

# Problems of Empowerment of Elected Women Representatives of Local Government in Some Rural Areas of Bangladesh

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## Abstract

As the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to all citizens clearly incorporated provisions for equal status of women so the Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act 1997 of Bangladesh is a mile stone towards ensuring women's equal access and space of increasing participation in political power structure. It provides 3 directly women members in the union Parishad from 3 reserved seats. The present study has conducted to assess the status of elected women representatives participates in decision making in respective development programs, to explore the types of capacity development training in operation for elected women representatives and to specify the limitations of women empowerment in Local Government Rural Development and Cooperative Systems. The study was conducted at Kishoreganj Sadar Upazila of Kishoreganj District, Netrokona Sadar Upazila of Netrokona, Bogra Sadar Upazila of Bogra and Kachua Upazila of Chandpur District. The studies were conducted using a questionnaire guideline developed for measuring empowerment status. The study covered 32 Union Parishad (UP) under 5 Upazila of 4 Districts in Bangladesh. 107 number of representatives interviewed during this survey. Women were elected only for reserve seat. From the result it was found that 97% percent women representatives elected for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, and only 3% for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time, 82% women representatives came from housewife category, 28% respondents were involved participating in decisions for implementing the programs. Men representatives thought that the participation was 42% for women. It indicates gaps in cooperation as regards agenda domination in decision endorsement. Only 27% women representatives received training from Non Government organizations and 25% received orientation from Government agencies on Roles of UP members. The result also revealed that 73% women representatives feel that the lack of cooperation by men members is a barrier against women empowerment. According to them Government policy flexibility and clarity related implications is a big concern for proper women functionality, lack of awareness being common. According to the UP Act, 2009, there is a provision of 13 Standing Committees (SCs) in the UP to support the Parishad in ensuring transparency, accountability, and people's participation in planning and implementing for ensuring better governance and service. Government has instructed that women members should be president of at least twenty five percent of these standing committees. Women's participation in decision-making process is one of the key components for their empowerment. However, the terms of reference of these committees and their operational modalities were not clearly specified.

**Key Words:** *Empowerment, Elected Women Representatives, Local Government, Union Parishad, Capacity, Participation, Training and Education.*

## INTRODUCTION

There is considerable literature on gender relations in Bangladesh, which documents progress achieved in narrowing the gender gap in some rural and local government sectors, though still facing great obstacles having recognized their representation rights. At the international level, the GOB signed CEDAW, but with reservations. The Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees equal rights to all citizens clearly incorporated provisions for equal status of women. The first National Policy for the Advancement of Women was adopted in 1997. The Policy has been revised in 2011. The Local Government (Union Parishad) Second Amendment Act 1997 of Bangladesh is a mile stone towards ensuring women's equal access and space of increasing participation in political power structure.

But role of women representatives in decision making process is one of the concern areas of empowerment. Without the active participation of women and the integration of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (FWCW, 1995:1). However, participation of women in Union Parishad is in action of the development and service programs

which largely depends on the proper empowerment of the individuals delivering contributions. But the expected output is still to be achieved specially for women where working environment and facilitations of scopes did not wide enough.

**Empowerment includes the following, or similar, capabilities:**

- ❖ to make decisions about personal/collective circumstances
- ❖ to access information and resources for decision-making
- ❖ to choose a range of options not just yes/no/either
- ❖ to achieve and access skills for improvement
- ❖ to increase ability in thinking to sort out the right and wrong

**OBJECTIVES**

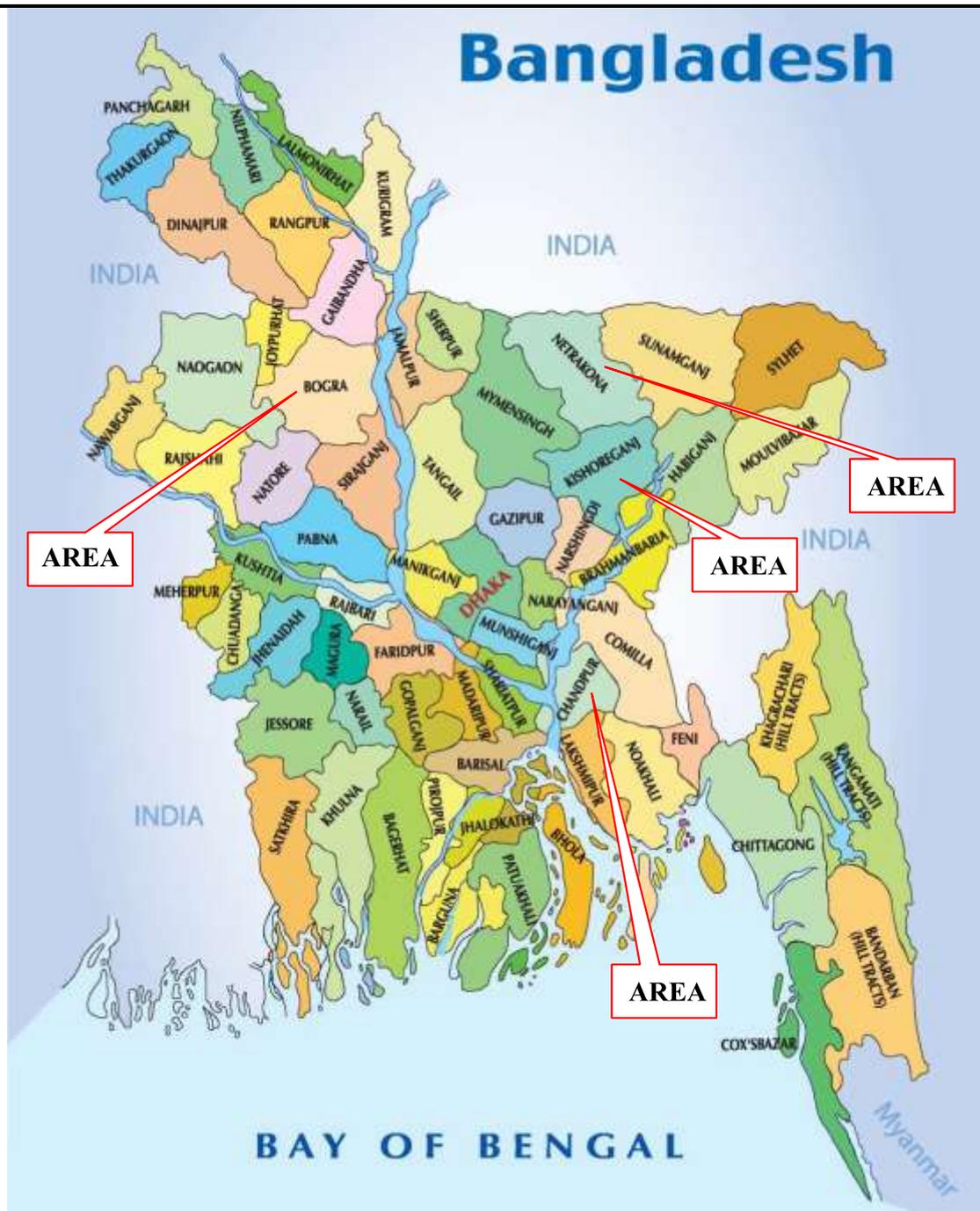
In the context of the situation explained here, a research program was formulated and conducted to get some light on the status of women representatives, their capacity development and working limitations particularly in Union Parishad.

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To assess the status of elected women representatives participates in decision making in respective development programs.
2. To know the types of capacity development training in operation for elected women representatives.
3. To specify limitations of women empowerment in Local Government Rural Development and Cooperative Systems.

**METHODOLOGY**

The studies were conducted using a questionnaire guideline developed for measuring empowerment status. Women empowerment can be measured through the mentioned empowerment indicators. The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) as used in these studies treated women's participation in a Parishad, in declared sectors. GEM is calculated by tracking "the share of seats in Parishads held by women who may come from all spheres of life categories, the methodologies were set as to information that it may be utilized taking into account the importance of women participation and equality for calculating the Gender Parity Index (GPI) and the Gender Development Index (GDI).



### Sites and Sampling

Districts: Kishoreganj, Netrokona, Bogra, Chandpur

Upazila: i. Kachua, ii. Netrokona Sadar, iii. Kendua, iv. Bogra Sadar, v. Kishoreganj Sadar

### Parameters of Questionnaire

- i. Participatory Planning and Budgeting
- ii. Project Development and Management
- iii. Roles of Union Parishad Member (UPM)
- iv. Roles of Standing Committee Member (SCM)
- v. Gender and Development
- vi. Leadership Development
- vii. Right to Information
- viii. Environment and climate change

**Persons:** Union Parishad Member (women and men), Standing Committee Members (women and men), elected women representatives, Union Parishad Chairperson.

Capacity development Agencies – Facilitator: Government agencies and Non Government organizations (NGOs).

Total Respondents: 107 both Men and Women.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

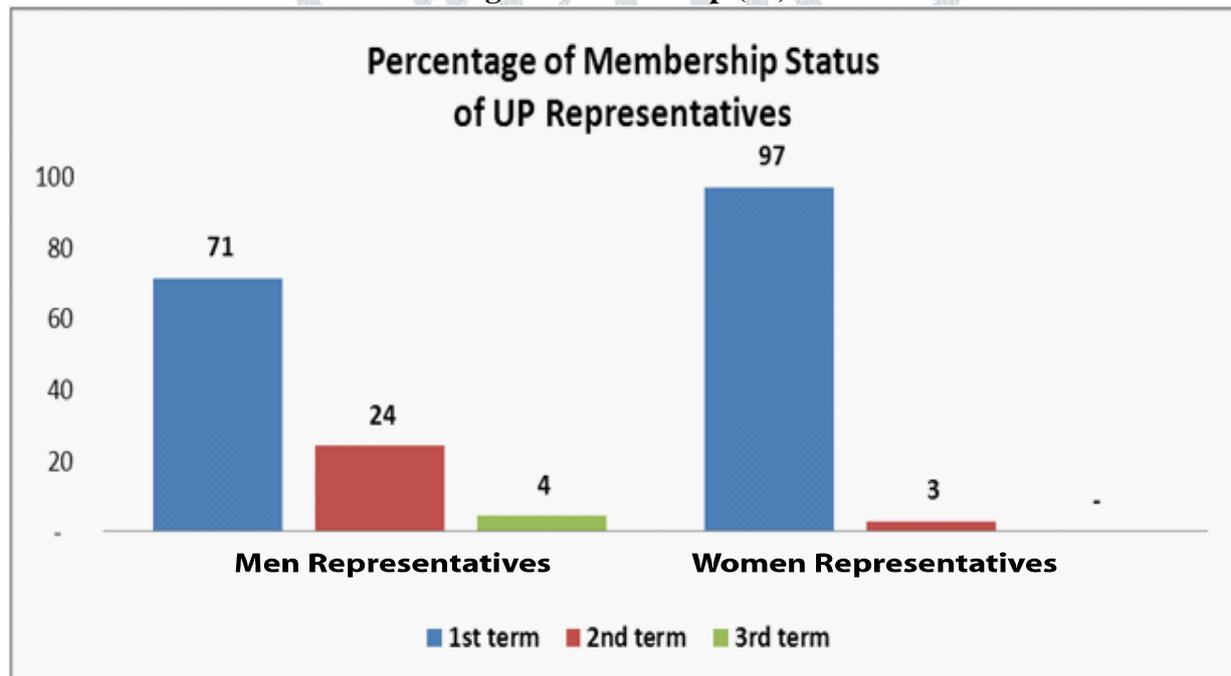
The results obtained from the studies are sequentially mentioned in this chapter including composition of the population: education, occupation etc.

1. To assess the status of elected women representatives participates in decision making in respective development programs: Men and women sharing development programs.
2. Types of capacity development training in operation: Participating Capacity Development Training (CDT) by Government (Local government, Rural Development and Co-operatives) system and NGO.
3. Limitations of women empowerment in local government.

### No. of Representatives Interviewed:

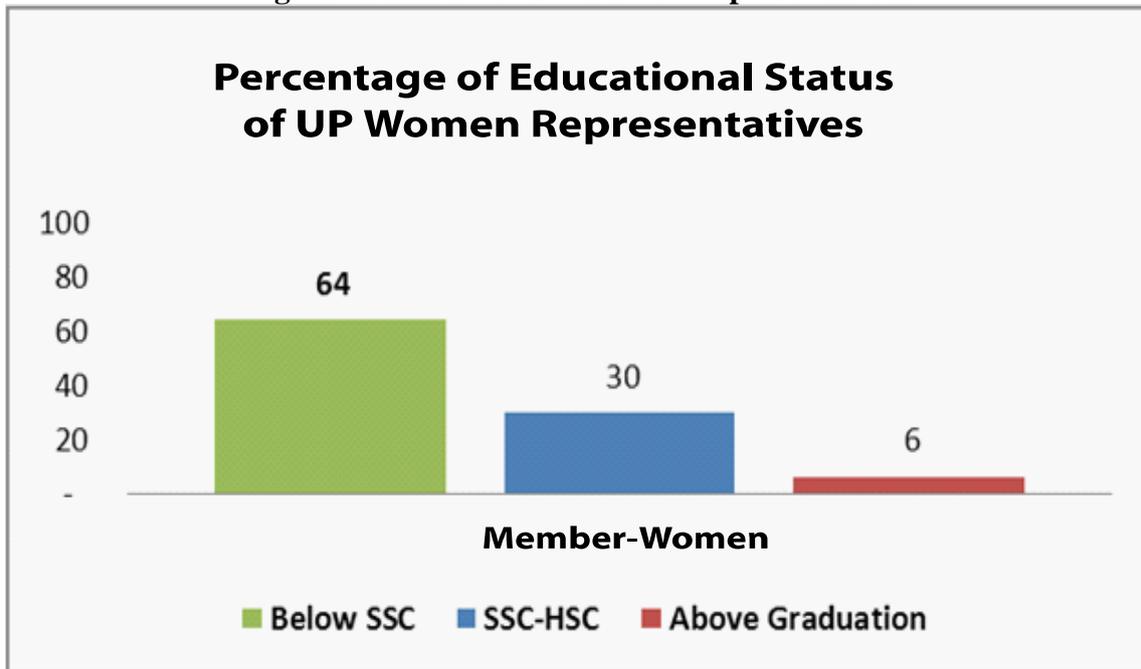
- Study covered 32 Union Parishad (UP) under 5 Upazila of 4 Districts in Bangladesh. 107 number of representatives interviewed during this survey. Women were elected only for reserve seat.
- The results show that 52% of the study was elected UP members, 29% was UP Chairman, and 26% was other committee members.

Fig. 1: Membership (%)



It was found that 97% percent women representatives elected for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, and only 3% for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

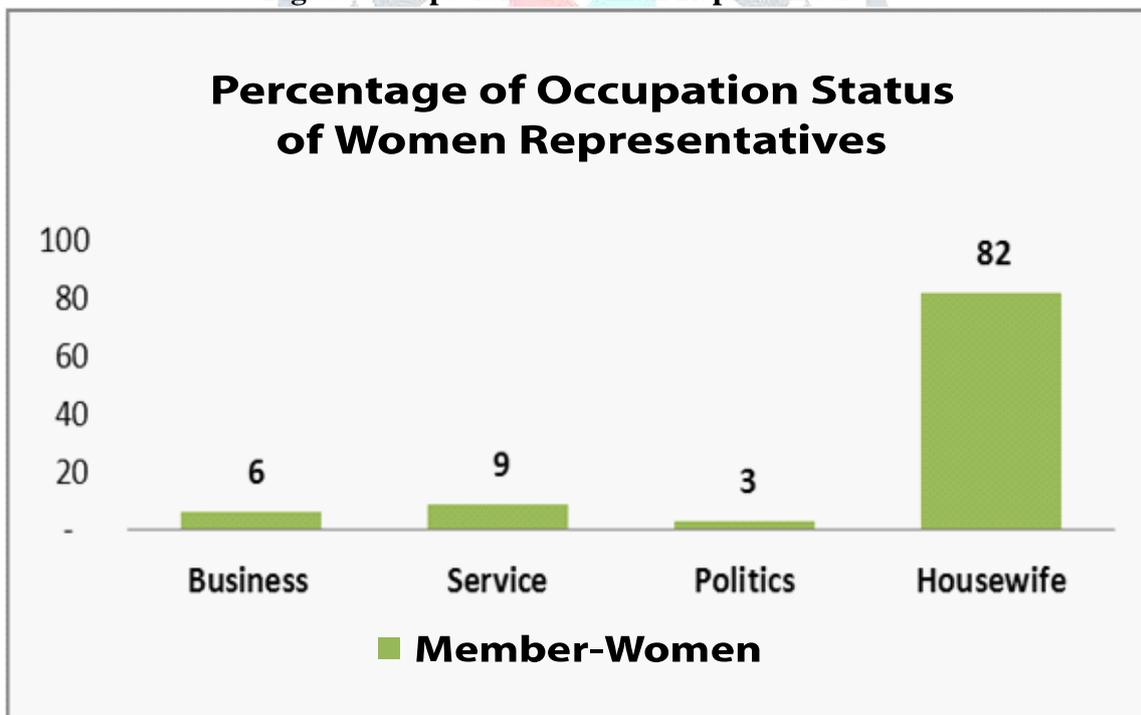
Fig. 2: Education of UP Women Representatives



**Educational Status: Women**  
 Graduate-6%  
 SSC-HSC-30%  
 Less than SSC-64%

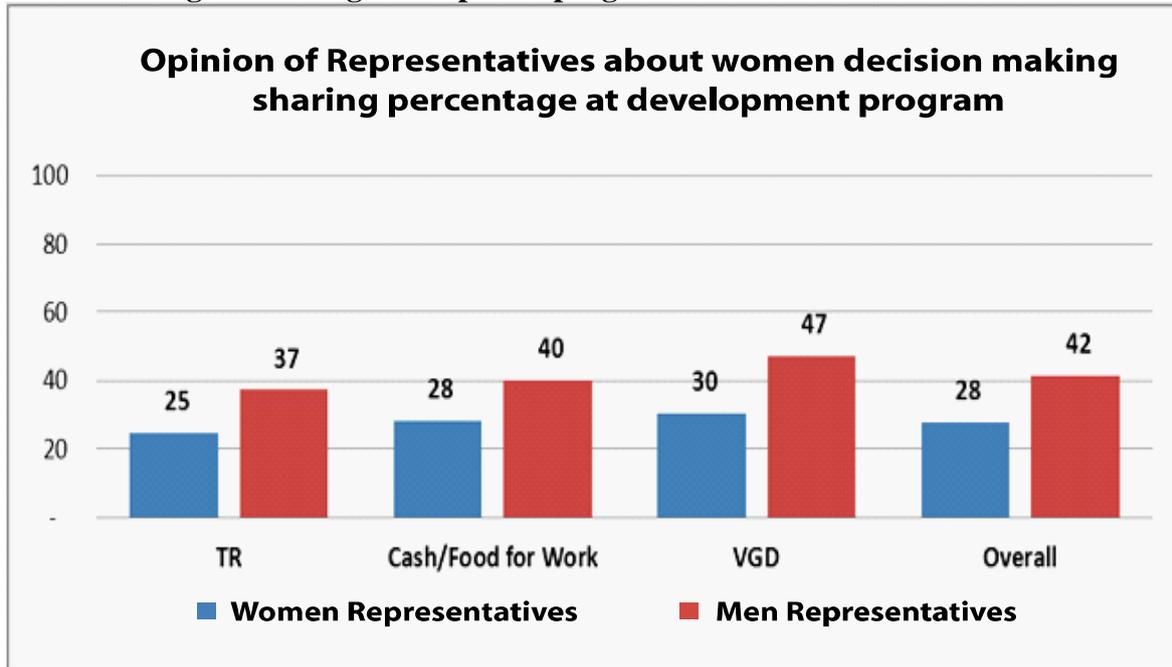
**Educational Status: Men**  
 Graduate-11%  
 SSC-HSC-42%  
 Less than SSC-47%

Fig. 3: Occupation of Women Representatives



It was found that 82% Women Representatives came from housewife category.

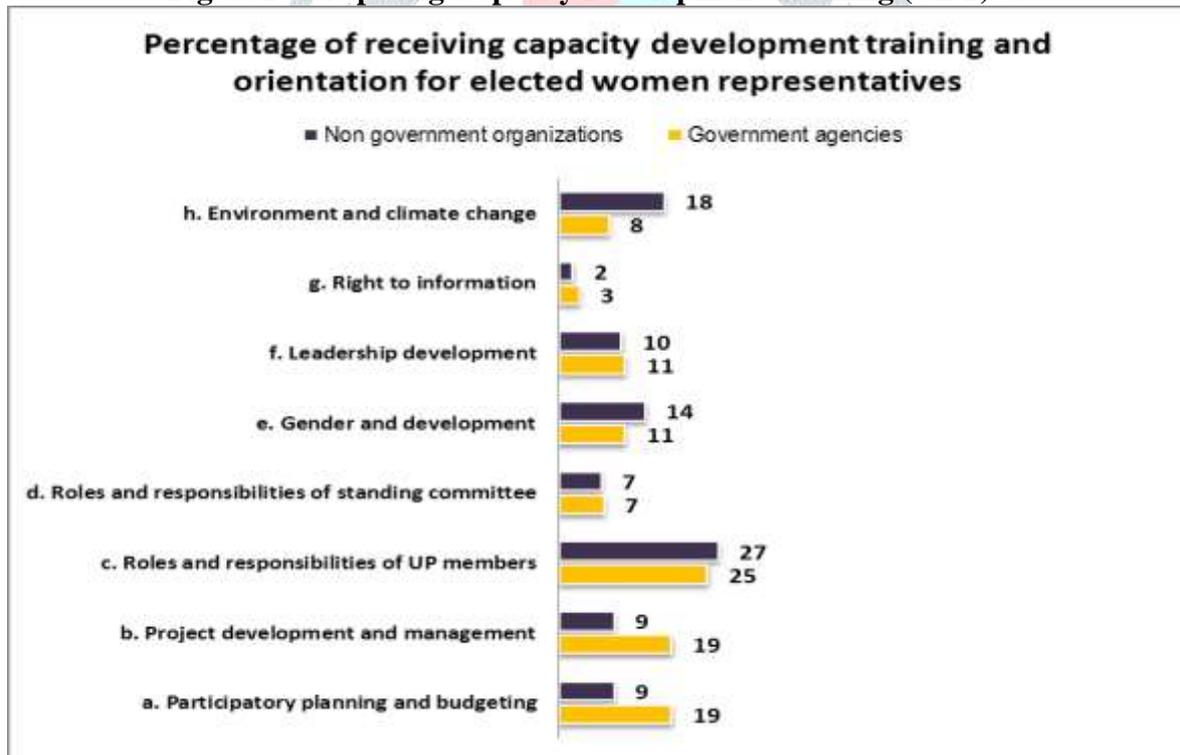
**Fig. 4: Sharing development programs: Women and Men Ratio**



It was found that according to the women representatives 28% were involved sharing decisions for implementing the programs.

Men representatives thought that the share was 42% for women. It indicates gaps in cooperation as regards agenda domination in decision approval.

**Fig. 5: Participating Capacity Development Training (CDT)%**



**Government agencies preferred:**

- i. Project development and management
- ii. Planning and budgeting

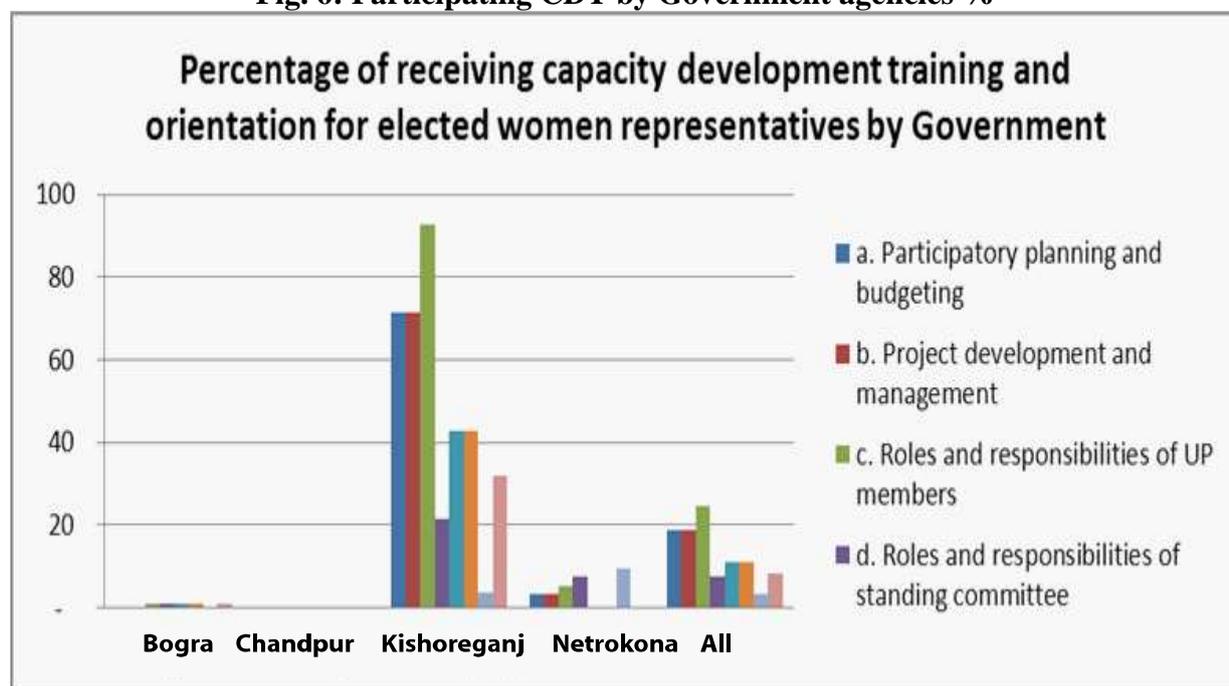
**NGO preferred:**

- i. Environment and climate change
- ii. Gender and development

**Both preferred:**

- i. Leadership development
- ii. Role of Union Parishad Members

**Fig. 6: Participating CDT by Government agencies %**



Topic preference: All Centers  
 Roles of UP Members: 22%  
 Project development and management: 18%  
 Planning and Budgeting: 17%

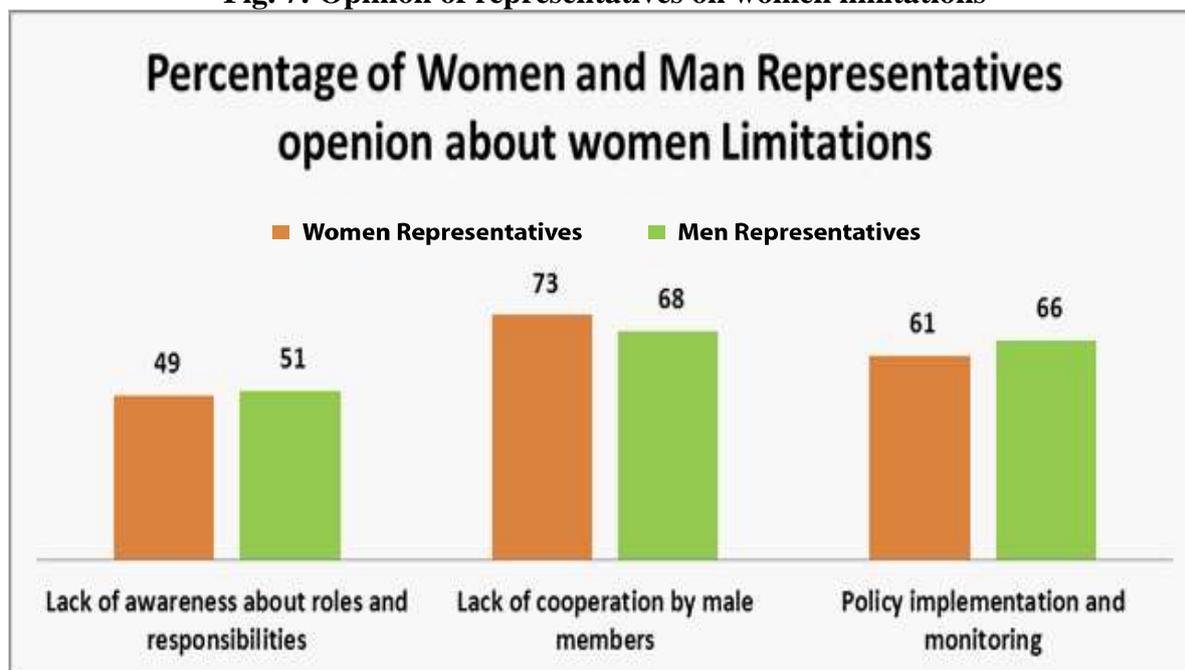
**Training Agencies**

Only 27% women representatives received training from Non Government and 25% received orientation from Government agencies on Roles of UP members.

**NGO Facilitators**

1. Kishoreganj - CARE Bangladesh
2. Netrokona - CARE Bangladesh and Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS)
3. Bogra - BRAC

Fig. 7: Opinion of representatives on women limitations



It was found that 73% women representatives feel that the lack of cooperation by men members is a barrier against women empowerment. According to them Government policy flexibility and clarity related implications is a big concern for proper women functionality, lack of awareness being common.

### Summary and Recommendations

The major findings of the present studies are briefly summarized followed by resulted recommendations.

**Membership:** 97% percent women representatives elected for the 1<sup>st</sup> time, and only 3% for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

**Educational status:** 82% women representatives came from housewife.

**Women Representatives:** Graduate -6%, SSC-HSC-30% Less than SSC-64%.

### 1. Women and Men participating in development programs

According to the women representatives 28% was involved participating in decision making process for implementing the programs. Men respondent stated that the participation of women was 42%. It indicates gaps in cooperation and understanding as regards agenda domination and in decision approval.

### 2. Type of Training CDT

27% women representatives received training from NGO and 25% received orientation from GO on Roles of UP members.

**NGO Trainers in Kishoreganj --CARE Bangladesh, Netrokona-- CARE Bangladesh and Sabalamby Unnayan Samity (SUS), Bogra – BRAC.**

### Topic preference: All centers by GO

Roles of UP Members: 22%

Project development and management: 18%

Planning and Budgeting: 17%

**Topic preference: NGO- Bogra, Kishoreganj, Netrokona**

Roles of UP Members: 42%

Project development and management: 15%

Planning and Budgeting: &lt;10%

**3. Limitations of women empowerment**

Opinion of representatives on women limitations: 73% women and 68% men responded that the lack of cooperation by men members was the most limiting factor or the barrier against women empowerment. According to them flexibility and complexity government policy related implications was a big concern for proper women empowerment functionality, though lack of awareness was mostly common in all cases. The non-cooperation happened due to gender insensitivity in the form of non-allowing women by their men counterparts or family and society.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the UP Act, 2009, there is a provision of 13 Standing Committees (SCs) comprising elected representatives from the Parishads, civil society members, women representatives of that area and socially respected persons are entitled to support the UP for ensuring better services along with resolving various problems. The Government also instructed that women members should be president of at least twenty five percent of these standing committees. However, the terms of references of these standing committees along with operational modalities are not clearly specified.

Therefore, notification from government should be directed containing the clause about own rights, role, power and responsibility of the women members in the manual, ensuring their presence as compulsion. Skill development trainings should be arranged regularly as needed for women by National Institute of Local Government (NILG) with due importance.

- Monitoring mechanisms should be transparent to ensure the participatory planning and implementation of women contributory development projects using accountable indicators.
- Concept and promotional training should be arranged for understanding on gender issues jointly for women and men members at Parishads.

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## AUTHORS BIOGRAPHIES



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