

The Nature of Political Empowerment and Gender in Local Governance: A Comparative Study of Dhaka City Corporation and Narayangonj Municipality

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Abstract

The study focuses on the fact that the role of women's participation in local bodies is undervalued. Women ward commissioners claim that responsibilities are not specified clearly for them in the working circular by the local government Gazette. As a result, though women ward commissioners come to power through proper political participation and commitment, they cannot demonstrate their commitment to the public. Their working environment is constrained by the patriarchal nature of politics as well as by the psychological state of their male-counterparts. They also recognize that constitutional assurance is unable to ensure their effective participation as well as political equality.

1.1 Introduction

Empowering women is good (for) governance. Equality between men and women is now a leading global political principle. However, gender differences, based on the social construction of biological sex distinctions, is one of the great fetters of all societies. Though the constitution provides women the right to be elected in political and public representative institutions, such as parliament and local government bodies (Husain, S. A. 2000), gender inequality, as a collection of interlinked problems, is manifested in the political arena too.

Politics is male dominant and andocentric. There is usually slim possibility for the integration and reflection of women's perceptions and needs in state politics that are determined, directed and controlled by men. As women are not adequately represented in political decision-making, issues of public policy relating to women's equality and empowerment remain under the competence of men, who may not be interested in these issues. In spite of the recognition of the principle of gender equality in the constitution, state policies could be seen as reinforcing women's subordination or as not prescribing bold steps for removal of gender disparity. Thus, there is a tendency to move beyond the traditional typology as determined by political science on the basis of political system and ideology, and identified the state as patriarchal. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

One UN study maintains, in support of women's representation and partnership in politics and power, that the issue of women's political participation first is a question of democracy, equality and citizenship rights. On the basis of population women's claim to representation is undeniable.

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Secondly, the feeble presence of women in politics raises questions about the decisions taken in the political arena and the legitimacy of democratic system. There occurs a vast disjunction between women and the democratic state due to the insufficient presence and limited participation of women in political structures and processes. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

The third argument rests on the differences of interests of men and women. Women are directly aware of their basic problems and needs. But women are denied the opportunity to articulate and safeguard their interests, if they are not adequately represented in politics. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Fourth, women's large-scale entry in politics will bring about a desirable shift in the existing focus of politics. Those issues that are now viewed as personal because they relate to women's lives and concerns and are thus considered as being outside the jurisdiction of real politics would come to be regarded as political issues. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Finally, the study notes that women's strong presence in politics is justified for the effective use of human resource. However, women do not constitute an un-differentiated social entity. From the vantage point of Contemporary Marxian Feminism, the quality of each individual's life experiences is a reflection first of his or her class position and only second of his or her gender. Women of markedly different class backgrounds have fewer life experiences in common than women of any particular class have with the men of their class. For this reason, they are not able to constitute one homogeneous interest group. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Again, there are differences among women, which are rooted in many existing social divides. There exist differences among women on the basis of class structure; geographical or situational differences; some differences are constructed on binary relations. There are differences among women determined by their class and status in society. Again, there are differences among women on the basis of society and culture. This wide applicability of this theory of difference nevertheless hints at a basic feature, which is that within the class or situational context, women's status is unequal and subordinate to that of men. This overriding difference based on gender, which is pervasive as a fundamental determinant in structuring genders relations, binds women together in one universal bond of a community. Women's subordination manifests in many ways. There are gender differences in ownership, authority and decision-making, which are reflected in the discrimination, oppression and repression of women. Therefore, the question of women's political participation is closely linked to the realization and awareness of many dimensions of unequal status of women. Thus, the social consciousness about this unequal status of women can be able to change the whole situation. (Chowdhury, N., 1994)

Throughout the world, women continue to face inequality and as a result are deprived of social rewards such as money, power and prestige. Unless women are involved in the decision and policy making processes at all levels of the state, changes in women's political and to some extent social and economic status will continue to remain marginal. The present study has been organized to examine the nature of women's participation in politics and to identify the factors, which work as obstacles in their satisfactory performance as compared to those of men of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study is broadly an attempt to analyze the emerging scenario of women leadership at urban local level politics by focusing on the women representatives compared to their male counterparts of the Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality. It is also an attempt to make a comparative analysis of the nature of political empowerment of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

More specifically, the study intends

- To assess the nature of political involvement and empowerment of women and men elected as commissioners of Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.
- To identify the functions of the ward commissioners of the two areas.
- To examine the role of gender in the functioning of urban local political institutions and focus on a comparative perspective on the experience of two areas.
- To identify the constraints and problems faced by women and men commissioners as representatives in the urban local bodies.

Along with these objectives, the research is looking at a fundamental question, i.e.

To what extent women's participation make a difference from their male counterparts?

1.3 Methodology

The study has been conducted in two neighboring districts of Bangladesh: Dhaka and Narayanganj. Both Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality are the municipalities of class-1 category. To satisfy the purpose it was needed to include a representative number of women and men Ward Commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality. A total of 60 respondents were selected to collect information about the research. Among them, 48 are from Dhaka Municipal Corporation and the rest of them are from Narayanganj Municipality. Among 48 respondents 24 are women and the rest of 24 are men commissioners. In case of Narayanganj, as it is a very small number to compare with that of Dhaka, all the 12 commissioners were interviewed. They were selected following purposive sampling procedure. The method of interview survey is adopted here because it is the most

appropriate one to collect data from the commissioners. In present research a combination of both structured and unstructured questionnaire is used for getting the advantages of the two and for the best outcome.

1.4 Participation and Representation of Women in Politics in Bangladesh

Historically women's voting right was established long ago but women's participation in the political and national movement has been negligible. At present both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition in Parliament are women. One of them (Begum Khaleda Zia) was a housewife and had no political involvement before she made a lateral entry into the party to assume the top leadership role. The other one (Sheikh Hasina) was also a housewife, but had some experience as a student leader during her university days. Begum Khaleda Zia is the widow of a former president of Bangladesh who was killed in an abortive coup and the other (Sheikh Hasina) is the daughter of another former president and first Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

The present chairman of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (Begum Khaleda Zia) was brought in to keep her husband's political party in tact as well as to rejuvenate it. She was ushered into the leadership role from a non-political status as the symbol of her husband to keep the battling groups in the party from falling apart.

As in the case of Bangladesh Nationalist Party, the Awami League also brought the daughter of a former president to assume the top leadership role as a symbol of her father to save the party from falling into pieces. These two women, on whom leadership roles were suddenly thrust upon, seem to have risen to the occasion. They have not only been successful in 'crisis management', but also have led their parties in such a way that these two political parties have become the main opposition parties of Bangladesh.

Political inheritance in Bangladesh is somewhat new in Bangladesh politics. Although such instances are not rare in Indian Politics, this is the first time such and their ship' has worked so successfully in the politics of Bangladesh.

Not only have these two top women leaders served as 'rallying points' of their very large party following (composed of diverse political elements in the case of Bangladesh Nationalist Party), these two political parties have to depend on them, to a very great extent, for the mobilization of public opinion in favour of the party programs. However, these two top women political leaders have been created by special circumstances.

However their high position in politics does not reflect the whole scenario of women's position in politics. Observation and study findings reveal that women generally cannot go up the party

hierarchical ladder in a 'reutilized' manner as a man generally can. Women are still subordinated to men in many cases but they are coming out. Gradually women's participation is increasing. The increasing political involvement has inspired women to contest for the Rural Union Council and Urban Municipal Election (there are one third reserved for women) more than before. In the last union council election (1997) nearly 48000 women contested for the member post. Directly elected women councilors/members are demanding for their defined responsibilities and Jobs.

Table 1: Gender based voters in National Parliamentary Election

Numbers of votes National Parliament			Number of votes State/Provincial Parliaments		Votes caste for Urban Local Government councils	
Year	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1996	28,759,994	28,956,941	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
2000	36,239,491	38,463,258	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a

Source: Election Commission Office.

Table 2: Representation in national parliament by Gender

Year	National Parliament			Urban Local Govt. Council	
	F	M	%		
1960					
1970	15	300	4.8		
1980	32	298	9.2		
1990	35	295	10.6		
2000	37	293	11.2	887	2661

Source: 1. Journal of Public Administration by PATC vol. 15, June 2000, Dhaka

1. List collected from Ministry of Local Govt (four City Corporations are not included here). Ratio of four City Corporation M:F=190:63 (Source: BBS, 1998)

Table 3: Women participation in Federal Cabinet/Executive branch and Urban Local government

Year	Number and Percentage of women in Federal Cabinet/executive Branch		Number and percentage of women Mayors	
	Number	%	Number	%
1960			Nil	
1970	02	4		
1980	06	6		

1990	04	3	
1992	03	5	
2000	04	16	

The Country was under military regime from 1975 to 1990. There was no democratic practice at all during the martial law government. After the fall of the martial law government in 1990, democracy was established in 1991. (Source: Islam, F., 2002).

1.5 Women's Participation in Urban Local Government

Before the Gazette notification (the Pourashava Ordinance 1977, Ordinance No. XXVI of 1977, which was emended on 1998, July, and Gazette additional copy 22/3/1999) for municipalities and city corporations respectively, female ward commissioners were appointed by selection. For the first time Dhaka City Corporation elected 19 female ward commissioners (elected by male commissioners) for reserve seats in 1994. With a view to promote women's participation in Urban Local Govt. the Pourashava Ordinance and City Corporation Ordinance have been introduced which were monetary for every Pourashava and city corporation. These ordinances stipulate that whatever the number of ward commissioner, depending on the area of Pourashava and City Corporation; there should be reserved seats, exclusively for women equivalent to one third of the number of commissioners fixed by the Govt. The women ward commissioners will be elected directly.

The span of responsibilities for ward commissioners has been well-defined in the govt. gazette. But there is no definite responsibility narrated in such a gazette for women ward commissioners. The Govt. Gazette Notification has described the nature of meetings; panel Chairman etc. so the status of women ward commissioners has been undermined still there is some confusion and misunderstanding between commissioners and women ward commissioners.

Every political party has a women wing to encourage women to join politics either at National or local level. Women's participation in politics has no doubt increased tremendously. All NGO's Women Organizations and Civil Society Organizations are very active in this regard. Recently there has been a phenomenal change. During the last 1998 local govt. election (Union Parishad) more than 12000 women members were elected directly for reserved seats. In the near future, after completion of municipal election, another 887 women ward commissioner will be directly elected. Contesting for reserved seats, women's participation in election will have a positive impact on women's political consciousness. Beside this, the media are playing a vital role educating women. The total number of women voters' enrolment has increased compared to the previous enrolment.

Table 4: Number of voters by sex in the voting year 1991 and 1996

Year of voting enrolment	Total number of voters	Number of voters by sex		The ratio of M/F voters	% of vote casting
		M	F		
1991	62181743	33040757	29140986	53.14:46.86	55.44%
1996	56887588	28614475	2827313	50.30:49.70	74.80%

Source: FEMA, Election Report (1996).

From the above table it is seen that the ratio of female voters has increased from 49.7% by the year of 1991-1996.

Local Govt. has initiated different programs to encourage women's participation in governance. Women ward commissioners mainly deal with women's issues, particularly for poor women, such as micro credit programs, handicrafts and professional training programs attracting women to join such programs. There are some positive impacts of such programs initiated by local government. Women are becoming very concerned about their rights and unnecessary cases. Local Govt. are compelled to facilitate their rights. Very recently the govt. has introduced transport facilities for women, childcare facilities, violence against man. All these are the results of the women's movement. (Source: Islam, F., 2002).

1.6 Major Obstacles to Women's Political Participation in Bangladesh

Although women in Bangladesh enjoy political and legal rights comparable to many other developed nations, very few Bangladeshi women have entered the political arena and still fewer have made serious efforts to gain political power through their involvement in the country's politics. Even after the war of liberation of 1971, the experiences of which played a significant role in raising the political consciousness of the women of Bangladesh, politics remains for them a very unusual career (Salauddin, K., 1994).

Traditionally women in our country are deprived of the right of decision-making and of effective political participation. Their roles have been identified as secondary. Their potentiality remains largely unrecognized and contributions are mostly unpaid. An adequate explanation of this phenomenon necessitates the identification of the constraints more precisely. Main obstacles to women's political participation include the following:

- (a) **Women's primary responsibility:** Traditionally women's domestic activities are considered as their primary responsibilities which keep women isolated from the labor market. This also limits their interests and serious involvements in politics. In general

women spend their times with family members such as children and very old people who hardly have knowledge or interests about politics. As a result, women lack scope to discuss political affairs with people either outside or inside the home and also the freedom to gain politically relevant experience. Studies in the United States (Anderson, 1975, Welch, 1977) find that employment particularly outside home, is associated with dramatic increase in women's political participation. These factors are more intense in a developing country like Bangladesh, where the average number of children per couple is much higher than that of the developed countries.

(b) Women's Inferior Economic Status: Economic dependence is the key factor that works against the political participation of women in Bangladesh. Gender is a significant factor in poverty in Bangladesh. Poverty is over represented among women. Empirical evidence from different studies suggests that incidence of extreme poverty is generally higher for the female headed, female managed and female supported households. Both labor force survey and micro level household surveys indicate that, female workers earn considerably less than the male workers. The vast majority of the populations (about 80%) live in the rural areas, where the women experience a disproportionately large share of the country's poverty (UNDP 1994). In Bangladesh, women's inferior economic status keeps women economically dependent on men. This dependence is also an important factor that limits her freedom to participate seriously in politics.

c) Lack of fixed working hours: Politics is an occupation, which does not have any fixed working hours. Ward commissioners may need to go outside anytime on an urgent basis. As women are primarily assigned to domestic activities, they might not make themselves available in a place where they are required on an urgent basis.

d) Women's Educational Status: Women are lagging behind men in all stages of education. Though worldwide literacy rate is improving, in all regions illiteracy remains higher for women than for men. Of the world's nearly one billion illiterate adults, two-thirds are women. Approximately, 100 million children, including 60 million girls remain without access to primary education and over two-thirds of the world's 960 million illiterate adults are women (United Nations 1995:70). This unequal educational status is contributing negatively on the way to women's involvement in politics. Women always have a fear of not being able to perform all the activities necessary for politics due to their inferior educational status.

e) Social Norms and Values: In fact, the cultural factors do not support women's involvement in politics. 'Women in politics' is a matter of toleration, not a matter of acceptance. Cultural values and norms are playing a crucial role in socializing a girl and a boy. The occupations, which are especially assigned to a girl from her childhood, are -

elementary school teacher, nurse, receptionist, personal secretary etc. On the contrary, the field of politics is highly considered as male-dominated.

However, in order to improve the situation of women, governments of almost all countries and different national and international NGOs are taking different steps. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees certain rights and privileges to women fundamental rights. Moreover, to safeguard the various constitutional rights, the government has enacted various women-specific and women-related legislation. As a result, gender gap is closing day by day, though much is left to achieve.

In recent years, participation of women in politics has been increased significantly. They all are contributing significantly to the country's democratic exercise and some of them are very much successful in performing their responsibilities. However, as for many years male politicians are involved in 'politics' as well as 'local government, these have become male dominated institutions. Women representatives face number of problems, which stand as barriers in their satisfactory performance. Under this purview, the later part of this article will focus on some of the problems those the local level women representatives are facing most.

2.1 Participation of women in politics

Political participation is one of the major ways to ensure women's empowerment, to increase decision-making power and enhance ability to influence matters that affect their lives in the community and in the larger society. In broader sense, participation in politics goes far beyond electoral politics, such as voting and election to public office. Women's empowerment begins with her consciousness- perceptions about herself and her rights, her capabilities and potential, awareness of her gender and socio-cultural, economic and political forces that affect her. Women's political empowerment and equal representation in all decision-making institutions are critical inputs in the struggle for freedom from patriarchal subjugation (Shamim and Nasreen, 2002). This section of the article focuses on the participation of women in two urban local bodies- namely Dhaka Municipal Corporation and Narayanganj Municipality.

Meetings Called Per Month by the City Corporation/ Municipality

Respondents were asked about the number of meetings called per month in City Corporation/ Municipality. Great variation in their opinions is found from the study. In case of DCC, 54 per cent respondents told that at least one meeting is called per month, whereas 38 percent respondents told that they meet twice/thrice a year. Such a situation indicates about huge communication gap

between the City Corporation schedules and those who are obliged to follow these schedules for their successful performance.

In case of Narayanganj, their opinions are more or less same. All but one responded that one meeting is called per month in their Municipality.

Attendance in the Meetings by the Respondents: The sample areas under study have large indicators to analyze two urban local bodies, their activities and respondents' role on it. Attendance at the meetings is not only an important indicator for active participation, but also a forum to discuss development activities and decision-making. This study shows that 88 percent women ward commissioners regularly attend the corporation meetings as compared to only 25 per cent men ward commissioners. A large number of men commissioners (75%) do not attend at meetings regularly. This clearly indicates that women ward commissioners are more serious about corporation activities than that of men.

Table 5: Attendance in the Meetings by the Respondents

Attendance in the meetings	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Regular	6 (25%)	21 (87.5%)	27 (56.3%)	4 (44.4%)	3 (100%)	7 (58.3%)
Irregular	18 (75%)	3 (12.5%)	21 (43.8%)	5 (55.6%)	-	5 (41.7%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	48 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	12 (100.0%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

In case of Narayanganj, the same scenario is apparent. All women respondents join regularly in the Municipal meetings as compared to 45 per cent of the men respondents.

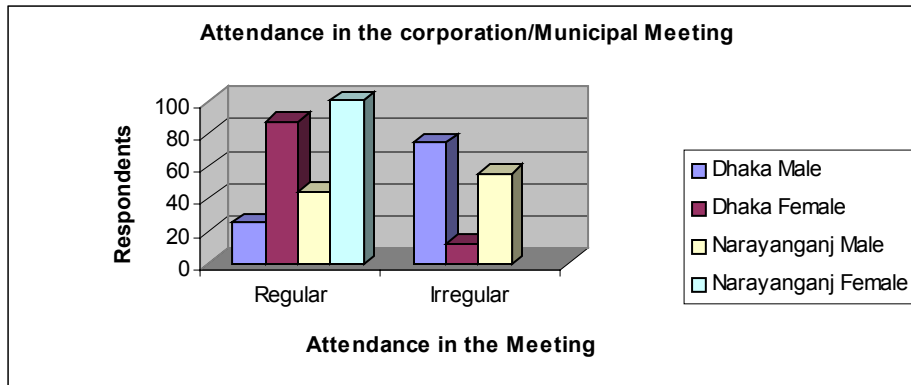


Figure – 1: Attendance in the Corporation/Municipal Meetings

If Irregular, Reasons for Non Attendance:

Regularly participation in meeting is very important for the commissioners for becoming up-dated about the corporation/ municipal activities. But the 'Table no. 1' shows that a large number of men ward commissioners do not attend at meetings regularly. About 67 percent of them told that they did not get notice in time. As a result, they failed to attend due to some other pre-scheduled tasks. (It should be noted here that women ward commissioners also do not get notice in time. But as they do not miss meetings as they always enquires about corporation activities). About 61 percent could not attend due to illness and 56 percent did not attend meeting as because they were in abroad. It is surprising that 22 percent respondents failed to attend because they forgot the schedule of the meetings.

Among the irregular women respondents 67 percent could not attend meetings due to illness. One responded that she does not attend for not getting the opportunity to participate in the discussion of the meeting. She complained that men commissioners do not give floor to women commissioners to talk. It is the general scenario, which is applicable to all women ward commissioners more or less. Despite most of the women commissioners attend the meeting only to establish their rights.

In case of Narayanganj, all the women ward commissioners are very serious regarding the participation in the Municipal meetings. But some men ward commissioners (56%) were irregular. They did boycott meetings for not being given with important responsibilities and due importance of their opinions. Only 20 percent could not join due to illness.

Extent of Participation by the Respondents in Meetings Discussion

The first hand report (field report) shows that all respondents participate in the meeting discussion more or less in Dhaka, whereas nearly 60 percent respondents have no participation in case of Narayanganj. In Dhaka, all men commissioners can participate fully as compared to only 29 percent women ward commissioners. More than 70 percent women ward commissioners participate partially. Here partial participation means only to join in the meeting and not getting the opportunity to express their own views. Women ward commissioners complained that men commissioners do not give them floor to speak, rather they laugh at the women ward commissioners. They opined that they were unable to raise their voices properly because of their lower representation in the corporation. Some of them opined that chairman ignores women's views. They said that their opinions are accepted only when majority support the same. But in case of men's opinions it is just vice versa.

Table 6: Extent of Participation by the Respondents in Meetings Discussion

Extent of participation	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No participation	-	-	-	4 (44.4%)	3 (100%)	7 (58.3%)
Partial participation	-	17 (70.8%)	17 (35.4%)	2 (22.2%)	-	2 (16.7%)
Full participation	24 (100%)	7 (29.2%)	31 (64.6%)	3 (33.3%)	-	3 (25%)
Total	24 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	48 (100.0%)	9 (100.0%)	3 (100.0%)	12 (100.0%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004

In case of Narayanganj, data show that only 42 percent respondents do participate in the meeting discussion of which 25 percent respondents are full participants and 17 percent are partial participants. A larger portion of the respondents has no participation which includes all the women ward commissioners. They felt themselves nothing but a living statue in the meeting as they are only the signatory of the decisions made by the male participants. Their chairman takes all the decision herself, prepares required papers on that and finally just ask for signature from them.

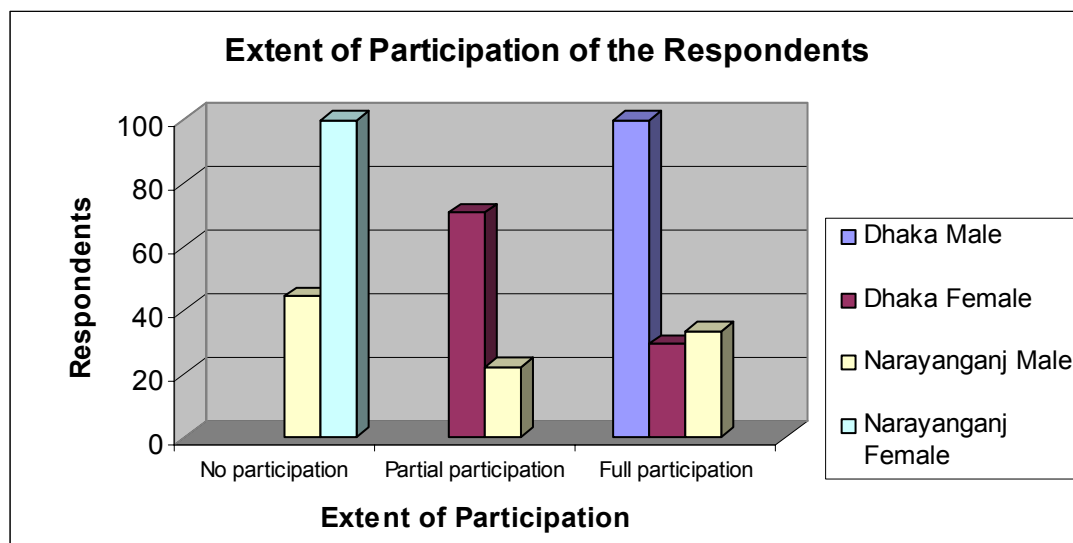


Figure – 2: The Extent of participation of the Respondent

Standing Committees Headed by Women Ward Commissioners:

When the respondents were asked about the number of standing committees formed by the City Corporation/ Municipality, most respondents of both Dhaka and Narayanganj became confused. A larger portion of men (33%) and women (67%) respondents didn't know the actual number of the standing committees.

In fact, no standing committees have yet been formed formally by the City Corporation. But there are some informal standing committees such as - Market, Technical and Mosquito Killing Committees (which are waiting to be approved), all of which are headed by men ward commissioners. But there are some development projects such as revenue committee, slum development projects which are being headed by the women ward commissioners. Again each ward has an urban development center (UDC), which is directed by the women ward commissioners of the respective wards.

In case of Narayanganj, the exact number of the standing committees remained undisclosed. The Chairman of Narayanganj Municipality informed that no standing committee was headed by the women ward commissioners. She told that reserve seated commissioners do not have the right of heading any committees.

2.2 The Nature of Functions of the Ward Commissioners:

Due to rapid urbanization, the role and functions of urban local government institutions in Bangladesh have been gaining in significance in the recent year. Gender empowerment is determined by the degree to which women and men participate actively in all these activities and take part in decision-making. But there are no clearly specified responsibilities given to women ward commissioners by the local government Gazette. As a result, women ward commissioners are unable to show their commitment to public or to the office. This section focuses on the different types of functions of the two urban local bodies performed by women and men ward commissioners.

Responsibilities Given by the City Corporation/ Municipality to the Respondents

The data reveal significant differences between responsibilities of men and women ward commissioners. In Dhaka City Corporation, almost all the men ward commissioners are given with the responsibilities of corruption and smuggling protection, provision of birth, succession, nationality and character certificates, provision of street light and keeping pollution free environment followed by infrastructure development (96%), maintaining proper drainage and

sewerage system (92%), encouraging people to pay tax (79%), provision of public toilet and water supply system (75%) and to participate in the tree plantation programme (70%).

But in case of women the scenario is totally different. Almost all the women are involved in judging the women and child issues, welfare of the local people, motivating people during natural calamities, provision of birth, nationality and character certificates followed by encouraging people in income generating activities (95.83%), motivating people in family planning and health care (95.83%), involving poor women in development activities (91.66%) and motivating people about literacy (91.66%). The participation of men in all those sectors mentioned above is very less. Again the sectors where the involvement of men is very high, participation of women in those sectors is really insignificant except infrastructural development (87.5%). Some ward commissioners perform some other activities such as numbering of houses, control over traffic and public vehicles etc. Many women ward commissioners work for keeping the environment free from pollution even not being given with this task by the Corporation.

Table 7: Responsibilities Given by the City Corporation/ Municipality to the Respondents

Responsibilities given	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Ensuring infrastructural development & maintenance	23 (95.83%)	21 (87.5%)	44 (91.66%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Corruption & smuggling protection & maintenance of discipline	24 (100%)	10 (41.66%)	34 (72.91%)	8 (88.88%)	-	8 (66.66%)
Encouraging people in income increasing projects	1 (4.16%)	23 (95.83%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Motivating people for family planning	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)

Encouraging people about literacy	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100%)	8 (66.66%)
Motivate people about health care	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Provide birth, succession, nationality & character certificate	24 (100.0%)	24 (100%)	48 (100%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Provide public toilet & water supply system for local people	18 (75.0%)	11 (45.83%)	29 (60.41%)	8 (88.88%)	1 (33.33%)	9 (75%)
Co-operate in enumeration	7 (29.16%)	-	7 (14.58%)	2 (22.22%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Provide public library, amusement facilities & its maintenance	9 (37.5%)	8 (33.33%)	17 (35.41%)	2 (88.88%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Encouraging people in cultural activities	13 (54.16%)	9 (37.5%)	22 (45.83%)	4 (44.44%)	-	4 (33.33%)
Awareness about natural calamities & relief distribution	5 (20.83%)	24 (100%)	29 (60.41%)	2 (22.22%)	2 (66.66)	4 (33.33%)
Maintaining proper drainage & sewerage system	22 (91.66%)	14 (58.33%)	36 (75.0%)	9 (100%)	-	9 (75.0%)

Keep environment pollution free	24 (100%)	13 (54.16%)	37 (77.08%)	9 (100%)	1 (33.33%)	10 (83.33%)
Welfare of local people (protect dowry, early marriage, acid throwing)	2 (8.33%)	24 (100%)	26 (54.16%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Register birth, death & marriage	-	8 (33.33%)	8 (16.66%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Encourage people to pay tax, fee etc	19 (79.16%)	3 (12.5%)	22 (45.83%)	8 (88.88%)	1 (33.33%)	9 (75.0%)
Provision & maintenance of street light	24 (100%)	9 (37.5%)	33 (68.75%)	7 (77.77%)	-	7 (58.33%)
Provision & maintenance of slaughter houses	-	-	-	3 (33.33%)	-	3 (25.0%)
Distribute VGD & VGF card	-	-	-	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)
Participate in tree plantation program	17 (70.83%)	6 (25.0%)	23 (47.91%)	1 (11.11%)	-	1 (8.33%)
Judge the child & women violence cases	15 (62.5%)	24 (100%)	39 (81.25%)	2 (22.22%)	3 (100%)	5 (41.66%)

Involve poor women in development activities	2 (8.33%)	22 (91.66%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100%)	3 (25.0%)
Others	-	1 (4.16%)	1 (2.08%)	9 (100%)	3 (100%)	12 (100%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004

Note: i) This is a multiple response table

ii) Parentheses present percentage on the basis of the respondents

In case of Narayanganj it is found that all the respondents irrespective of men and women are given with the task of ensuring infrastructural development, distribution of VGD and VGF card and provision of birth, character and nationality certificates. All the men are specially involved in maintaining proper drainage and sewerage system and keeping the environment free from pollution followed by corruption and smuggling protection (89%), provision of public toilet and water supply system (89%), encouraging people to pay tax (89%) and provision and maintenance of street light (78%). Like DCC, the nature of the women functions is much different than that of the men. All the women are involved in encouraging people in income generating projects, motivating people for family planning, encouraging people about literacy, motivating people about health care, welfare activities for the local people, to judge the child and women's violence cases, followed by creating awareness about natural calamities. The participation of men in such activities is very less. All the respondents of Narayanganj Municipality perform some other activities such as - naming of roads, numbering of houses, controlling the super markets, eradication of mosquitoes, reception of distinguished visitors etc.

The nature of functions given to the commissioners by the local bodies is very much similar. But the function of distributing VGD and VGF card is practiced only in Narayanganj. Another significant difference is that commissioners of DCC are enjoying full freedom in selecting the development activities. They give plan and take approval by the chairman and distribute the work among the contractors and supervise it personally. But in case of Narayanganj, commissioners only look after the development activities and their chairman performs all other formalities.

Activities those specially address women

All women respondents of DCC and Municipality mentioned almost the similar type of responsibilities. The activities which specially address women are generally - to encourage people in various income generating activities, motivate people about family planning, demonstrate people about literacy, motivate people about health care, provide birth, succession, nationality and character certificate, provide public toilet and water supply system for the local people, make people aware about natural calamity and relief distribution, keep environment free from pollution, look after the welfare of the local people specially women and child, protect dowry, early marriage, acid throwing etc, judge the child and women violence and to take effective steps to involve poor women in development activities.

But there are also some differences in the responsibilities performed by the women ward commissioners of two local bodies. The women ward commissioners of Narayanganj are also involved in taking possession of governmental lands. These activities are difficult even for a man to perform properly. But women are performing these activities quite successfully. Again responsibility to distribute VGD and VGF card is practiced only in Narayanganj, not in Dhaka.

It is found in DCC that women are heading some committees like 'Revenue committee' and 'Slum development committee' etc and they are really proving their capabilities in performing these activities. This type of involvement as well as performance is in deed remarkable in Narayanganj.

2.3 Hindrances Faced by the Respondents While Undertaking the City Corporation / Municipal Activities

Numerous reasons have prompted the less participation of women representatives in local bodies activities. All of the women ward commissioners of both Dhaka and Narayanganj mentioned that they have been encountering many problems. Some problems are mentioned in the Table 6. Almost all the women respondents complained that they are given with fewer responsibilities. They are also facing financial constraint (92%) and immorality of chairman in distribution of corporation activities (92%). The problem of financial crisis is more acute for those women who all are not from rich family background. About 96 percent women reported that they are always vested with unimportant tasks. They (96%) also complained that male commissioners laugh at them while participating in meeting discussion. Women ward commissioners are also facing some other problems such as - ignoring women in financial affairs (71%) followed by getting less information about Corporation activities (58%), indirect threat by the male colleagues (46%), restrictions to get involved in work (42%), lack of security (38%), social obligation (33%), very poor honorarium (29%), lack of peoples interests in paying tax (29%), and high rate of corruption (21%) etc.

On the contrary, 79 percent men ward commissioners do not face any problem in performing their duties. It has been proved by the co-efficient of correlation as the figure -0.19 indicates that men

and women are negatively correlated with the hindrances. A very non-significant portion of men faces some problems due to partiality of the chairman (25%), followed by lack of security (8%), social obligation (4%) and less allocation of work (4%). A male commissioner mentioned that he does not feel secured even having 10 security guards. However, he believes that for political representatives this situation is a typical one.

Table 8: Hindrances Faced by the Respondents

Hindrances	Dhaka			Narayanganj		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
No problem	19 (79.16%)	-	19 (39.58%)	1 (11.11%)	-	1 (8.33%)
Social obligation	1 (4.16%)	8 (33.33%)	9 (18.75%)	-	-	-
Financial constraints	3 (12.5%)	22 (91.66%)	25 (52.08%)	8 (88.88%)	3 (100.0%)	11 (91.66%)
Immorality of chairman in work distribution	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Partiality of chairman	6 (25.0%)	22 (91.66%)	28 (58.33%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Lack of security	2 (8.33%)	9 (37.5%)	11 (22.91%)	-	-	-
Restrictions in involving work	-	10 (41.66%)	10 (20.83%)	-	-	-
High rate of corruption	-	5 (20.83%)	5 (10.41%)	-	-	-
Very poor honorarium	-	7 (29.16%)	7 (14.58%)	2 (22.22%)	-	2 (16.66%)
Lack of people's interest in tax paying	-	7 (29.16%)	7 (14.58%)	7 (77.77%)	-	7 (58.33%)
Less allocation of work	1 (4.16%)	24 (100.0%)	25 (52.08%)	5 (55.55%)	3 (100.0%)	8 (66.66%)
Less responsibilities given to women ward commissioners	-	24 (100.0%)	24 (50.0%)	-	3 (100.0%)	3 (25.0%)
Women ward commissioners less informed about responsibilities	-	14 (58.33%)	14 (29.16%)	-	-	-

Less interest shown on women program by local elites	-	17 (70.83%)	17 (35.41%)	-	-	-
Male commissioners laugh at women ward commissioners	-	23 (95.83%)	23 (47.91%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Indirectly threatened by male colleagues	-	11 (45.83%)	11 (22.91%)	-	-	-
Ignoring women ward commissioners in financial affairs	-	17 (70.83%)	17 (35.41%)	-	2 (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Women vested with unimportant works	-	23 (8.70%) (95.83%)	23 (7.59%) (47.91%)	-	2 (9.10%) (66.66%)	2 (16.66%)
Others	-	-	-	-	1 (33.33%)	1 (8.33%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2004.

Note: i) This is a multiple response table

ii) Parentheses present percentage on the basis of respondents

$r = -0.19$ [Dhaka (male-female)] $R_{xy} = 0.93$ [Narayanganj (male-female)]

$r = 0.87$ [DCC & Narayanganj Municipality (Total)]

In case of Narayanganj, 67 per cent respondents irrespective of men and women face problems due to the immorality of the chairman and due to her partial attitude. The result of co-efficient of correlation is .93 which means that men and women of Narayanganj Municipality are strongly correlated with the hindrances. They also face problems due to lack of funds. It should be mentioned here that Narayanganj remained as an abandoned Pourashava for a period of 18 years. As a result, there was no political representative during that period. This town is now facing a large number of problems. The Commissioners believed that these problems cannot be solved within next few years with their limited funds. In order to solve all those problems - mainly very poor condition of roads, another 18 years may take. But the commissioners are hoping for the best.

From the above analysis, it is clearly understood that most of the commissioners of DCC and almost all the respondents of Narayanganj Municipality are facing numerous problems. Figure .87 indicates that the commissioners of both of these two local bodies are strongly correlated with the hindrances. However, unlike the respondents of Dhaka City Corporation, they do not face the problems of lack of security, high rate of corruption and social obligation.

Concluding Remarks:

Politics relates to decision making through formal structures and informal processes on the basis of the public opinion. The mobilization and distribution of resources at micro and macro levels, the creation and application of value, the organization of public opinion – all these are integral parts to political processes. The community action at local level is as much a part of politics as is public policy activism. This present study is conducted with a view to examining the political participation of women at the urban local level and to identify various problems that are faced by women.

The study reveals that the government could merely recognize the potentials and dynamism of women ward commissioners. On the contrary, they were given with work responsibilities by the local government Gazette. As a result, gradually they are grown up with lack of confidence in to performing any Corporation work when it is given occasionally. Initially they were not involved with any development activities. Women ward commissioners of DCC and Narayanganj Municipality had been working only through Urban Development Center and UGIIP respectively to improve the socio-economic condition of the poor people of their communities. Familial disputes, dowry issues, domestic violence, mother-child health care, women's and adult education, women's co-operative, income earnings and credit programs and arranging emergency fund and relief in a period of disaster have received special attention by the women ward commissioners. But when women ward commissioners of DCC logically demanded to the Mayor for providing them with development work. Such an instance prompted the Mayor to give the responsibility of tax committees and slum development projects to them. Since then the women ward commissioners are monitoring these projects and committees only.

Ironically women cannot show their commitment to the public, or to the office, as they are supposed to listen or convince three different ward commissioners for any project to be realized. Women ward commissioners cannot take any development initiatives and actions without the permission or support from the relevant men ward commissioners. Men commissioners were not at all cordial to see the women to come to the limelight. Men ward commissioners were also not keen to share the chance of handling a big "financial benefit" with those who did not have any specific duty (according to the Gazette) to perform.

The fund allocation of women ward commissioners for their development work is comparatively much lower than that of the male. Due to very less allocation, utilizing the fund properly becomes more critical than that of getting the allocation.

In DCC, no standing committee has yet been formed completely. Few standing committees are in pipe line and few are already being started working, but being headed by some men ward

commissioners. According to a new circular of DCC, the women ward commissioners of reserve seats are to act as head of one-third standing committees. Thus it is expected that the more standing committees will be formed, with women being the president of the. But in case of Narayanganj Municipality, the reserve seated are prohibited by rule to act as head of any department of the Pourashava.

All the women ward commissioners strongly opined that the government must take adequate steps so that their potentials and dynamism are being utilized to the fullest. Recently some new rules and regulations have been introduced in order to improve the overall situation of the women ward commissioners regarding their meaningful political empowerment. According to the circular, issued on 6th January, 2005:

- All the commissioners of DCC will be given 2000 Tk. per month by the City Corporation for their presence in the meeting.
- All the commissioners of the City Corporation not having any govt owned office, will be given 6000Tk. monthly as office rent.
- All the commissioners of DCC will be given 2000Tk. monthly for the maintenance of their offices.
- One ward secretary, one MLSS and one guard will be appointed for each ward commissioner's office.
- Chairmen of the Tax Committee of different zones will be given 300 Tk. as honorarium.
- The City Corporation will provide all furnitures of the ward offices of the commissioners.
- The above policy level changes of the City Corporations may become a milestone in the context of improving the prevailing vious status of women in urban local governance. Side by side, women ward commissioners are also trying their best to minimize their shortcomings. It must be noted here that all the women ward commissioners of both DCC and Narayanganj Municipality are not less trained than those of men. As a result, the presence of the women ward commissioners has already changed the environment of politics/governance in various aspects. The changes are vivid, especially in relation to the poor and females, the field in which women work independently. Thus it is noticeable that if women are allowed to work independently in other spheres of City Corporation, they are likely to bring even more positive changes.

In order to involve women in local bodies and for their active participation in local and national decisions, they have to be mobilized and organized at various levels. It is expected that the steps stated above will be able to enhance the mobilization and organization of women. In fact, the local government system of the country can be effective only through the equal representation of

gender in all parts of it. For this women must also learn how to make the local government more responsive and accountable to them. To transform the local government system of Bangladesh into more responsive and accountable one, the government must be committed to ensure the establishment of truly representative local bodies backed up by the administrative and financial powers with a view to expediting decentralized development process.

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