

BRAC Research Report

December 2007

Facilitating Good Governance at Grass Roots: BRAC and the Women Members of *Union Parishad* ?

Md. Abdul Alim

**Facilitating Good Governance at Grass Roots: BRAC and the
Women Members of *Union Parishad*?**

Md. Abdul Alim

December 2007

Research and Evaluation Division
BRAC Centre, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
E-mail: research@brac.net, www.brac.net/research
Telephone: 9881265, 8824180-87

For more details about the report please contact: alim.ma@brac.net

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my director Dr. Imran Matin who has given me a chance and improvise the objective of the study. I also want to give special gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Mohammed Rafi who provided me critical comments on contents and language of this paper. Finally I thank the reviewer who has given extensive comments to make the paper publish.

The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) is supported by BRAC's core funds and funds from donor agencies, organizations and governments worldwide. Current donors of BRAC and RED include Aga Khan Foundation Canada, AusAID, Australian High Commission, Brigham Young University, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, BRAC University, NIKE Foundation, Campaign for Popular Education, Canadian International Development Agency, Charities Aid Foundation-America, Columbia University (USA), Conrad N Hilton Foundation, Danish International Development Agency, DEKA Emergence Energy (USA), Department for International Development (DFID) of UK, Embassy of Denmark, Embassy of Japan, European Commission, Fidelis France, GITAC Consult GmbH, The Global Fund, GTZ-Germany, Government of Bangladesh, The Hospital for Sick Children, ICDDR,B Centre for Health and Population Research, ICLARM/World Fish Centre, Institute of Development Studies (Sussex, UK), Inter-cooperation Bangladesh, International Committee of the Red Cross, Japan International Cooperation Agency, International Research and Exchange Board, The Johanner, Land O Lakes (USA), Manusher Jonno Foundation, Micro-Nutrient Initiative, NORAD, NOVIB, OXFAM America, Plan Bangladesh, The Population Council (USA), RNE/DGIS, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Royal Norwegian Embassy, Scojo Foundation Incorporation, SIDA, Sight Savers, Stanford Medical School, Swiss Development Cooperation, ULG Northumbria, UNICEF, United Way International, University of Calgary, University of Leeds, University of Manchester (UK), World Bank, World Food Programme, and World Health Organization.

RED received wide support and cooperation from all divisions of BRAC, particularly from the field staff and the people of Bangladesh without whose sincere support and patronage no field research could be conducted smoothly. RED also received useful comments, suggestions, and guidance from researchers, reviewers, and editors from within and outside the country, which helped improve the quality of research and research outputs. RED is indebted to BRAC management for its continued support.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of NGOs, especially BRAC, in enhancing the functional space of women members in *Union Parishad* (UP). The study was basically qualitative in nature where respondents were women members, affiliated with BRAC as well as members with no affiliation with any NGO. Here, the determinants of the women members' winning the election and functional space in UP were compared. Findings show that BRAC provided enormous support to its members in becoming a credible leader to compete in the election and ensure successful participation in UP. In case of participation in UP, BRAC-affiliated members performed better than their non-BRAC counterparts although both faced some common challenges in discharging their responsibilities. The BRAC-affiliated members raised voices against those challenges. Villagers' discernment was also better towards BRAC-affiliated members in respect to the participation in *Union Parishad*.

Key words: Good governance, *Union Parishad*, BRAC, Women UP member

INTRODUCTION

Systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of the activities of local government. If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both women and men, through an equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision making, covering the wide range of responsibilities of local government (Khan and Ferdous 2006). Women's equal participation in political life plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women for themselves as well as for local government. It is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account. Without the active participation of women in local government and the incorporation of women's perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved (FWCW 1995).

More precisely the western liberal arguments in support of increased representation of women in politics are: (a) women comprise about half of the population and should be represented adequately to establish a government by the people; (b) women are more likely to see an open and transparent government; (c) women will bring a different perspective to politics; (d) women can broaden the political agenda; (e) women are more aware of the needs and issues which affect them; and (f) extensive participation of women in public life is likely to lower the level of corruption. However, more empirical evidences and substantiation are essential to support some of the above assertions and arguments (Ahmed 2005). A 1999 World Bank Research Report stated, 'Where the influence of women in public life is greater, the level of corruption is lower (Dollar *et al.* 1999).

But the political participation of women is still not encouraging through out the world. The International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) provides some statistical information on women participation in local government in different regions of the world. In Africa for instance, women's participation is estimated at probably less than 5%. As for Asia no statistics are provided. In European Union in 1997 one out of five was female, 40% in Sweden, 4% in Greece but in North America in 1990 women in local council was not better (23%) and in Canada only 18% of the council women were members. The IULA indicates that there is a huge lack of information and reliable statistical data concerning women's participation at the local level however, their representation at the local level generally surpasses that at the national level.

However, although women form more than 50 per cent of its population, and their participation in the decision-making process, especially in relation to representation at the different levels of governance, is significantly lower in countries such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka although given that women's equal right to participate in governance is the constitutionally entrenched fundamental right (Ghoshal 2004).

Multiple factors have contributed towards this situation and one of the most important factors that have affected non-participation of women in the decision-making and governance is the gender stereotypes associated with women and men. Gender relations and the patriarchal structures and attitudes prevailing in both the private and public domain, therefore, contribute to women's subordinate status and their inability to participate in governance (Mukhopadhyay 2007). The constraints of women's political participation at the local levels are- traditional patriarch, repressive control on women's public engagement compared to the national level revealed by Rai (1999) observing Indian society and there is similarity in Bangladeshi society too.

There are many other constraints available which hinder women to participate in local government. These are customs and norm barriers meaning that politics is mainly for men and even if thought has started to change in the villages, their place is in the house. This is because people in the villages have a hard time accepting women in the local government and the men do not want to work with them (Mukhopadhyay 2007). Dube (1988) has found institutional barrier in India in which in some ways caste and democracy are antithetical to each other and only in the last few year's supportive links between the two has appeared. Similar to India women in Bangladesh experiences such a barrier. Women are given opportunity to participate in local government but their role is not clearly stated by the government (Khan 2006). On the other hand Shvedova (1998) mentioned psychological barrier of women viz. lack of confidence among women. It means that it is not only the society's perception of women but also women do not believe in themselves and on their capacity to be politically active.

There are many women that are illiterate and do not know what political participation is all about. They are not aware of their role and responsibilities in local government as well as in development and welfare programmes. This is called lack of knowledge /awareness barriers by Sarena (1990). She also mentions the recruitment barriers meaning that many women lack education and the cultural norms and conservative customs make it even harder for women to enter politics and survive in politics (ibid).

Begum (2007) in her recent research has found that women have political rights to participate as voters and representatives, but in reality they can be actively discouraged to do. The patriarchal society enforces rule and laws in such way that affect the self-confidence of women, limit their access on resources and information and thus keep them in a lower status than men. In other words, the discriminatory and uneven distribution of governance functions, inappropriate attitudes of male colleagues, the lack of commitments of political parties towards women's quota and the absence of any legal provision to recognize the situation remain the major impediments to frustrate women's participation in local governance in Bangladesh.

Therefore, to challenge the on-going constraints faced by women non-government organizations (NGOs) are promoting women to participate in local governance to ensure transparent, efficient, and equitable and gender friendly local government. They provide a mechanism that might work where government has failed (Donnison 1993). In other words, NGOs were seen as facilitators for local people especially women, more able to listen and respond, facilitate, enable and support them (CCTS News letter 15). Larry Diamond (1998) has identified functions of NGO in making local government transparent and more gender friendly through: 1) assuring the ground for women participation in local government and limiting the control of the state; 2) stimulating political participation of women through 'educating'; 3) developing democratic values as tolerance, moderation, compromise in them; 4) creating channels for articulation and aggregation of their interest, 5) unifying interest of women that helps to move over political parties; 6) information flow and facilitating economic support to them, and finally 7) increasing positive implication of women in the decision-making process.

All these widened activities of NGOs can ensure the social, political and economic empowerment of women that can create the pave of ensuring women in active political participation especially in local government. Thus in 1997 about 15% elected ward members *Union Parishad* (UP) – the lowest administrative unit of government - elections were NGO-affiliated candidates (Siddiqui 2004). Against this background and with the increased participation of NGO members in the local government especially in UP, this report focus two pertinent questions: Are the NGO-affiliated women members in UP providing efficient and better services to the poor, and are the male colleagues of UP receptive to the increasing participation of women? The quest of the answer of how BRAC prepared those members to be elected, and in what extent they had been able to make their space in local government inspired to conduct the study. The objective of this study is to look into the role of NGO particularly

BRAC in creating the functional space of women members in UP. Comparing the nature of participation of BRAC-affiliated women members and the members without NGO-affiliation does this.

BRAC'S ROLE IN WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

NGOs can have greater role on the community people to have better participation in local government to ensure democracy. Resteman (undated) has identified two main groups of mechanisms through which it can have impact on local government. First group is composed of indirect mechanisms through which NGOs can enhance a more transparent local government. It can be through different programmes and activities such as informational campaigns and educational programmes or through community development programmes that aim at building trust and field for common action, identity, interest unification and articulation. Secondly NGO can ensure more transparent local government through developing and strengthening civil society both in national and local level. This is fulfilled through training programmes, developing resource centre and encouraging the development of other structures such as community groups, advocacy alliances, networks and self-help groups. These are three direct mechanisms of positively influencing local government transparency as well as ensuring women's participation: 1) enhancing responsibility and accountability of the local government through the participation of women, 2) public policy advocacy and 3) forms of communication, consultation and support (Dakova *et al.* 2000).

BRAC as an NGO is trying to change and expand power of the community people by capacity building¹ and by increasing social capital² to participate in local power structure using the two mechanisms of Restman since starting. To do this BRAC social development programme endeavors to increase or build the capacity of the poor through two frameworks: an asset-based sustainable livelihood framework which focuses on the development of human rights and social assets and its structure and process (policies and social changes, institutional structures, etc.), and a right-based framework which addresses social mobilization issues. The programme combines these two frameworks to promote greater awareness of social, political and economic injustice that is prevalent in society. This awareness programmes helps to create the paths for its beneficiaries to participate in local government.

Amongst different strategies of social development programme forming *Palli Shamaj*³ (PS) is an important one for building social asset of the poor and ensuring the participation in local power structure through participation in local government. One of the major achievements of the PS groups is the creation of a new cadre of women leaders among the leader. By providing them with various types of leadership training and exposure in different forums (in their own groups, in wider BRAC forums and in community forums), these women are becoming capable of providing leadership within their groups and in the community in general and thus many of them have been UP member (BA report 2006). In a research of Tareq

¹ Capacity building refers to assistance which is provided to entities, which have a need to develop a certain skill or competence, or for general upgrading of performance ability. The contemporary view of capacity building goes beyond the conventional perception of training. The central concerns of community building - to manage change, to resolve conflict, to enhance coordination, to foster communication, and to ensure that data and information are shared

² People form social systems, which provide for a range of needs not met through market transactions – households, communities of interest, locality and neighbourhoods create networks of mutual obligation, care, concern, interest and even conflict (access to other points of view). In the development and organizational literature these networks, norms and trust, which facilitate co-operation for mutual benefit, are referred to as 'social capital' of the community people.

³ The *Palli Shamaj* is a ward (of UP) level organization consists of representatives from several village organization (VO) and external poor. The main objective of *Palli Shamaj* is to give a political voice to poor and therefore ensure their interest. It also mobilizes government services such as vulnerable group development (VGD), vulnerable group feeding (VGF), old age pension cards, roads and embankments, etc.

and Alim (2005) shows that PS members won 13% and 1.6% of the total reserved and general seats respectively in 2003 UP election.

BRAC also has undertaken capacity development of women UP members to strengthen local governance for the effective delivery of the public services, promotion of accountability and transparency. It also endeavors to build up the UP women members' capacity to perform their roles and responsibilities in UP efficiently.

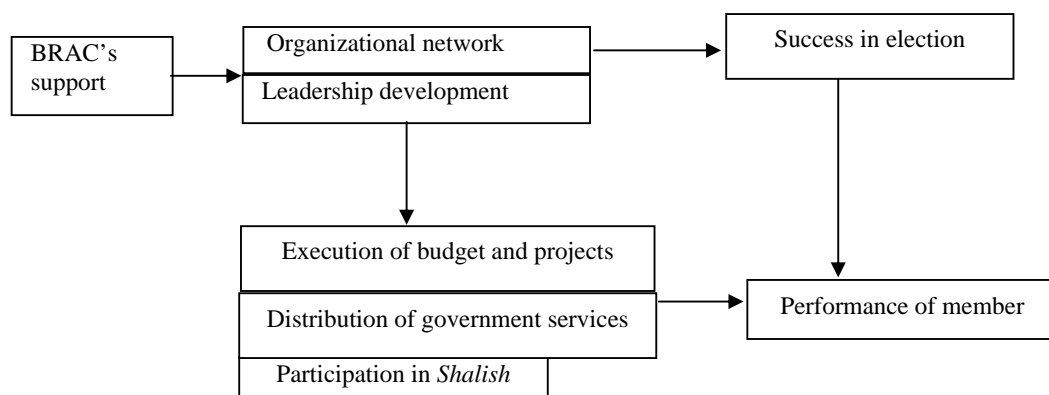
METHODOLOGY

Since this study is concerned with UP and women members it is necessary to know about the function of it and responsibilities of women in this domain. According to the UP training manual (2003) the UP is responsible for different functions such as a) civic functions, b) police and defense functions, c) revenue and general administrative functions, d) development functions, and e) functions which may be transferred by the government from time to time. In addition, UP is also involved with the implementation of government and donor-assisted programmes, which include old age allowance, VGD, rural maintenance programme, and the rural physical infrastructure improvement programme. To perform those functions especially different developmental functions UP receives allocations for projects through the central government's Annual Development Programme (ADP) grant. This grant is administered at the *Upazilla* level, and *Upazilla* Development Coordination Committee (UDCC) decides on the allocation of this grant for projects proposed by unions. UP chairman is the representative of respective union in this committee.

After the allocation from UDCC the projects are implemented through 13 standing committee in UP. As women member, as per procedure, would be the president of three committees of those. She would remain chairman of one-third of the projects implementation committee and as a member in rest of the committee. She would be member of site selection committee of sinking tube well in UP. She would be deputy president of the elderly allowance committee. She would be the member of primary and mass education and act as the monitor of rural maintenance committee. She would be the president of social development committee and on the other hand she would prepare 50% of the list of beneficiaries for VGD card. She would also be the advisor of *gram sarker* (village government) in which she would take measures against the violence against women, terrorism, theft, and robbery to maintain the law and order situations.

The study was conducted at Domar *Upazilla* in Nilphamari district. The *Upazilla* was purposively selected with an assumption that it would have members affiliated with BRAC but with any NGO both before and after *Union Parishad* election 2003.

Figure.1. Analytical framework



The study was a qualitative in nature. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. A description of seven days' activities of women members was taken into

consideration to see the difference of members' performance. In-depth interview was conducted on four women members affiliated with BRAC and similar number of women members without any NGO affiliation. The BRAC-affiliated women members were the *Palli Shamaj* members, *Shasthya shebika* (health workers) and human rights legal service *shebika* (HRLS worker). Data collected from the respondents were cross-checked with *Palli Shamaj* members, village elite, schoolteacher, male/female ward members, and chairman of *Union Parishad*. With a view to understanding the villagers' perception towards members' performance a survey of 159 individuals was conducted in the areas where members carried out development projects.

The strategy for analysis includes the comparison of BRAC-affiliated and non-affiliated women members. The comparison includes the access to organizational network, leadership development and their use in winning the election, budgeting and implementing projects of *Union Parishad*, distribution of government services e.g., vulnerable group development (VGD), vulnerable group feeding (VGF), elderly and widow allowance, and participation in village court and village *Shalish* (Informal justice system in Bangladesh village) (Fig 1).

The indicators mentioned in the Fig. 1 led the members' success in the election, which also determined their performance in *Union Parishad* activities. Secondly, after being elected members' participation in *Union Parishad* also would determine their performance, and thus compared the performance of both BRAC-affiliated and non-BRAC women members' function.

FINDINGS

Political participation of women in local government is a part of BRAC's vision as mentioned earlier. With a view to doing this BRAC provides supports to its members through its different programmes and projects to become a leader who at the end of the day would participate in local government. This section discusses how BRAC-affiliated members had been a credible leader to compete in UP election and win the election. The competency of both BRAC-affiliated and non-affiliated members was compared in terms of their leadership as well.

ROLE OF BRAC IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AT THE GRASS ROOT

BRAC not only gives economic support to its members but it also builds up leaders at the rural level so that they can play active role of the rural power structure. BRAC engenders the qualities of leadership to its members through the organizational support especially through formation of *Palli Shamaj* to become a credible candidate for UP election. It is an organization through which its members were taught how to speak, to interact with general people and contact with government officials, and participate in *Shalish*. *Palli Shamaj* members in the discussion cited examples of BRAC's contribution in developing the leadership qualities of its members as such:

“A ward member named Taznura was housewife and did not come out of home before being a member of Palli Shamaj. Now she has become a leader of Palli Shamaj. She can speak eloquently. She resolved disputes within Palli Shamaj. She also protests illegal activities, child marriage, polygamy, illegal divorce, and dowry in the village. She helps Palli Shamaj members obtain VGD, VGF cards from UP chairman. She gains those qualities from BRAC”

With regard to developing of leadership in woman member a UP chairman remarked, *“Despite having lots of qualities it is not possible for a member to become a leader unless they are associated with any organization like BRAC.”*

Participation in *Shalish*

Conducting and participating in *Shalish* is manifestation of leadership. As a leader members must participate and play significant role in *Shalish*. This informal institution (*Shalish*) an integral part of power structure is very important for the villagers and has lot of implications on them. Through participation in *Shalish* members could raise their voices and demand right justice for them. There were a number of *Shalish* in which members participated and ensured justice before election. In this context a woman member remarked,

“I have learned to lead and I have become a leader with the help of BRAC. Every week in the meeting the members stage a drama about the incidence that took place in my community. The members played the role of judge, chairman, ward member, villagers and offender. Thus we have learned how to conduct Shalish and protest to injustice done by the chairman.”

Communication with villagers and village leaders

BRAC-affiliated members were involved with different programmes and in connection they came in contact with the villagers and village leaders both within and outside their village. As a

member of *Palli Shamaj* BRAC-affiliated member had the mandatory to attend different forums and meetings. The *Palli Shamaj* also invited village leader to discuss various social problems e.g., child marriage, dowry and other kinds of violence against woman. Thus, the women members for being the presidents of *Palli Shamaj* gained popularity and villagers' support.

On the other hand, direct involvement of *Palli Shamaj* member in politics provided them with the opportunities to come in touch with local political leaders. In this context, one member mentioned, *"To attend the party meeting I had to travel various wards where I was introduced as a Mohila union shavapati (president) of Bangladesh Nationalist party (BNP). Thus I came to know the local political leaders."*

The BRAC-affiliated members who also happened to be HRLS *Shebikas* taught important family and human rights-related laws to the villagers. A schoolteacher said, *"As she teaches laws she willingly attend in Shalish and tries to convince the village leader to follow the law."* Their presence in the *Shalish* as HRLS *Shebika* influenced the verdict of the village leader.

Mobility of BRAC-affiliated member

Mobility of women is a precondition for women empowerment. This is a quality, which significantly contributes to develop of communication skills and confidence in women. As part of empowerment BRAC through its different interventions has encouraged its members to have been more mobile. For example, *Shasthya Shebika* visited villagers door to door to make them aware of some common diseases and their preventions. She also sells medicine to cure those diseases. On the other hand, HRLS *Shebika* made people aware about family laws and legal rights in and outside of her ward.

NON-BRAC AFFILIATED MEMBER'S LEADERSHIP

On the other hand non-BRAC members did not have any experience of leadership which BRAC-affiliated members had. Non-BRAC members did not participate in *Shalish* before being elected in election. They were reluctant to go outside home without their husband. Besides, the family to participate in social activities restricted them. Regarding *Shalish* a UP member said,

"I never participate in Shalish nor got involved in leadership activities because my mother-in-law does not like me going outside home even in the local market without my husband. I also do not like going out by myself as it may lead to a dispute with my in-laws."

In addition to that non-BRAC member did not have any mobility before being elected because of restriction from own family and relatives' (husband, father and mother in law, uncle in law). A male *Union Parishad* member said, *"Women of aristocratic lineage did not participate in Union Parishad election."* Besides, the members themselves did not have any interest to go outside. They preferred to stay at home and remain busy with household activities.

THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN BY WOMEN MEMBERS

BRAC has different programmes and activities extended all over Bangladesh (Fig. 2). These programmes and activities played significant role in winning member's election for BRAC-affiliated members. BRAC created the opportunity for the members to use its network to campaign and to win the election.

Village Organization (VO) is the centre of BRAC's network. Almost all programmes and activities are driven around the VO. The candidate received tremendous support from VO. The VO members played significant role in election campaign thereby helped the members win in election.

Palli Shamaj was one of the most functioning organisation of BRAC for providing support to the members. All the candidates were PS members and attended the *Palli Shamaj* ward *shava* meeting where they expressed their intention to compete UP election. The meeting was attended by village elites like teacher, *Kazi* (man who registers marriage), *Imam* (religious leader) who indirectly influenced the villagers to vote the candidates by their decisions. Besides, *Palli Shamaj* members proposed its president to contest in the election and continued their support for the president until the election was held. A *Palli Shamaj* member said,

“At first Palli Shamaj members including others of neighbouring ward held a meeting. The meeting included Union Parishad members, teachers and matbors (village leaders). Palli Shomaj members of my ward asked all people whether Taznura should compete in the election. The meeting finally declared that Taznura would be candidate in Union Parishad election. Then they all promised to vote her.”

Palli shamaj not only campaigned for the BRAC-affiliated members visiting door to door but also provided financial support to them. For example *Palli Shamaj* raised fund feed to submit the nomination paper, printing poster, offering *bidi* to the villagers to smoke. *Palli Shamaj* members divided themselves into four or five groups to campaign for the members. Husbands and their friends of *Palli Shamaj* members also campaigned for the candidates.

Questions may be raised as to why *Palli Shamaj* members and other beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries helped members in the election. The primary reason was a sense of belongingness or the emotional attachment with BRAC. Secondly, the candidates managed VGF, VGD, widow and elderly allowances and corrugated tin for them from the UP chairmen. When any *Palli Shomaj* members had shortage of money to get his/her daughter married the candidates requested the villagers to subscribe for him/her. She took sick person to the hospital irrespective of relatives (all members). Besides, she resolved disputes among the neighbours. *Palli Shamaj* members remarked,

“We prefer Taznura as our leader because she is poor, and poor cries for poor, not rich. In other words, poor understands poor's sufferings, the rich does not.”

Popular theatre is an innovative communication medium that focuses to stimulate the audience about their surroundings creates awareness. Local folk artists work with the popular theatre staff. BRAC-affiliated candidate used this as a part of campaigning election. The organiser of the popular theatre introduced the candidates to the audience and requested the audiences to cast vote to them at the end of the theatre. Thus they also came in contact with the village leaders of other villages attending the theatre. A woman member remarked,

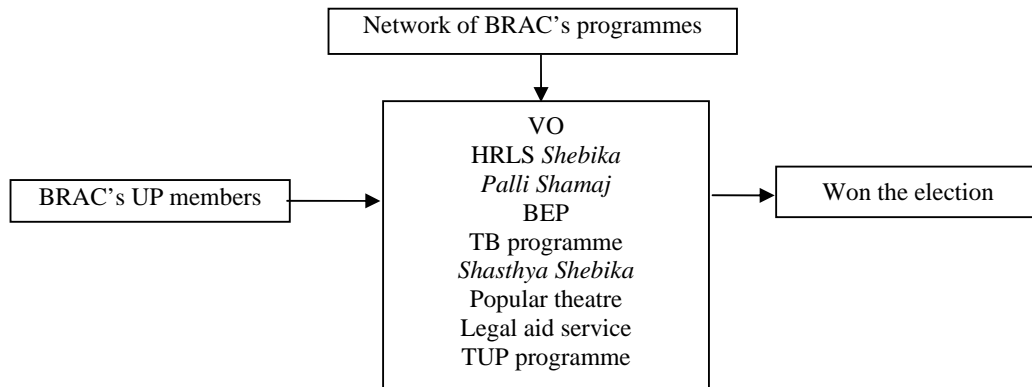
“Child marriage, dowry, and violence against woman were staged in popular theatre. After the drama I got in touch with the village leaders. Just before election I went to them to campaign for my candidacy. The leader advised his family members as well as neighbours to cast vote for me.”

The other programme such as Targeting the Ultra Poor (TUP) and legal aid service helped the candidates to win the election. The candidates managed to get cows, goats, etc. from TUP programme for some *Palli Shamaj* members. These cattle were given to them at no cost. They also resolved disputes between husband and wife, and between neighbours through legal

aid programme. The beneficiaries in exchange were grateful to the candidates and cast her vote to be elected.

Shasthya shebika campaigned for the candidate during her regular activities. She had a better network within the village that was used for winning the election. The field worker of tuberculosis (TB) control programme also campaigned for the candidates. He introduced the candidate to the beneficiaries of this programme and requested to elect her. Under this programme BRAC identifies the TB patient and provide medicine without any charge. Therefore, villagers HRLS *shebika* campaigned on behalf of the candidates. She made the beneficiaries aware of family and land law. She told her participants to vote the candidate and requested their husbands and relatives as well. Like other programme schoolteachers of BRAC education programme (BEP) also campaigned for the candidates. She invited the candidates to attend student’s guardian meetings where she introduced the candidates with guardian. Schoolteachers also took the candidates to the students’ home.

Figure 2. BRAC’s network used by BRAC-affiliated women members to win the election



On the other hand money as well as kinship network were the only means for the non-BRAC members to win the election. The kith and kin of both husband and father’s lineage campaigned for the candidate. Members reported that lot of money had to be spent to win the election. Moreover, their competitors were not equally solvent as the member to spend money in the election.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN MEMBERS IN UNION PARISHAD

BRAC mobilize its members for active participation in UP to claim their rights and raise voices. This section discusses how much the BRAC-affiliated members played role in UP and had been able to establish their rights after being elected. The answer of this questions were sought on the basis of exploring the nature of participation of women UP members in budget preparation, getting and implementing projects, available government opportunities from chairmen and her counterpart male members including participation in *Shalish*.

Participation in UP budgeting and implementing the projects

Budget preparation and project implementation are the important functions in *Union Parishad*. The study in fact shows that most of the chairmen did not prepare any budget. Those who did that did by consulting with their secretary and nearest colleagues but not the members of the *Union Parishad*. In this case irrespective of BRAC-affiliated or non-BRAC women members were discriminated and threatened very much. A woman member remarked, “*Once we all members went to the chairman and told that if you (chairman) make budget by yourself we will*

not come to Union Parishad.” The chairman replied, “I have nothing to do if you do not come.”

It was found in the study that chairmen were observed to have political connections, have long time experiences in operation of *Union Parishad*, and have network with the government officials. They were financially solvent and had dignified lineage. Presence of these factors made chairman powerful to conduct of *Union Parishad* according to his wishes.

Chairmen did not disclose the financial matter of the budget and projects to the members meaning that money allocated to the projects and amount spent remained unknown to all members. Often women members avoided asking detail expenditure account of budget and projects to the chairmen believing that he might become angry and insult them.

All members have right to submit projects for development. And in cases it was the policy that the development that appeared to be most important should receive priority in implementation. In reality in spite of the urgent need male members including chairmen ignored the project proposals proposed by women members. In fact, chairmen and male members became annoyed and passed remarks when women members submitted development projects for their wards. The incidence in cases led to disputes between male and women members. The exchange between male and women members in or of the dispute was as such:

I told him that you are elected by 1200 votes, for example, we have been voted by 3,600 voters where as, we have rather much power than you.” In reply the male members said, “You got Tk.350 as allowance and so do I. If you have more power than us you should have received bigger allowances.”

The chairmen having affiliation with political party especially the ruling party, got projects sanctioned from *Upazilla* and party. With regard to these projects the male and women members supported the implementation of the projects. Chairman employed the labours and gave wages to them at the end of the work. The chairman also supplied even the construction materials. Members never ask how much money was spent in that project. Chairman involved members in those activities, which were not linked with money.

In some cases the chairmen made a rule that no member will be in charge of implementing a project individually. When a woman member wished to have a project independently in her ward the chairman said, *“There are many rules and regulations but here what we do will be rule.”* She then replied, *“People have voted us to work for them otherwise they will not vote again.”* In reply the chairman said, *“If there is a project I will do this and I have no headache of anyone’s vote.”*

Sometimes the chairmen gave priority to male members in allocating projects, as they were majority in number compared to the women members. The chairmen believed that if this was not done the male members together could move a ‘vote of no confidence’ against him. The chairmen always believed that women members could not harm him if they (women members) were discriminated.

The overlapping of electoral areas between male and women member produced some difficulties for women members to work in *Union Parishad*. Because of overlapping male members considered women members as competitors in the case of receiving projects and other government facilities. Male members tried heart and soul not to give any chance to women members to be involved in any projects.

The ignorance of women members about the roles and responsibilities in *Union Parishad* was an obstacle in their participation in *Union Parishad* activities. Women members attended

BRAC's capacity development training learned a few of the roles and responsibilities. After the training BRAC-affiliated members bargained for projects and budgets but they hardly managed to influence the chairmen and the male members' decisions. Rather, chairmen and members commented, "*Rasta nasta karlo truck ar nari nasta karlo BRAC (Truck damages road while BRAC spoils women).*"

The masculine attitude of chairmen and male members towards women members also created problems for them in preparing budget and in project implementation. The male members considered women members as physically weak and less skilled in communication and management. The non-BRAC women members who did not get any projects wanted to know the reasons of such discrimination. The chairman said,

"He is not willing to give any projects to women members because they cannot handle the project appropriately. For example, they cannot hire labour if it is earth cutting work, and cannot spend full time in the project area because they have to take care of their household work."

There were some women members particularly not affiliated with BRAC were not at interested in *Union Parishad* activities. They were just happy by becoming *Union Parishad* members as it added honour to their family. They irregularly participated in UP activities. In context a member remarked,

"I did not visit Union Parishad for the last three months and now I hardly go. My husband did everything. If my signature was needed my husband brought the paper at home and I signed it. I have many things to do at home. I have five children to take care of. On the other hand, my husband is a bit conservative and does not like me going outside home."

Therefore, they were ignorant about budgets and projects. Few of them heard about it from the male members.

Distribution of government services

Women members' position in distributing government services for extreme poor such as VGD, VGF, and widow and elderly allowances was vulnerable in *Union Parishad*. The chairmen did not follow the *Union Parishad* rule in distributing government services. According to the policy women members were supposed to get half of the cards to be distributed in her wards but the chairmen never abode by this policy. In distributing those services chairmen and male members were very much motivated by economic gain and thought how the distribution was going to help them in wining in future election. Such motives equally affected both BRAC and non-BRAC women members in distributing these services in their constituencies.

Almost every year the UP members had to make a list of possible beneficiaries of VGD, VGF, elderly and widow allowances to be submitted to the chairmen. Sometimes the chairmen did not want to disclose the actual number of VGD, VGF, elderly and widow allowances the *Union Parishad* received from the government. A chairman of another *Union Parishad* expressed similar attitude when a woman member demanded 50% of the total VGD cards mentioning the reference of UP manual. He said, "*Many things have been written in UP manual which people's representatives make. So, whatever we do will be constitution. You as a woman ward member are given equal amount of allowances by the government and therefore, what is the squabble to give you more cards than male members.*"

Another woman member mentioned, "*When I request my chairman to give me more cards as per policy and for representing a large constituency he says that you (women*

members), male members and I myself are distributing cards in your area, so what is the necessity to give you more cards, it is enough.” Sometimes I dared to protest the despotic policies of the chairman but in reaction to that he remarked, “Am I a bamboo flute that will make sound as you would play.”

The non-BRAC members faced similar problems in receiving the government for distribution from chairman. It was found that the chairman played tricks with women members by asking the list of VGD or VGF beneficiaries within a day. It was difficult for them to prepare the list of beneficiaries within such a short time without visiting them. Moreover, the male members who rather considered them as rival did not cooperate with women members in preparing the list. They were not interested to make list of beneficiaries jointly with women members. It was observed that when women members complained to the chairman against the male members the chairman became angry which deteriorated their relationship further.

Sometimes the chairmen and male members prepared a list of the beneficiaries without involving women members but they asked the women members to sign the list as proof of their acceptance. Most of the time women members refused to do this. This augmented the wrath of chairmen towards them and makes them ask objectionable question like, “Why are you going to expose power? Have you made an agreement with anyone to get money by giving them cards?” Male members also harassed women members by passing comments such as, “Get a list prepared by husband.” A male member from other UP remarked, “Women members are curse in UP. They are also weeds (agasa) in UP. If they don’t visit the UP remains clean.”

Sometimes male members plotted situations against women members as such so that in future they could not win in the election. In one instance, a case was found in one *Union Parishad* that with view to harass the woman member a male member spread a rumour in the villages that his woman counterpart was going to distribute all VGD cards. Therefore, people came and asked her about it.

In another UP, the chairman kept almost 50% of the total cards allotted for the union for him to distribute. A decision was made in UP that each woman member would get only 10 cards for their respective wards but male members pen through the names of the probable beneficiaries given by the women members. The chairman became angry when women members protested and threatened not to give any cards in future.

The chairmen cheated the women members by taking signature on the list of beneficiaries of VGD, and VGF cards. They did it to show the proof of the number of cards that were provided to women members. It means that chairmen showed that women members received the number of cards they were entitled whether it was true or not.

In one case it was given impression to women members that the chairman had to bribe Tk.500 to different officials in *Upazilla parishad* to receive VGD card. So a woman member collected Tk.1,500 from three villagers and gave it to the chairman for three VGD cards. But chairman did not provide any card to the woman member for distribution. She had to refund that money of her own.

Political affiliation – no project, no card if not a member of the ruling party

Affiliation with political parties particularly with the party in power was significant for all UP staffs to have better access to *Union Parishad*. It was absolutely necessary that chairmen and members should have affiliation with the party in power in order to receive any projects or VGD/VGF/elderly and widow allowance card from the Member of Parliament (MP) and his ally UP chairmen. It was found that chairmen and members had to join the ruling party to get more benefits from the government in spite of their unwillingness.

In one *Union Parishad* the male members affiliated with *Bangladesh Awami League* (BAL) did not get any projects during Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) was in power. These members were not get any chance to participate in any *Union Parishad* activities. Therefore, they joined BNP – the ruling party so that they might be given some project for their areas. In another *Union Parishad* members and the chairman were BAL supporter. They joined the ruling party to get projects than what they were getting.

Political affiliation was not only important for members to receive projects but also to the villagers in receiving the benefit. The UP members, other than ruling party, were ignored by the chairman when they provided a list of the villagers for VGD/VGF/widow/elderly allowance to receive. Chairman did nothing when the members complained. Rather the chairman remarked, “*The list that I have made is the final, and whomever I like I will give cards, and projects.*” As a result the villagers affiliated with the ruling party received many government services at the cost of villagers who should have received it.

Corruption

Corruption was one of the major challenges for women members to carry out their responsibilities at *Union Parishad*. There were three parties involved in corruption: concerned officers at *Upazilla Parishad*, chairman and members at *Union Parishad* and beneficiaries at the village level. Respondents reported that to receive projects and government services certain amount of money as bribe had to be provided to the concerned official at the *Upazilla*. On the other hand, the chairmen and members did corruption during implementing projects and providing government services.

By virtue of chairmanship most of the chairmen declared that any members carried out project 10% of the project money should be given to him. He rationalized this demand by saying that he needed to contact different officers at *Upazilla* level to approve the project. For example, a chairman said that to get approval of any work involving rice or wheat (VGF and VGD) he had to pay Tk. 1200 to the UNO and his clerk as bribe. Another chairman said that to approve *Kabikha* (Food for work) 18% of project money had to be paid to the UNO. Most of the chairmen did not want to disclose this transaction to the members. But in few cases, the chairmen disclosed it to the members to prove themselves as innocent but members were not convinced by such stories.

Union Parishad chairmen handled the financial aspects of the projects exclusively by themselves, which gave them an opportunity to become corrupt. It is the policy that the projects chairman and *Union Parishad* chairman should jointly sign the cheque to draw project money from the bank. Sometimes the women members had been the project chairmen. In most cases the chairmen and the women members went to bank to withdraw money. Sometimes chairman sent his secretary to get the cheque signed by the woman member from her home. Sometimes a blank cheque was presented to woman member to get signed. Most of the cases women members were forced to get the cheque signed. In few cases chairman cheated women members.

National politics was also responsible for corrupting the chairman. A few leaders from ruling party got projects sanctioned from the central government in the name of women members and grabbed all the money against the project without doing any work.

Male members of *Union Parishad* were also involved in corruption. Respondents reported that in a UP member bought a motorcycle using project money. Other members forced him to return the money when they came to know about it. Finally that money was divided among all UP staffs. The chairman and members also took bribe in issuing VGD, and VGF

cards, and elderly and widow allowances. A male member took Tk.500 from a beneficiary before providing him a VGD card.

Copping challenges

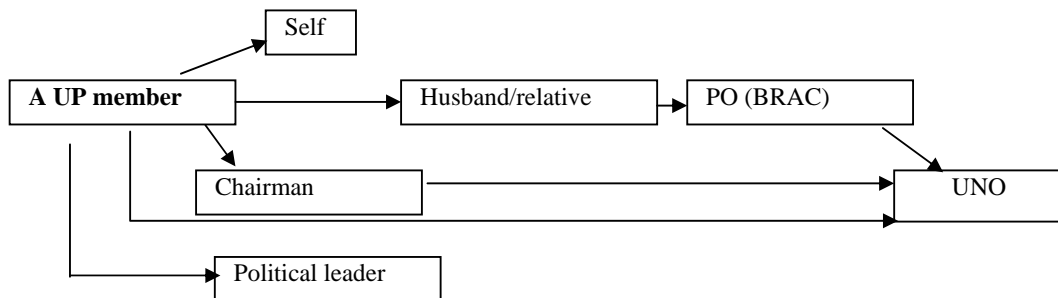
The women members made every effort to cope with the challenges that they faced. Both BRAC-affiliated and non-BRAC member resorted to almost similar approaches to overcome the challenges (Fig. 3).

As a first approach the women members themselves tried to overcome the challenges by using their knowledge and arguments with the chairmen and male members. They protested against the members about the avoidance and deprivation of giving any projects or other UP opportunities. Sometimes the women members together with the male members, planned to imply ‘vote of no confidence’ against their chairmen.

The women members, in most cases, often discussed with their husbands and relatives when they failed to do anything. Their husbands or relatives took initiatives to solve the challenges. A woman member said,

“When I argue that if you (chairman) do not give us card and project why we will come to UP? The chairman reacts saying that if you (she) think that it is unnecessary to come to UP you need not to come. I complained to my uncle to do something. He went to the chairman but he did nothing. The chairman only assures my uncle to give few more cards.”

Figure 3. Coping mechanism of the challenges of women members at UP



After being unsuccessful the women members especially BRAC-affiliated members by and large went to the BRAC Programme Organizer (PO) in the respective area to get suggestion. The PO advised them to submit an application to the UNO with joint signature of all women members. The UNO did nothing but advising them to cooperate with their chairmen. This resulted further threat to the members from chairmen. The chairmen then behaved rude to her and did not cooperate with them anymore. The chairmen used slang language so that the women members did not come to UP. A woman member remarked,

“The chairman threatens that if he does not give project the UNO cannot. The UNO is in charge today in this Upazilla and tomorrow he will not be. But we have to stay in this union until death. You have to do according to my wish. Therefore, I stop complaining to anyone.”

Sometimes the women members reported to the chairmen about the male members’ dispute in implementing projects and distribution of different entitlements. The chairmen hardly solved those dispute, and therefore, the women members had to go to the UNO. In few

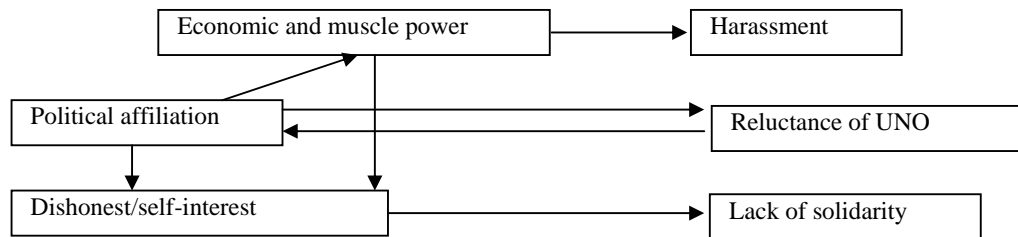
cases women members directly went to the UNO to seek solution of the dispute that emerged from the male members and the chairmen.

An *Upazilla* BNP secretary took away lot of money by using the name of a woman member. In order to protest the concerned member went to her relatives who was then a Member of the Parliament to get the problems solved. But she was disappointed when the MP said, “As I am not an MP of the ruling party I am unable to do anything.” The members became depressed when they did not get any justice from MP and from the UNO.

Reasons of failure to cope with challenges

There were many reasons for being unsuccessful in coping with the challenges. These were economic and muscle power of the chairmen and members, political affiliation with the ruling party, fear of harassment, dishonesty and lack of solidarity among members, and reluctance of UNO (Fig. 4). The figure indicates that the affiliation of the chairmen with the ruling party was one of the important determinants that caused the women members’ coping of the challenges unsuccessful. This factor was also associated with the muscle power of the chairmen and thus made the opportunities to be dishonest. With this power chairmen always ignored the women members and sometimes they harassed women members in various ways. This also influenced the power and activities of the UNO.

Figure 4. Determinants of failure to cope with challenges



The women members reported that all chairmen were financially solvent and had muscle power mentioned earlier. They had better network with the village elites, and government official at the *Upazilla* level. They had strong kinship network. Their relatives were also powerful. Therefore, powerful village leaders also favoured the chairmen and became friends of the chairmen. The project implementation officer, with whom the chairmen had to deal with many times for project purpose, always listened to the chairmen.

The UNO and other officials also favoured the chairmen. In other words, they had a tendency to ignore women members. They behaved with women members as if they showed sympathy. They did not listen to women members.

The affiliation of the chairmen with the ruling party intensified their power. Most of the chairmen managed to get projects from ruling party and implemented according to their desires. The UNO had power to monitor the progress of the project implementation and he should do this. But despite the allegation submitted by the women members he did not take any action against the chairmen. He technically avoided the allegation of the women members because, women members reported, the UNO could be transferred immediately or harassed other ways by the ruling party. Thus, women members did not get any justice from UNO.

Complaining against the up chairman increased the possibility of harassment of women members. Women members were not inspired by their parents and husbands to be involved in dispute with the chairmen in fear of losing status of the family. A woman member said,

“When i wanted to protest against the corruption of our chairman and male members i did not do it because of harassment such as passing bad comments that created mental torture and deprivation of financial benefits from the chairman. My husband also did not inspire me to do this. He said that it would not work.”

With a view to stepping down of the chairmen through raising ‘vote of no confidence’ the members failed to do this because of lack of their solidarity. Few of them particularly non-BRAC women members were afraid of doing this. Or some did not agree to do it because this procedure would not work. On the other hand the chairmen secretly convinced two or three members by giving money or projects so that they could not go for ‘vote of no confidence’ against them. Besides, there were some male members who acted as collaborators or of chairman’s corruption. They got benefits from the chairmen with regard to projects and distribution of entitlement cards. Therefore, dishonesty and lack of solidarity of members hindered to stop the corruption of the chairmen.

Participation in *Shalish*

Among other important functions of *Union Parishad* conducting *Shalish* was UP members’ responsibility. The villagers expected better solutions of their problems from elected leaders. Different types of *Shalish* were conducted at *Union Parishad* of which violence against women was salient. It was reported that after being elected all BRAC-affiliated members participated and conducted *Shalish* successfully. They conducted on an average 20 *Shalish*. BRAC-affiliated women members did not face any difficulties in conducting and participating in *Shalish*. The chairmen sometimes handed over the responsibility to women members to do *Shalish* alone during his absence.

On the other hand, the non-BRAC members participated in a few *Shalish* but could not influence the verdict given by the chairmen and the male members. It was reported that on an average women members participated in 5 *Shalish* after being elected. Despite the membership some women members were not interested to conduct *Shalish*. In some cases it was found that there were family bindings, which discouraged them to attend the *Shalish*. Besides, husbands of women members were village leaders who conducted *Shalish*. Therefore, they needed not to go to *Shalish*. A woman member said,

“I normally do not go to Shalish as my husband, who is a matbor, conducts Shalish. After being elected I participated a few Shalish by myself, and sometimes with my husband. If my husband was absent I went to Shalish. Villagers came to my husband, not to me. I did not give verdict in Shalish. If there was a women-related issue I played role as a helper.”

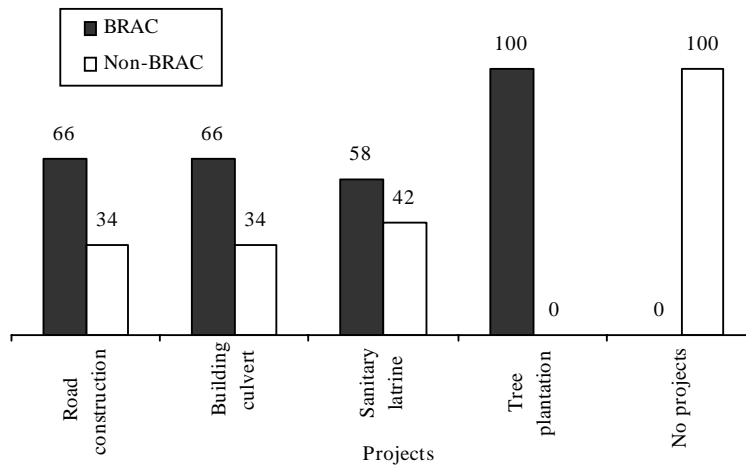
Among the non-BRAC members a few were interested to participate in *Shalish* but they could not play any role because 1) the chairmen and the male members thought that the women members could not conduct big *Shalish*, and 2) they did not want to divide the money to women members. Male domination over female was also a reason of not giving women members a chance to participate in *Shalish*. In other words, male members did not want women members to be present in the *Shalish* because 1) if women members talked first and conducted *Shalish* the status of the male members might have declined; 2) the villagers would have considered women members as efficient ‘*Dewani*’ (traditional village judge who head *Shalish*) than male. Therefore, women members got insulted if they talked in *Shalish*. A woman member remarked,

“There was a Shalish of land dispute between two brothers. In Shalish I first asked a brother to tell the incident in detail but in the mean time a male member threatened me to stop. Then I stopped asking the brothers. Previously I was insulted when I talked in another Shalish. Therefore, in this case, I decided to remain silent as I did not want to be insulted.”

Sometimes women members considered themselves incapable of conducting *Shalish* and were afraid of protesting the corruption of chairmen and male members. A woman member said,

“There was a Shalish about illicit relationship between a boy and a girl. The verdict fined Tk. 20,000 to the boy. Of the money fined Tk.9000 was paid to the girl, and the chairman and other members including matbors distributed the money among themselves. I did not protest the wrong doing because I am a woman, I cannot talk efficiently. And I am also afraid of talking carefully. Moreover, I am afraid of the chairman.”

Figure 5. Villagers perception towards UP members’ on projects carried out by them (%)



VILLAGERS’ PERCEPTION TOWARDS BRAC AND NON-BRAC WOMEN UNION PARISHAD MEMBERS

The villagers had a better perception towards BRAC-affiliated members compared to non-BRAC. Most of the villagers reported that BRAC members carried out more projects in their electoral areas than non-BRAC members (Fig. 5). A few villagers mentioned that non-BRAC members did not do any projects in their areas. They also mentioned that BRAC-affiliated members participated and conducted on an average 15 *Shalish* before and 16 after election whereas non-BRAC members participated in only 4 *Shalish* after being elected.

The villagers had positive perception towards BRAC-affiliated members regarding the distribution of government services to the poor in their electoral areas (Fig. 6). They also witnessed that non-BRAC members did not distribute few services such as blanket, tubewell, disable allowances, and latrines.

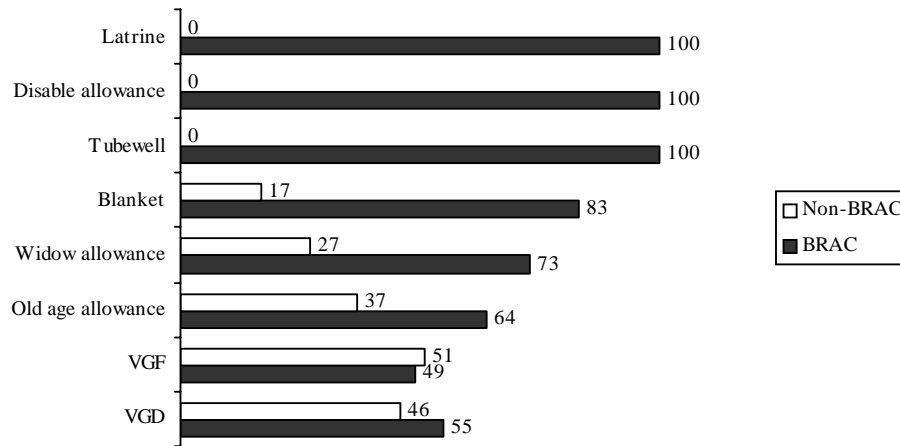
Villagers also commented on whether members were competent or not as a *Union Parishad* member. Most of the villagers (69%) considered BRAC-affiliated members as competent in *Union Parishad* activities but majority of them (84%) showed negative

perception towards the non-BRAC members. The villagers rationalized their support to BRAC-affiliated members by mentioning that the members were helpful (64%), honest and well behaved (65%). Sixty-seven percent of the villagers reported that these members participated in *Union Parishad* activities regularly and bargained with the chairmen for various opportunities provided by the government.

The villagers did not consider non-BRAC women members as competent indicating that they did not look after the people (100%), did not have any qualities (82%), and their husbands substituted them (100%) in *Union Parishad* activities. Besides it was mentioned that BRAC-affiliated members distributed cards (VGD, VGF, etc.) properly and did not take bribe from the beneficiaries.

They were very much helpful than non-BRAC members. Whenever anybody sought any help, be it financial or social, members tried to help him or her. On the other hand, the non-BRAC members did some financial help, although few, but not any kind of social help to the neighbours or villagers in their wards.

Figure 6. Villagers' perception on members based on government services (%)



To compare the competency between BRAC-affiliated and non-BRAC members of their weeklong activities were recorded. It shows that BRAC-affiliated members had better involvement and strong participation in *Union Parishad* activities in this week. They had finished daily household work (taking care of children, husband, cooking, sending kids to school, etc.) and visited UP to attend meeting, *Shalish*, or other purposes. Almost everyday a BRAC-affiliated member conducted *Shalish* in their village or outside village. They had taken a sick woman to the hospital. They also supervised the distribution of VGF wheat among members at *Union Parishad*. One of them went to UNO office, and social welfare department for widow allowance. Some of them went to market to buy necessary things and some of them visited relatives. Members also talked with beneficiaries several times going to their homes. And sometimes villagers came to the members for help.

On the other hand, non-BRAC members were busy with household work, watching TV, listening to radio, and sleeping almost everyday in a week. Only a member went to *Union Parishad* to participate in *Shalish* with her husband. In most of the cases their husbands helped them in all kinds of *Union Parishad* activities such as conducting *Shalish*, and bargaining with chairmen for projects. They talked with the beneficiaries by chance but visited relatives frequently. They hardly looked after the villagers while people did not come to them for any reasons.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

As an NGO, BRAC plays a role in skill development, building social capital, and raising the voice of women members to prepare them as eligible candidates for local government election. However, unfortunately these BRAC members did not use any of this support effectively after being elected. In fact they were little succeeded in the participation of UP budget, projects, distribution of government services, and *shalish*. As a whole, their performance was below par, although, they did however play a better role than non-BRAC members, in most of the cases. There were many determining factors that came as barriers for both types of members in the participation of *Union Parishad*. There were many determining factors that appeared as barriers for both types of members in the participation of *Union Parishad*.

Under the reservation system both BRAC-affiliated and non-affiliated women members found themselves in a disadvantageous position to get projects and government services in their UP. For example, the provision of three seats reserved for women would overlap the constituencies of three general seats raised a serious structural issue that adversely affected women's roles and functions. Women members have no provision to deliver more services than the general members, nor do they have the authority to supervise that of others (Khan 2006). In this study similar difficulty between women members and their male colleagues emerged.

The attitude of maleness towards women members was imposed upon both BRAC-affiliated and non-affiliated women members. Male members dominated the women members in all kinds of decision-making process. Male members ignored the active involvement of women in those processes (Omveted 2005; Shamim and Kumari 2002). The other study shows that the women members were given membership in special committees of UP, which basically dealt with non-economic function and engaged them to take care of the projects (Siddiqui 2005). Even women remaining on special committees played little role, or not being allowed to do so. Similar finding was also found in this study.

The harassment and intimidation by the chairmen and male members were also another important reason for making the women members unable to participate spontaneously in UP activities. This also led to the corruption of chairmen and male members in preparing budget, projects, government facilities, and even in *Shalish*. Both the groups confronted such challenges but BRAC-affiliated members were able to cope with the difficulties to some extent. This happened, as there was no effective government, which could ensure the accountability and transparency of the chairmen and members' role and responsibility. UNO - the local administrative superior of UP also did not oversee the chairmen properly. Rather he always favoured them. It is a vicious circle that needs to be broken down. BRAC does not have any right to interfere in this complex system and therefore, it has undertaken the bottom-up approach, i.e. to inspire and empower the victim, meaning the women members through different trainings and awareness programmes would solve their own challenges and constraints.. Thus BRAC played a very significant role to mobilize the poor women to come out of home and also inspired them to participate in local power structure.

To overcome the challenges faced by women members, BRAC can undertake some more initiatives to ensure greater and improved participation of women members in UP. Firstly, BRAC can set off an advocacy programme at the national level with the government to remove the structural obstacles of UP and set a clear demarcation of electoral areas for women members compared to male members. Secondly, *Palli Shamaj* and *Union Shamaj* (combination

of several *Palli Shamaj*), as grass root level organizations, can be supported by BRAC in order to extend their network with other programmes of BRAC so that a combined force of the two parties can ensure BRAC-affiliated members' successful participation. Thirdly, women members can be trained intensively about the ins and outs of the roles and responsibilities of UP members. Fourthly, NGO/BRAC and local benevolent elite cooperation committee should be formed through which they would make the chairmen and members activities transparent and accountable. In other words, all kinds of projects and grants coming from central government at the beginning of the year should be presented to all staffs and local people. Finally, BRAC can play role as a negotiator with the concerned officials such as project implementation officer, women affairs official, etc. at the *Upazilla* level in favour of women members to ensure an easy access to information.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed KM (2005). Women and politics in Bangladesh, *J Asiatic Soc of Bangladesh (Hum.)* Vol. 50
- Begum A (2007). Local governance in Bangladesh: towards a 'critical mass' to combat discrimination against women with special reference to India. *J Soc Sc*, 14(3):261-272.
- BRAC Annual Report (2006), Dhaka: BRAC
- Dakova V, Dreossi B, Hyatt J, Socolovschi A (2000). Review of the Romanian NGO sector: strengthening donor strategies, charity know how. London: Department for International Development, UK.
- Diamond L (1998). Rethinking civil society. In: R. C. Macridis RC and Brown BE (Editors). *Comparative politics: notes and readings*. 8th edition, Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers.
- Dollar D, Fishman R, Gatti R (1999). Are women really the fairer sex? Corruption and women in government. Policy research report gender and development, World Bank: Working Paper series No. 4.
- Dubey SC (1998). *Modernization and development the search for alternative paradigms*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publication, P.23.
- Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) Platform for action (1995). Women in Power and Decision-Making, www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision/htm, retrieved on 10.11.2008
- Ghosal IR (2004). A fact sheet on South Asian women's representation in government; A case for affirmative action. Canada: South Asia partnership (Unpublished report). http://action.web.ca/home/sap/south_asia_resources.shtml?x=62676&AA_EX_Session=29f157b629b5384d46f9e789d38007b8
- Haque AKS, Shaki KMAH (2003). *Union parishad Training Manual*, Dhaka: National Institute of Local Government
- International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) (1998). *Women in Local government*, Stockholm, 11-17
- Khan MR, Ara F (2006). Women, Participation and Empowerment in Local Government: Bangladesh Union Parishad Perspective. *Asian Affairs*, 29:1;73-00
- Khan ZR (2006). Are women in *Union parishad* empowered? Women and local government in Bangladesh. *Steps*, 2:3
- Mukhopadhyay L (2007). Gendered Roles and Policy: Governance Implications. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association 48th Annual Convention, Hilton Chicago, IL, USA, 2007-2-28. http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p181531_index.html Accessed on January 2009
- Omveld G (2005). Women in governance in South Asia. *Economic and Political Weekly*, October, p.4746-4752.

- Rahaman MS (1991). People's participation at the *Upazilla* level: problems and prospects, Rajshahi University. In: Khan MR, Fardaus ara, women, participation and empowerment in local government: Bangladesh *Union parishad* perspective, Asian Affairs, 29(1):73, 2006.
- Rahman HZ, Islam AI (2002). Local governance and community capacities: search for new frontiers. Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
- Rai MS (1999). Political Representation, Democratic Institutions and Women's Empowerment: The Quota Debate in India. In Democratization, Vol. 6 No. 3, Autumn
- Resteman O (undated). The role of civil society in the transparency of local governments. Graduate school for social research, Poland: Polish Academy of Science. http://www.crida-fr.org/03_actualites/streams/stream%203/1%20-%20ISTR-EMES_Resteman.rtf (Accessed on January 2008)
- Rashid TA, Alim MA (2005). A study on BRAC's palli shamaj. Dhaka: BRAC (unpublished report)
- Sarema KS (1999). Women's Political Participation in India, New Delhi: Sublime publications, p.150
- Shamim I, Ranjana K (2002). Gender and local governance: A new discourse in development, Islamabad: South Asia Network of Economic Research Institute, Pakistan.
- Shvedova N (1998). Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament. In : Karam, Azza (ed) 1998 Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers. International IDEA. Handbook series 2. p.34
- Siddiqui K (2004). Local governance in Bangladesh: leading issues and major challenges. Dhaka: University Press Limited. p.105-110.