

Women Representation in Urban Local Government of Bangladesh: Laws and Realities

Mst. Rezwana Karim

Department of Law, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology, Cumilla, Bangladesh. Email: rezwanalaw@gmail.com

Abstract: Women's representation and meaningful participation in decision-making are prerequisites for women's empowerment, which ultimately contributes to the overall socio-economic development of any country. Upon realizing this fact, Bangladesh Government enacted several laws to ensure women's representation in different local government (LG) tiers. This paper intends to evaluate the legal provisions concerning women's representation in Bangladesh's urban local governments (ULGs) and draw the practical scenario with associated challenges regarding their participation. Based on primary and secondary data, this study found sufficient provisions related to women's representation in the Constitution of Bangladesh and local government laws. However, the state of meaningful women's participation was found unsatisfactory. Male-dominated society, sharing wards with male colleagues, lack of educational qualification, negative attitudes towards reserved seats, unawareness about duties, lack of cooperation from male colleagues, and less priority to women than male colleagues are the key impediments to women's participation in local government institutions (LGIs). This study emphasizes the specification of the power and functions of women representatives in ULGs and building awareness of the rights of women representatives by themselves. Moreover, this study suggests a healthy relationship between male and female colleagues to enable women representatives to hold responsible positions.

Keywords: Urban local government, women representation, meaningful participation, local government laws, reserved seats

1. Introduction

Local Government (LG) is an administrative cum political subdivision of a state. It is constituted by law, recognized as a minor territory, and has substantial control over local affairs, including the power to impose taxes (Siddiqui, 2005). Local Government Institutions (LGIs) perform various functions under the orbit of relevant laws and thus establish a bridge between political leaders and general people. Moreover, LG is such an avenue from which leaders can gain practical experience before they move to national politics. Therefore, it is considered the most viable vehicle for evolving the democratic process and participatory development in a country (Khan, 2015).

Women's participation in politics is a significant way to establish their positions. It is pivotal to any nation's economic, social, and democratic development (Shetty & Kodandarama, 2019). Equal participation of both men and women in politics is of utmost need for the development of women. It is not merely for equity or democracy but for women's and society's well-being (Khan, 2015). The goal of development, peace, and equality cannot be achieved without women's active participation and inclusion in all spheres of decision-making. Under-representation of women at any level of governance and decision-making indicates democratic deficiency.

Women's role in decision-making is considered essential in ensuring their empowerment. Upon realizing this, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) has taken steps to ensure women's representation in political life, including at national and local levels. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act, 1997 of Bangladesh is a landmark document ensuring women's access to local-level politics. This amendment introduces direct elections for women-reserved seats in LG. Affirmative action to provide the structural framework for women's representation in the political decision-making process creates an opportunity to bring women to the arena of local-level leadership (Khan & Ara, 2006). Besides, the GOB has enacted LG laws for different tiers of LGIs based on constitutional provisions. Though there are laws to ensure the representation of women in LG, there is still a question of whether they can truly participate in all decisions and whether they face any challenges in active participation. In this context, this study intends to find out the laws regarding women's representation in urban local government (ULG) and their state of participation with associated challenges.

Making women an active part of all development activities is a priority agenda for the policymakers of the GOB. However, the country's political field is still, by and large, unofficially reserved for men alone. Thus, systematic incorporation of women is needed to enhance the efficiency and quality of LG services. The quota system for women in LGs is an important initiative for women's empowerment in Bangladesh, but it is not enough. Additional strategies are required to support and accelerate the process, which requires further research.

As the present study has focused on the law and practice, academics, LG experts, policymakers, legislators, and development partners are expected to get new insights. Such insight will ultimately help make LGIs more effective and a venue of true democracy. In the present study, legal provisions have been analyzed elaborately. Thus, stakeholders will find most laws on LG relating to women's representation in one research and also the defects in the legal provisions. Furthermore, this study has been conducted on the two tiers of ULGs: city corporation and paurashava. In this context, the current study has added a new dimension to the existing stock of knowledge in legal and social science fields. The remainder of this paper is organized into six sections. Section 2 explains the methodology of the study followed by LG laws and the structure of LGIs in Section 3. Section 4 narrates the laws regarding women's representation in ULGs. Section 5 portrays the realities of women's participation in Bangladesh, followed by a conclusion in Section 6.

2. Methodology of the Study

This qualitative study was conducted in the Rajshahi district of Bangladesh. Rajshahi district comprises 96 local government units, as shown in Table 1. The population of the study covers all the women members of different tiers of ULG in the district.

Table 1
Local Government Institutions in Rajshahi Districts

Serial No.	Name of Local Government	Frequency
1.	Zilla Parishad	1
2.	City Corporation	1
3.	Upazila Parishad	9
4.	Paurashava	14
5.	Union Parishad	71
Total		96

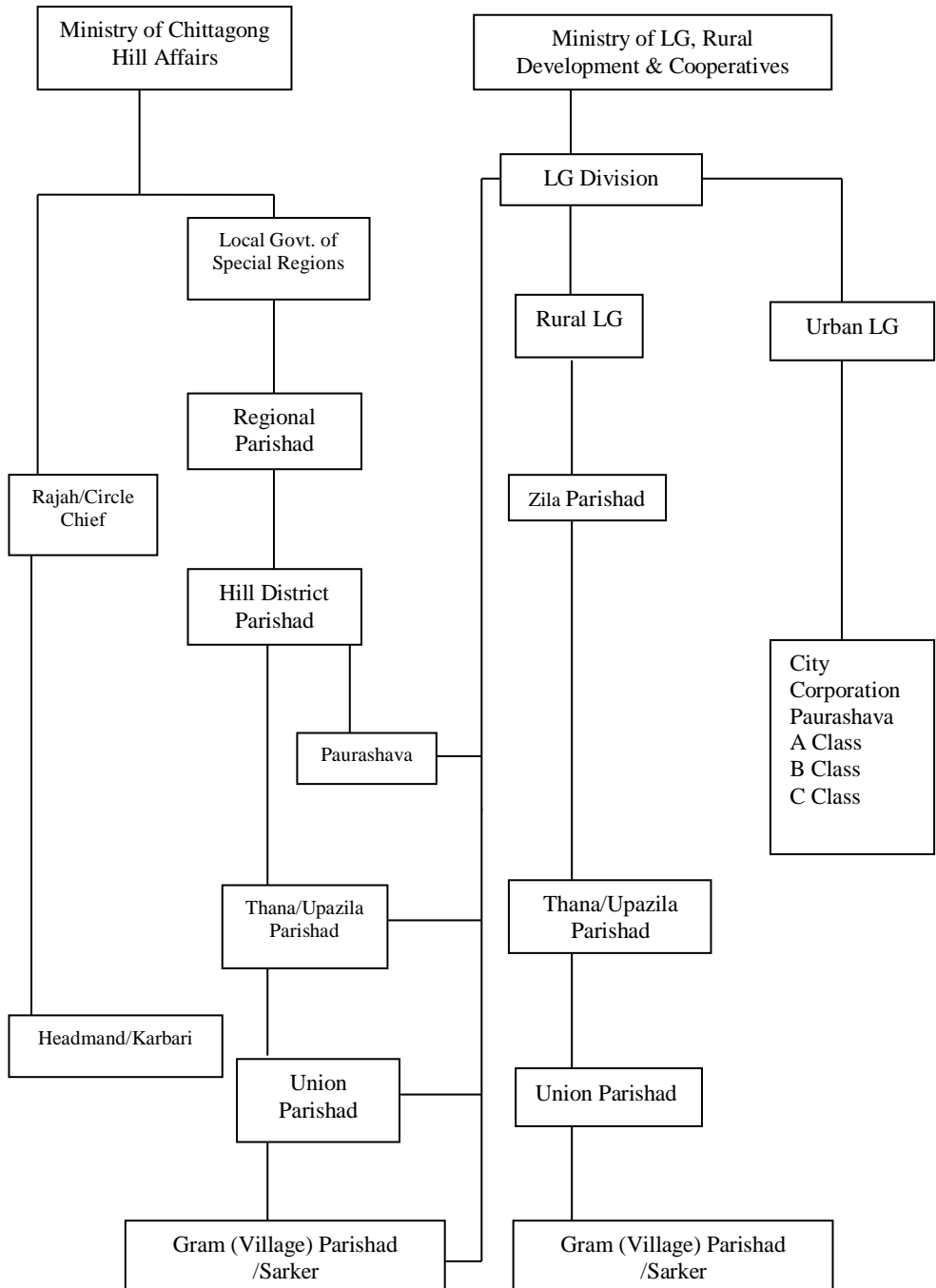
ULGs of the Rajshahi district consist of one city corporation and fourteen paurashavas. Rajshahi City Corporation is the only city corporation under consideration and the largest unit among ULGs in the district. Besides, seven paurashavas were randomly selected (50% of the population). Therefore, the sample area of the study covers eight ULG units in Rajshahi. Thus, all the 31 women elected members from reserved and general seats of these eight units are the sample of this study.

This study was based on primary and secondary sources of information. Primary data sources constituted the sample of women representatives from selected ULGIs, whereas secondary data sources covered relevant books, journals, dissertations, newspapers, and publications of government and international organizations. Primary data of this study has been collected through a semi-structured questionnaire survey. After completion of data, it is verified, reviewed, and scrutinized to avoid any errors and inconsistencies. Simple statistical tools, such as frequency distribution and percentage, were used to analyze primary data. Finally, the findings have been presented descriptively and supported by tables and graphs.

3. Local Government Laws and the Structure of LGIs in Bangladesh

The GOB emphasizes efficiency in implementing rural development programs through economic reforms and structural adjustments. It is stated in the 4th five-year-plan (1990–95) of Bangladesh that people's participation is an essential element in the development process. It is also stated that the government should play a pivotal role in creating opportunities for the rural people's meaningful participation in the development process, where they will design their development projects (Mujeri & Singh, 1997).

Figure 1
Organogram of Local Government in Bangladesh



Source: Tofael Ahmed (2002) (Khan, 2015)

There are provisions in the Constitution of Bangladesh regarding LG regulations. Meaningful participation of citizens through election is the fundamental principle of state policy of the Constitution of Bangladesh (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, Art. 11). Moreover, articles 59 and 60 have given the authority to establish LG. According to article 59, LG in every administrative unit shall be entrusted to bodies of elected persons. Therefore, declaration as an administrative unit is one of the conditions for establishing any tier of LG. An administrative unit is a district or other area designated by the law (The Constitution of Bangladesh, 1972, art. 152(1)). LGs perform their functions according to the guidelines in article 59(2) of the Constitution. According to article 60, LG bodies can exercise several powers, such as budget preparation, fund maintenance, and tax imposition.

The Legislative body has absolute power to enact laws relating to LG in compliance with the provisions of the Constitution. According to article 7, a law will be void if it contains anything contradictory to the Constitution. In this context, there are two historical examples. First, the Supreme Court announced *Gram Sarker Ain, 2003* void for incorporating provisions inconsistent with the Constitution (*BLAST v. Bangladesh, 2003*). Another example was in 1991 when the government abolished the Upazila Parishad established under the Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Ordinance, 1982. The decision was confronted before the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. The court announced its judgment that Upazila Parishad was not declared an administrative unit under article 59 of the Constitution. Thus, it was not properly formed as a local government institution (Rahaman & Hasan, 2014). The two judgments mentioned above imply that the legislative body has the authority to enact laws for the smooth functioning of LG; however, it must be made following the constitutional provisions (*Kudrat-E-Elahi Panir v. Bangladesh, 1992*).

In addition to general constitutional provisions, there are a few specific legislations related to LG, which include Hill District Local Government Parishad Act, 1989; Zila Parishad Act, 2000; Upazila Parishad Act, 1998; Local Government (Union Parishad) Act, 2009; Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009; and Local Government (Paurashava) Act, 2009. Besides the constitutional provisions and statutory enactments, there are several rules, regulations, by-laws, office orders, and project guidelines adapted by the concerned authority (Local Government Division, 2015).

In each administrative district of Bangladesh, there is a tier system of LG comprising three levels of rural councils and urban municipalities. Therefore, the LG system of Bangladesh is divided into rural and urban areas side by side, a separate system in hill tract districts. The rural council has three tiers, Zilla Parishads, Upazila Parishads, and Union Parishads. The urban council comprises city corporations and paurashavas (Bangladesh National Portal, GOB). Each tier has a different law to regulate the LGIs. Besides, there are laws for three hill tract districts. Figure 1 shows the structure of LG in Bangladesh.

4. Provisions relating to Women Representation in ULG

LG is used to describe the transmission of power from the national government to local authorities (Bhuiyan, 2011). Several international conventions have incorporated provisions to ensure the representation of women in the decision-making process in every sphere of life (Zaman, 2012). There are two enactments to deal with the provisions of city corporation and paurashava. Women members can represent directly under the statutory laws and represent under different regulations, office orders, and different projects. This section depicts the laws regarding women's representation in ULG.

4.1 Provisions Concerning Women Representation in Paurashava

Although LG is an ancient institution in Bangladesh, LGIs got their legal shape under the British regime. Nasirabad, the first and earliest municipality in the sub-continent, was set up in 1856 (Siddiqui, 1992). According to sections 6 and 7 of the Local Government (Paurashava) Act of 2009, a paurashava shall be constituted with a mayor, an equal number of councilors according to the number of wards, and one-third of female councilors in the reserved seats. The scope of reserved seats does not bar any female member from participating in a direct election for general seats.

According to section 40 of the Act, the councilors of the paurashava will form a mayor panel comprising three members among them. One of those panel members must be from the councilors of the reserved seats. Section 55 states that the paurashava will constitute ten standing committees for two and a half years. This section also states that a maximum of five members will constitute each committee. Forty percent of members in each committee will be female councilors. The standing committees are related to— (1) establishment and finance; (2) taxation and collection; (3) accounts and audit; (4) women and children; (5) urban planning, services for citizens and development; (6) observation, monitoring and control of market prices; (7) law and order and public safety; (8) information and culture; (9) communication and physical infrastructure; and (10) fishery and livestock. Per this section, in addition to the standing committees, a paurashava can form, if required, additional committees. According to Paurashava Ideal Tax Schedule, 2014, all the standing committees along with the additional standing committees will be constituted as follows:

- Councilor (general/reserve), ward no – Chairman
- Mayor- Member (ex officio)
- Councilor (general/reserve), ward no – Member
- Councilor (general/reserve), ward no – Member
- Councilor (general/reserve), ward no – Member

Ward Committee: Section 14 of the Act states that ward committees comprising not more than ten members should be formed in every ward with the approval of the paurashava council. The elected councilor of each of the wards will be the chairman of the ward committee, and the women councilor of that ward will be the vice-chairman. Forty percent of committee members will be female [Paurashava (Constitution & Function of the Ward Committee) Rules 2012, sec.3]. This committee performs functions related to the

development of the concerned ward and invites the citizens of the ward to discuss the overall condition of the ward, and the way forward for the problems of the concerned ward.

Town Level Coordination Committee (TLCC): To fulfill the objectives of sections 14 and 115 of the Local Government (Paurashava) Act, 2009, TLCC will be formed with 50 members. The mayor will be the chairman of this committee, and the mayor will select 12 councilors as members. In constituting the committee, the condition is that at least one-third of the members will be female (Local Government Division, 2015, p. 126). The TLCC deals with making the overall proposal of paurashava, implementation, and monitoring of those proposals, discussion regarding the tax collection, and rendering services to the general people of the paurashava.

Khas Collection Committee: After the circulation of tender regarding the lease of hatbazar if the lease is not completed within the stipulated time, the paurashava performs the duty to collect the money from the hat bazar. This function is performed by a committee named the khas collection committee. Regardless of the type of paurashava, * the committee includes two councilors from the paurashava, including one women councilor (Local Government Division, 2015, p. 340).

Paurashava Hat-bazar Management Committee: For daily management, maintenance, and development of hat-bazars under paurashava, a management committee is formed. All ward councilors, including women members of reserved seats of the concerned paurashava, are members of the committee (Local Government Division, 2015, p. 336 & 346).

Paurashava Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Committee: According to the Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-2013, all councilors of the paurashava, including women councilors are members of the Paurashava Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Committee (Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-2013, guideline 8.8).

Paurashava Infrastructure Maintenance Committee: All the male and female councilors of paurashava are members of the committee (Rural Infrastructure Maintenance Programme Guidelines 2012-13).

Project Implementation Committee: Every project implementation committee comprises five to seven members. The ward councilor of the respective paurashava becomes the chairman of this committee. A person cannot be a chairman of more than three

*Class A Paurashava's average annual revenue income from its own sources is over Tk. 60,000,00 in three years; Class B Paurashava's average annual revenue income is between Tk. 25,000,01 to Tk. 60,00,000 in three years, and Class C Paurashava's average annual revenue income is between Tk. 10,00,000 to Tk. 25,00,000.

projects in any financial year. If there are more than three projects in a financial year in any paurashava, at least one-fourth of such committees will be chaired by women councilors (Rural Infrastructure Maintenance (TR-Food Grains/Cash) Programme Guidelines 2012-13).

Paurashava Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Committee: In every paurashava, there is a VGF committee to deal with issuing VGF cards and making the beneficiary list. All the members of the paurashava will be members of this committee (VGF Programme Circular, 2009, art. 5).

4.2 Provisions Concerning Women Representation in City Corporation

The Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009 deals with the establishment of the city corporation. According to the Act, there will be one mayor, and the number of councilors specified by the government in the official gazette, including reserved seats for women. The seats for women shall be one-third of the total number of the councilors [Local Government (City Corporation) Act, 2009, sec. 5]. According to Section 20 of the Act, the councilors of the corporation will form a mayor panel composed of three members comprising one woman councilor of the reserved seats.

Khas Collection Committee: There is a *khas* collection committee in each city corporation. Among the committee members, one member will be the women councilor of the concerned ward (Local Government Division, 2015, p. 336). The committee is assigned to perform the same function as paurashava does.

City Corporation Hat-bazar Management Committee: For daily management, maintenance, and development of hat-bazar under each city corporation, a management committee is formed with four nominated ward councilors by the mayor, including one female member (Local Government Division, 2015, p. 336 & 347).

City Corporation Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Committee: According to the Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-2013, various committees are formed to implement the assistance programme. All the ward councilors, including women members of reserved seats, are members of such committees (Humanitarian Assistance Programme Implementation Guidelines 2012-2013, guideline 8.14).

Allotment Committee: There is a committee for the allotment of shops in the markets of the concerned city corporation. Among all members, two councilors (one male and one female) of the corporation will be nominated by the mayor as members of that committee (Rajshahi City Corporation Market by Law, 2014, sec. 3).

As per discussion in this section, laws provide provisions for women representation in several ways. Women councilors can represent the main body of the city corporation and paurashava. They also can represent in different standing committees.

Besides, there are several other committees where women councilors can represent according to the provisions of the law. Apart from the statutory enactments, there are several guidelines from the government by which the representation of women councilors is ensured in different committees in ULG.

5. The Scenario of Women Participation in ULG

LG in Bangladesh is one of the oldest bodies constituted of local representatives at grass root levels where women representatives can raise their voices (Dalia, 2018). The political participation of women in Bangladesh has increased over time (Prodip, 2015). It is a democratic insufficiency if women representation in local governance is poor. In Bangladesh, the provision for representation of women at the local level is ensured by different laws. Despite several attempts to increase women participation at all levels of decision-making, the condition of their participation is still not satisfactory (Ara, 2021). The study of Ara (2021) outlines the differences between women representation and participation. Women representation in LG merely fulfills the legal provisions regarding representation, whereas participation is related to their active or effective engagement. Again, meaningful participation indicates that women representatives should be given a proper opportunity to express their opinions and that those opinions are valued. Although there are provisions for women representation and they represent accordingly but there are questions regarding their participation. The subsequent discussions present the findings concerning notable women participation issues.

5.1 Reason to Contest in LG Elections

The respondents were asked about their inspiration to participate in the LG election. About half of the respondents (48 %) have replied that they have participated in performing social responsibilities. Around 30% of respondents have said that they have got inspiration from their family members. On the other hand, around 15% became inspired to participate in LGs to help people and only 7% of respondents have expressed that becoming an LG representative was their dream. The study by Ferdous and Islam (2021) found that 30% of respondents self-inspired, family members inspired 30%, community members inspired 30%, and the remaining 10% are encouraged by local political parties.

5.2 Election Experience

It is evident from this study that more than half of respondents (55%) have experienced winning elections two to six times and thus participating in LG elections. The rest participated for the first time. The study also finds that the acceptability of experienced representatives is higher than the first-time winner. During the discussion with respondent in Tanore Paurashava on 26 February 2022, one women councilor, who had been elected for the 6th time, stated—

“I am more experienced than the male councilor and even the mayor who has been elected for the first time. So, all of them respect my opinion in

making any decision. However, this situation is different for those women representatives elected for the first time.”

5.3 Fulfillment of Electoral Manifesto

When the respondents are asked about the fulfillment of the electoral manifesto, they provide mixed reactions. Nearly half (48%) of the respondents have said they have fulfilled only a little of their manifesto. They added that they want to fulfill their commitments but cannot do it due to insufficient resources. Over a quarter (29%) of respondents said they have fulfilled their electoral manifesto. A minority (13%) of the respondents have replied that they cannot fulfill the manifesto because they are not given any resources from the concerned LGI. Only seven percent of respondents have no electoral manifesto, and the remaining three percent skipped this question. Thus, insufficient resources and opportunities are barriers to fulfilling the electoral manifesto of women representatives. It is evident from the study of Dalia (2018) that only a few respondents can fulfill their electoral manifesto, and 45% fulfill their promises partially. They can provide allowances to only a few persons in their areas. A quarter of them has opined that they cannot maintain any promises made at the time of the election, and the rest (22%) have mentioned that they do not make any promises to the people before the election.

5.4 The Attitude of Colleagues toward Reserved Seat Representatives

The goal of institutional efficiency cannot be achieved without a healthy relationship among colleagues, irrespective of male or female. As shown in Table 2, around two-thirds of respondents (65%) have said that their male colleagues have a negative attitude towards reserved seat provisions, and the female representatives are elected from those seats. Over a quarter (29%) have said that male members have a positive attitude towards the female, and only six percent of respondents have said that it varies depending on circumstances, such as their experience, relationship with colleagues, affiliation with the political party, family background, and relation with influential persons.

Table 2

Attitude of Men Councilors towards Reserved Seat Councilors

Attitude	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
It varies	2	6.5	6.5
Negative	20	64.5	71.0
Positive	9	29.0	100.0
Total	31	100.0	

Respondents’ opinions concerning the attitude of male colleagues towards the members of women-reserved seats are mixed in another study. More than 50% of the respondents stated that women representatives from reserved seats encounter negative attitudes from their men colleagues. Moreover, they also said that male colleagues think themselves superior to female members and ignore the views of female members.

Sometimes they ridicule women members for being elected from reserved seats. The remaining respondents have said that male colleagues are respectful towards them (Karim, 2020). The attitude of male councilors towards the female councilors of reserved seats is discriminatory and the male councilors always get priority over the female councilors of reserved seats (*Shamima Sultana Seema and 9 others v. Government of Bangladesh and 3 others*, 2005). During the field survey by the researcher, the attitude of men councilors toward women has been observed as unsatisfactory (Godagari Paurashava, March 5, 2022).

5.5 Recommendation of Beneficiaries by Women Members

Women representatives were asked whether they get the opportunity to recommend beneficiaries under different social safety net (SSN) programs. Most respondents have said they do not get equal opportunities to recommend. Sometimes they are not informed about the distribution of relief under different projects.

Table 3

Responses concerning Opportunity to Recommend Beneficiaries

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	6	19.4	19.4
Yes	10	32.2	51.6
Yes, but not accepted always	1	3.2	54.8
Yes, but not equal number	14	45.2	100.0
Total	31	100.0	

It is evident from Table 3 that almost a third (32.3%) of respondents agree that they can recommend it. The remaining respondents have expressed their dissatisfaction regarding their beneficiary recommendation scope. More than two-fifths (45.2%) of the respondents have agreed that they can recommend but not in equal numbers compared to male councilors though a female councilor represents three wards. Regarding the allocation of different development budgets, the scenario is different. Here, the women members are not involved at all. Another study conducted on UZP in this regard support that women members do not get equal opportunity to recommend beneficiaries (Karim, 2020).

5.6 Satisfaction at Working Place

In response to the question of whether women members are satisfied in their workplace, the respondents provided mixed reactions. More than half (52%) of the respondents have said they are not satisfied working at LGIs. The rest (48%) of the respondents have said that they are satisfied with working at LGIs.

5.7 Cooperation from Male Colleagues

Respondents were asked to express the state of cooperation between male and female colleagues at LGIs. More than two-fifths (45%) of the respondents answered that their male

colleagues do not cooperate with them in any matter. Twenty-six percent of respondents have said that the male members cooperate with them, and another 26% said that sometimes they cooperate, but the scope of their help is minimal. Only three percent of respondents have replied they do not ask for help from male members as they are unwilling to help female colleagues. It has been found in another study that a significant proportion (67%) of respondents have claimed that male members do not cooperate at all regarding decision-making issues. A fifth (20%) of them have said that they are not cooperative. Only a minority (13%) mentioned that the male members are supportive (Nahar, 2019).

5.8 Domination of Male Members

Male domination is one of the significant barriers to women's active participation in the LGs in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2016). Many female councilors are dominated in their working place by their male colleagues. More than two-fifths (45%) of respondents have said that their male colleagues are highly dominating. In a previous study, a fifth (20%) of respondents have said they are dominated sometimes and the situation is gradually improving. A quarter (25%) of respondents have said that nobody is entirely free from domination by male colleagues. The rest (10%) have said that male councilors do not dominate them. (Ferdous and Islam, 2021).

This study also finds similar answers from respondents. When the respondents were asked whether the male member dominates them, almost three-fifths of the respondents (58%) replied that women members are always dominated by their men colleagues. On the other hand, more than a third (36%) of them have said that the male members dominate them in decision-making sometimes; moreover, a minimal number (6%) have replied that male members do not dominate them; instead, they help female members. When asked what type of dominance they face, more than half (51%) have said their male colleagues do not allow them to speak in the meeting. Male colleagues ridicule the ideas of female members, and sometimes, they are given unimportant work to perform. It is also observed during the survey that female members are not allowed to speak in a TLCC meeting at a paurashava (Mundumala Paurashava, March 31, 2022).

5.9 Barriers to Women Competing in LG Election

Respondents were asked whether they faced any barriers to competing in LG elections. Male dominance (32.3% of respondents) and unawareness about women rights (24.8% of respondents) are the two major causes. However, an insignificant number of respondents (19.4%) have replied that they did not face any problems. The current study's finding contradicts other research findings, where a very large majority (88%) of the respondents replied that they faced no problem. A minority (12%) of them said they face a threat from the opposition party so that they do not contest the election (Karim, 2020). To remove the barriers to women candidature, respondents have suggested different ways, such as elimination of discrimination between male and female councilors, ensuring women rights, assigning specific duties to women members, free from political influence, awareness about women rights, support from family and society, and positive attitude.

5.10 Representing Three Wards with Less Power

According to law, women councilors from reserved seats must contest from three wards. Therefore, they become councilors of three wards after victory in the elections. However, they practically cannot exercise power equal to the male councilors of a ward. When asked whether this is discrimination against them, a very large majority (84%) of respondents have marked it as discrimination. Less than a fifth (16%) disagreed, saying it is not.

5.11 Educational Qualification of the Respondents

When respondents were asked about their educational qualifications, some felt shy to tell their academic level. The educational level of more than two-fifths (42%) of respondents is below SSC. As evident in this study, less than a quarter (23%) of them have completed the SSC level. Here most of the respondents from the city corporation area have completed HSC and are above the HSC level. At paurashavas, the level of education of women members is below SSC in most cases.

Table 4

Educational Qualification of Women Representatives

Education Level	Percentage
Below SSC	41.9
SSC	22.6
HSC	12.9
Degree	3.2
Honors	6.5
Masters	12.9
Total	100

It is observed in another study that more than half of the respondents have educational qualifications below SSC and the rest have SSC degree (Nahar, 2019).

5.12 Family Members Involved in Politics

In Bangladesh, most women representatives have been nominated due to their family members' involvement in politics. Many women representatives at national and local levels get nominations as inheritors to their family relations (Ahmed & Hasan, 2018). This study has also found that women representatives with a family with political affiliations are engaged in politics in large numbers. When respondents were asked whether their family members were involved in politics, most respondents (65%) have said their family members are involved in politics. They added that they have got the inspiration to

participate in the election from their family members and the people of the concerned area. The rest (35%) have said that their family members are not involved in politics. It is also evident from this study that the husband of a woman representative interferes in the decision-making process of women representatives.

5.13 Equal Importance with Male Colleagues from LGI

Women representatives were asked about getting equal importance to find out the scenario regarding this. A significant proportion (74%) of the respondents have replied that they never get equal importance as their male colleagues from LGIs. Less than a fifth (19%) of respondents have answered that they get equal importance with male colleagues. A small number (7%) have said that sometimes they get equal importance but upon some conditions, such as family background, political influence, experience, etc. They added that they sometimes get equal importance after complaining about that. Another study corroborates the findings of this study. Due to gender discrimination and non-cooperation from the union parishad chairman and officials, the female representatives receive fewer benefits and opportunities from male colleagues. Besides, for these reasons, they cannot perform their responsibilities properly (Das et al., 2020). However, evidence from other studies shows significant gaps between the legal provision and reality. Most male colleagues do not allow female representatives to undertake responsibilities for any necessary work. They argue that women representatives cannot perform their role in implementing projects (Mohiuddin & Ahmed, 2019).

5.14 Role of Women Representatives in Combating Violence against Women

Respondents were also asked about their role in combating violence against women. Almost all (97%) of respondents have said they try to solve different issues by counseling the parties. One of the respondents has stated—

“As soon as we receive the news of any violence, we go there to observe the matter. Then, we sit down to negotiate the issue. Sometimes some concerned persons are invited to solve the issue. Overall, we always try to solve the issues to do justice to the victim. Moreover, the parties accept the decision in most of the cases.”

Another study supports the current study's findings that in combating violence against women, it is crucial to create awareness and resistance against violence. They have mentioned that usually, they participate in *shalish* relating to violence against women. In case of need, women representatives take victims to the proper authority to get legal aid (Mohiuddin & Ahmed, 2019).

6. Conclusion

The Constitution of Bangladesh has emphasized the establishment of LGs with a representative character. Incorporating provisions concerning women's representation in every tier of LG does not ensure their active participation. The male-dominated society is not yet ready to accept women as a part of the decision-making process. Consequently, women lag in leading different sectors, thus causing a big challenge in achieving sustainable development. Based on the findings of the current study, it can be said that the level of women's participation in ULG is still unsatisfactory and thus requires further improvement. This study summarizes the state of women participation in ULGs and the challenges in ensuring effective participation. Women members face different challenges in participating in the decision-making process of ULGs. The women representatives are not satisfied working at their working place. It is observed that though they have been elected several times, they cannot fulfill their electoral manifesto properly. The study further finds that the respondents' educational qualification creates differences between the women and men representatives.

The study has further found that the attitude of men colleagues towards women representatives is not favorable. In many cases, they do not show any respect to women representatives. It has been found that most of the time, the male colleagues do not cooperate with the female colleagues in any difficulties. It is also evident that female representatives are dominated by their male colleagues in decision-making. Male dominance has also been identified as the main barrier to the active participation of women representatives. Further, women representatives need to get equal opportunities and importance from LGIs to recommend beneficiaries. They can recommend but always in a smaller number, and sometimes they do not get any scope to recommend the beneficiary's name. Finally, this paper suggests the following to overcome the above barriers and ensure meaningful women's representation and participation:

- Women members' power and functions should be more specific in related laws, rules, regulations, office orders, and by-laws of LGs;
- There should be some educational qualification for being elected in the LG elections;
- The women representatives should be aware of their rights and duties. They can read the relevant laws, discuss with other persons, take help from the NGO for this purpose;
- The relationship between them should be more reasonable and polite. Positive counseling and advocacy may be made to improve their relationship; and
- The negative attitude towards reserved seats should be changed. Building awareness and effective advocacy may be the way to change the mentality of males and females towards each other.

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