

Participating of Women in Rural Politics and Decision-Making in Rural

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Abstract

Women's participation in politics and decision-making is a crucial factor in achieving gender equality and inclusive development at the grassroots level. In rural Bangladesh, where traditional and patriarchal norms often dominate, the involvement of women in political and decision-making processes has profound implications for social and economic progress. This is qualitative research and this research was conducted in the areas of two villages at Jamalpur district in Bangladesh. A comprehensive case study method was followed to collect data and the main objectives of the study are the participation of women in rural politics and decision-making in rural Bangladesh. Considering the main objectives there were some specific objectives for this research such as social-demographic and economic conditions and problems related to their participating politics and the existence of GOs and NGOs services. The study reveals that lack of support, religious culture, male domain, less education, and less effective communication are the main barriers to women participating in politics and decision-making in rural Bangladesh. Comprehensive ways of service and support, education, and income-generative programs are needed for women participating in politics and decision-making in rural Bangladesh.

Keynotes: *Participating, Women, Rural Politics, Decision-Making, Rural Bangladesh*

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Background of the Study

In Bangladesh, about half of the population comprises women (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Women are comparatively in an inferior position in all spheres of life, however, politically they are situated in a negligible state in the local government (Qadir, 1995). As the paternal-based social structure of males, the domain society exists in all the areas of rural Bangladesh. Women have few opportunities to participate in local politics and decision-making in rural Bangladesh. They have faced discrimination, injustice, and fewer opportunities to participate in rural policies and decision-making. If someone participates in policies to break the traditional culture and rituals she has to face several maltreated and neglected societal attitudes for this participation in politics and decision-making in rural Bangladesh. Furthermore, the members of the family do not willingly accept her participation in politics and decision-making in rural politics. As of now, very few Bangladeshi women can be found in positions of political leadership and administrative hierarchy in both central and local government structures. Women have a minimal impact on the planning, management, and implementation of policies and rules due to a lack of access to intervene in the decision-making process (Mahtab, 2007). Continuously engaged women in the development process of development in the equitable premise, the democratic basis, the efficiency, and the quality of local government activities will possibly improve. Participating both males and females in the local structure of politics through rational representation at all levels and all areas of decision-making, covering all ranges of Responsibilities of local government can be possibly improved. Women's role in the decision-making process is local areas one of the important criteria of women's empowerment. Keeping in mind, the importance of women's participation in the decision-making process of development, just like the other governments within the world, the government of Bangladesh has started efforts to broaden the scope of women (Khan & Fardaus, 2006). Union Parishad (UP) is a unit of the rural local government and a significant sector for the participation of women in rural Bangladesh but women have faced huge challenges to participate in local politics and decision-making at family and grassroots levels. Women's participation in decision-making is one of the criteria of women empowerment and women's development. So, this study focuses on women's politics and participation in decision-making in rural areas and also focuses on the socio-economic and demographic conditions of rural women, existing problems of rural women's participation in local politics and decision-making; existing support for participating in local politics and decision-making by GOs and NGOs. This study has Insightful proper information on women's participation of women at rural areas in politics and the decision-making process.

Significance of the Study

Women's participation in politics and decision-making is a crucial factor in achieving gender equality and inclusive development at the grassroots level. In rural Bangladesh, where traditional and patriarchal norms often dominate, the involvement of women in political and decision-making processes has profound implications for social and economic progress. Their engagement ensures diverse perspectives, strengthens democracy, and fosters equitable community development. Political involvement empowers women by giving them a voice in governance and policy-making. When women take on leadership roles in local government, such as Union Parishads and Upazila Parishads, they advocate for issues directly affecting their communities, including education, healthcare, and women's rights. The presence of women leaders also challenges gender biases and encourages greater female participation in the political sphere. Women in decision-making prioritize policies promoting social welfare, such as maternal healthcare, reproductive health, child education, economic empowerment, and women's development programs. Their leadership often leads to more inclusive and sustainable development initiatives that benefit entire communities and foster development in participation in decision-making. Additionally, female participation in politics enhances economic growth by supporting small enterprises and advocating for women's employment opportunities. Rural governance structures in Bangladesh benefit immensely from women's involvement. Women leaders tend to be more attuned to grassroots issues and can bridge the gap between local communities and higher levels of government. Their participation strengthens democratic practices by ensuring accountability, transparency, and community-driven governance. Despite progress, women in rural Bangladesh still face significant challenges in politics. Cultural and social barriers, lack of education, financial constraints, and resistance from male-dominated political structures hinder their active participation. However, increasing awareness, policy interventions, and support from NGOs and government initiatives are gradually helping women overcome these barriers and women have played a significant role in national development. This research has played a significant role in the policy practitioner for giving a complete picture of women's participation in politics and their barriers to participation in politics in local areas in Bangladesh. This research is also helpful to the researchers who are willing to work with women participating in politics in rural Bangladesh, they will get a complicated picture from the study.

Objectives of the Study

The general objectives of the study are the participation of women in local politics and the decision-making in rural areas in rural Bangladesh and the specific objectives are:

1. To know the socio-economic and demographic conditions of rural women;
2. To investigate the existing problems of rural women's participation in local politics and decision-making;
3. To focus on the existing support for participating in local politics and decision-making by GOs and NGOs;
4. To recommendations and suggestions for overcoming problems participating women in women in local politics and decision-making.

Methodology of the Study

This is qualitative research and this study was conducted in the areas of Jamalpur district at a selected two villages in Maderganjupazila. The entire population of the selected village is considered the population in this study. We selected five respondents for in-depth interviews by using purposive sampling from the population and thematic analysis used for using data analysis. The secondary data were collected through different journals, newspapers, articles, research papers, etc.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Qualitative study means descriptive study where the researcher has focused the elaborate idea from the respondents and not using any numerical data. As our study, we have used the interview method in our research. It is qualitative research. So, I described the data we collected on the field in our fieldwork area by using some of the terms related to our research objectives. Those terms are:

1. Poor demographic conditions indicate poor socioeconomic conditions for women
2. Lack of support makes them less capable of participating in politics and decision-making
3. Poor education conditions focus on less awareness about their rights
4. Religious and male-dominated societies have created unfavorable conditions for women's participation in politics.
5. No opportunities to go outside the home are one of the barriers to participation in politics.
6. Less economic power denoted less participation in politics and decision-making.
7. Income-generating programs and support can improve women's condition.

8. Social support and awareness are effective in participating in women's local politics and decision-making.
9. Effective communicable service is possible to increase participation in women's local politics and decision-making.
10. A favorable environment for women can increase participation in women's local politics and decision-making.

1. Poor Demographic Conditions Indicate Poor Socioeconomic Conditions for Women

The poor demographic condition of Bangladesh can significantly indicate poor socio-economic conditions for women. The number of female employees in Bangladesh has fallen from 19.6 million in 2017 to 17.3 million in 2022. The number of women in the total urban workforce fell from 31% of the total urban workforce to 23.58% in 2022. (BBS, 2022) Gender discrimination in rural areas across Bangladesh continues to be a formidable barrier to both social and economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector. Despite their critical roles in farming, processing, and post-harvest activities, rural women face entrenched inequalities in wages, opportunities, and recognition. (BBS, 2022). According to a 2023 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the gender pay gap remains a significant issue in rural areas, with women in agriculture earning an average of 30-40 percent less than their male counterparts for the same work.

My respondent "A" mentioned *"I am 24 years old and My husband does not give me any freedom regarding money. I have to ask my husband if I need anything. I can't do what I want. If I could earn, I could fulfill my desires."*

My respondent "B" said *"I cannot take rest because I have to do housework all day. As a result, my body is always tired."*

My respondent "C" said, *"I came from a poor family and lack of financial status; my father gave me marriage at the age of 18."*

My respondent "D" said, *"I came from a poor family and lack of financial status; my father gave me marriage at the age of 18."*

2. Social Support and Awareness are Effective in Participating in Women's Local Politics and Decision-Making.

Local politics means the politics of Union Parishad. Union Parishad consists of a Chairman and twelve UP representatives, out of which three seats are reserved exclusively for women. (Nlahanambrota Das, 2020). The lower number of women's participation in local politics like Union Parishads (Ups) generally contributes to stronger attention to women's issues. Women's political

participation in Union Parishads (UPs) is essential for achieving gender equality and authentic democracy, enabling women to engage in public decision-making and enhancing accountability. (UN) Political awareness boosts women's confidence and motivates them to pursue leadership roles. Social support and awareness are two important factors in participating in local politics like village politics which make them decision-makers in participating as female members of UP. But they face some obstacles in society.

My respondent "A" mentioned, *"I hope to become a politician but due to the lack of support from my husband and other people in my family, I cannot decide to participate in political activities."*

My respondent "B" said, *"I have no social support and I face some obstacles in my surroundings and the lack of interest in women and the male-dominated society are responsible for this so we are deprived of participation."*

My respondent "B" said, *"People in my society believe that women have a responsibility to stay home and cook, rear children, etc. My husband and my family members do not want, me am participate in politics."*

3. Poor Education Conditions Focus on Less Awareness About Their Tights

Education in its general sense is a form of learning in which the knowledge, skills, and habits of a group of people are transferred from one generation to the next through teaching, training, or research (Ojha, 2016). Education provides women with an understanding of their rights and power to fight economic and social discrimination. This is a key to prosperity development and welfare (Jha, 2014). An educated woman provides the infrastructure for a family to grow up in a competitive world. An educated woman has better bargaining powers through the channels of increased information and thus provides autonomy (Jha, 2014). Education enables women to build their views, and understanding and help families, societies, and nations as a whole to gain competitiveness. It plays an important role in enhancing the livelihood conditions for women (Yousuf, 2019). Education helps women in their fight against their fears and enhances their self-dignity. PromillaKapur (2001) has rightly viewed that, a "Woman's empowerment in reality is to empower herself and not overpower men" (Mandal, 2013). Education was to equip women with the know-how to make sure that women would be part of structures and participate in making influential decisions and policies that affect women and ensure that their interests would be advanced (Akawa, 2014). However, the majority of the women who live in rural areas do not have education opportunities. For that cause, they do not know about their rights and their demands and they have no opportunities to participate in local politics and decision-making.

My respondent “B” said, *"I do not read and write for that cause, I do not participate in any of decision making. Lack of knowledge my family members seem that I am incapable of making the family decision. "*

My respondent “C” said, *"I have no knowledge about my rights and I am incapable of reading and writing, if I did it, I would participate in local politics and decision making"*

My respondent “D” said, *"I have a great hobby of participating in local politics but it would not be possible for me because I am incapable of reading and writing and I do not have any idea of my rights for that who can I consume my basic right"*

4. Religious and Male-dominated Societies Have Created Unfavorable Conditions for Women's Participation in Politics

The status of women in society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious texts and of the cultural and institutional set-up of religious communities (Klingorová, 2015). Bangladesh now existence a traditionally based society and religious cultures still now existence in everywhere. For that causes, people believe that women have the main responsibility of making food, rearing children, etc.

My respondent “D” said, *"My husband does not permit me to go out of the home, he told me going out of the home of women is not accepted attitudes according to the religion. "*

My respondent “C” said, *"One day I told my grandmother about my hobby of joining politics, and she said to me do you know women joining politics is forbidden by religion"*

My respondent “D” said, *"In my family, my decision is not considered because my husband told me the traditional women role rear children, cook, household chores, So, you do not need to decide any matter. "*

5. No Opportunities to Go Outside the Home are One of the Barriers to Participation in Politics

Due to being restricted from going outside the home, women's opportunities to participate in politics are limited. Generally, women face various types of social and cultural pressures in society, which restrict their chances of working outside or engaging in political activities. According to the norms of family and society, women's primary responsibility is considered to be housework, and if they work outside or participate in political activities, their morality or social status may be

questioned. As a result, women in rural areas are often distanced from politics, leading to the loss of female representation in electoral contests. The progress and development of civilization that we witness today would not have been possible without women (Patra, 2021).

That's why the rebellious poet Kazi Nazrul Islam said, "In the world, everything that is a great creation and beneficial forever, half of it is created by man and another half by woman."

Respondent A said, *"Due to the fear of social stigma, I cannot get involved in various political sectors, which is why I rarely step outside the home. Additionally, cultural and religious reasons make it difficult for them to demand empowerment."*

Respondent B said *"I am always required to do household chores and take care of the children, and my family and husband do not allow her to participate in any other social activities. Society does not easily accept women going outside the home to engage in various social and political activities."*

6. Less Economic Power Denoted Less Participation in Politics and Decision-Making

Economic problems hold back every individual in all aspects. Economic weakness is a barrier to participation and decision-making in many places. Even in the political sphere, economic weakness has an impact.

Karl Marx in his theory of class struggle highlights how the political system often serves the interests of the ruling class, with the working class (or the poor) being largely excluded from meaningful political power (Marx, 1867). In our society, women suffer from economic problems the most because they receive less priority than men in all areas, and they have fewer opportunities to strengthen their economic power.

Respondent A said, *"After marriage, I was subjected to torture by her husband due to not being able to provide dowry and property, and I was not allowed to make any decisions in the family."*

Respondent B said, *"I do not have any importance in my family because I come from a poor family, while my husband's family is wealthy. Even though I am educated, no one respects my decisions, and my husband's family prevents me from participating in politics."*

7. Income-Generating Programs and Support Can Improve Women's Condition

In many countries, including Bangladesh, women are given fewer opportunities than men in all fields. Women face different problems in different fields of work, and they are denied the right to work. If women get the opportunity to participate and work in all fields, they can contribute to the development of the country in different fields like men.

The participation of women in the workforce helps to alleviate their poverty and various other issues, and it also assists in decision-making within the family and community, thereby increasing empowerment (Duflo, 2012). If women receive income-generating programs and support, they will become financially independent and be able to make decisions on important personal and family matters. Moreover, it will play a significant role in increasing women's empowerment.

Respondent A said, *"I do not grant any government privileges. If I got the support and training and other facilities from others I could do better in such a man I also played a significant role in politics and family decisions"*

Respondent B said, *"I seem, Training and education is very effective for any of women empowerment but I do not get any support of income generating activities from govt and non-govt. if I get it, I will be able to do the greatest role in economic activities and hopefully participate in politics"*

Respondent C Said, *"I have a dream to become a self-sufficient woman and will take to decision making at my family issues, but I do not get sufficient support from the govt and non-govt organizations. I believe that the possibility of women's empowerment is possible only when they give support to women in all spheres of life"*

8. Social Support and Awareness are Effective in Participating in Women's Local Politics and Decision-Making.

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and authentic democracy, enabling women to engage in public decision-making and enhancing accountability. (UN) Political awareness boosts women's confidence and motivates them to pursue leadership roles. Social support and awareness are two important factors in participating in local politics like village politics, making them decision-makers in participating as female members of UP. But they face some obstacles in society.

My respondent "A" mentioned, *"I hope to become a politician but due to the lack of support from my husband and other people in my family, I cannot decide to participate in political activities."*

My respondent "D" said, *"I have no social support and I face some obstacles in my surroundings and the lack of interest in women and the male-dominated society are responsible for this so we are deprived of participation."*

My respondent "C" said, *"I want to participate in politics and took my decision myself. But I do not get proper support from my relatives, neighbors, and others. When I told them about my dream with my neighbors, relatives, and others made laugh hearing my dream"*

My respondent "B" said *"Where I live is in a very remote area. I don't know that women also have a role in local politics and decision-making because our society doesn't tell us this. "*

9. Effective Communicable Service is Possible to Increase Participation in Women's Local Politics and Decision-Making.

Women's poverty, limited financial access, increased unpaid care responsibilities, and barriers to sexual and reproductive health rights, along with exclusionary institutional practices and gender-discriminatory social norms, hinder their full participation in politics. Women increasingly occupy decision-making roles, often tackling overlooked policies. In Bangladesh, there has been progress in the number of women elected or appointed to such positions and effective communication services can increase women's participation in local politics and decision-making. By enhancing awareness, skills, and engagement, women can be empowered to partake in decision-making, reducing marginalization and increasing confidence. So, offering platforms for women to voice their opinions will promote their involvement in political discussions.

My respondent "A" narrated, *"I am a 32-year-old woman, I do not make my decisions regarding family and local political involvement because I do not get proper service related to local politics."*

My respondent “B” mentioned, *“I give some facilities from my family members and I am an uneducated person. So I can’t get effective communicable services in participating in politics and making decisions.”*

My respondent “D” mentioned, *“I believe that effective communication with different agencies has made tremendous success in the sector of women empowerment and decision making.”*

10. A Favorable Environment for Women Can Increase Participation in Women's Local Politics and Decision-Making.

The government is committed to enforcing laws and policies that ensure gender equality, promoting equal rights and participation of women and men in public life, as well as in economic and social activities. Equal political participation is crucial for women's development. Their involvement in politics goes beyond seeking justice or enhancing democracy; it also reflects women's growing interest in political engagement. Equality, development, and peace cannot be realized without the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at all levels and ensuring their active participation. The advancement of democracy relies on the active participation of women in politics, which will enhance the efficiency and quality of local government work. Suppose local governments truly want to meet the needs of everyone, regardless of gender. In that case, they must have the opportunity to participate equally in decision-making at all levels of local government on all issues.

My respondent “A” said, *“I think if the government have given different facilities among us such as education, awareness that will help to our participation in politics and decision making”*

My respondent “E” said, *“I believe the good environment makes us courageous at participating in politics and decision making. however, the government has ensured an equitable environment for us so that we can easily participate in any development activities.”*

Discussion and Findings

This study shows that the majority of respondents belong to age 34 and poor economic conditions and get fewer facilities for education in their lives and also get fewer financial facilities from parents, and husbands. Several other South Asian studies support our findings, including those from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and India (Abbas et al., 2021; Acharya et al., 2010; Olaolorun & Hindin, 2014; Phan, 2016; Sen & Nilima, 2018; Senarath & Gunawardena, 2009), which found empowerment and participation in decision-making increased with a woman's age. Young girls are subject to intra-household power relations and have limited to no decision-making ability and agency because of their young age (Olaolorun & Hindin, 2014). This study also expresses women can have less

social support and they have faced different types of obstacles in their families, and social lives that resulted they do not participate in local politics and decision-making. They have been told that their main responsibility is to rear children, do household chores, sex roles, etc. The majority of the respondents said that fewer education opportunities are one of the barriers to participating in politics. Evidence from Pakistan assessing the determinants of women's empowerment also found that a higher level of education for both men and women was significantly associated with the ability to participate in decision-making and women's empowerment (Abbaset al., 2021). Most women are illiterate and they do not know their rights and existing laws on how can they consume different facilities that exist in their surroundings. Education provides knowledge and skills, which can enhance confidence and self-efficacy (Cornwall, 2016). They always face discrimination, injustice, and maltreatment attitudes from their family member and they do not get any support from their husband. In 2014, almost one in three women agreed with at least one reason for wife-beating; this reduced to one in five women in 2017–2018. Other research revealed that women who disagree with all reasons for wife-beating have greater self-esteem and are more likely to participate in all decisions (Moloy et al., 2019). On the other hand, this study also expresses women can be confined to the home by saying that women have the main responsibility of cooking, rearing children, household chores, etc., and no need to go outside of the home and participate in any of the development activities. Another responsible factor that we found in my study is that as a religious viewpoint-based society in here all of where the practice religious sentiment and men are not given any opportunities to take any decisions such as taking conception, or family issues. They also believe that participating women in politics is a sin and decision-making process of including women is not better for bringing success. We also found that less economic condition is one of the barriers to their backwardness. The majority of our respondents cannot do income and they, directly and indirectly, depend on their husband's income, and dependency they do not make any decisions without the permission of their husbands. In this study, we also found that ensuring more social support and education are provided by government and non-government organizations and taking different income-generative programs will change the overall situation of women in participating in local politics and decision-making. they also say that education and training is very significant for any of development. If the government does it, the majority believe that change will be possible in their situation. In this study, we also found social support and an effective communication system is very needed for improving women's participation in local politics and decision-making. An analysis of DHS data from Pakistan found that access to information (frequency of watching TV, listening to the radio and reading newspapers) was also associated with the ability to make decisions (Abbas et al., 2021). They believe effective communication and social support

are created more aware of their rights and they can easily make any decision according to their needs. Most of the respondents of the study believe that any success of women is only possible when the government has created an equitable environment for all and all people get the benefits of their needs. They also believe that empowering women and participating politics of women at the grassroots level in Bangladesh is possible when a suitable and smooth environment are privilege for women otherwise it will not be possible to ensure women's participation in policies and decision-making.

Recommendations and Conclusions

Bangladesh is a developing country and the total population is two-thirds are women. We cannot do proper development in our country by including a large number of women in the development process. The Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 5, aim to achieve gender equality empower all women and girls, and ensure equality for all. This goal cannot be achieved if women are prevented from actively participating in decision-making (Turning Promises into Action, 2018). After considering data analysis and Discussions we have mentioned Some recommendations that ensure an equitable and good atmosphere for women.

1. Develop a comprehensive education system for women that has created positive attitudes for women that ensure participation in women in politics in local areas and decision-making.
2. Creating favorable and social support for women so that women can easily participate in politics and decision-making.
3. Launching awareness programs at the social level so that people can easily understand the significance of participating women in local politics and decision-making.
4. The government should introduce different types of training programs and incentives for women so that women can have opportunities to increase their earning capabilities and develop their situation.
5. Non-Government organizations should take innovation programs so that women can easily participate and they can flourish in it process.
6. The government should launch an effective communicable system for women so that women can easily learn and communicate with others for participation in politics and decision-making.
7. Different types of programs should be introduced at the social levels so that people can easily understand the significance of participating women in local politics and decision-making.

8. Reform existing laws and legislations that are related to women and ensure more safeguarding of women by implementing those laws that are privileged in the country.
9. Implementing the goal of Women's Development Policy 2011 at the grassroots level.
10. The government should take community development programs in local areas so that women can easily participate in development programs.
11. Giving more incentives for research about women so that every year published women's conditions at international journals.

Conclusions

However, we do not gain sustainable development goals if we do not take proper steps to participate women in local politics and decision-making. The development of our country will be possible when we create a favorable and suitable environment for women and possible to act for their betterment.

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