

STATE OF WOMEN IN URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT BANGLADESH

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE COUNTRY

1.1 Socio-economic profile

Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation state in 1971. Although a new state, Bangladesh is an old country with a long recorded history of several thousands years. In its recent past it was part of Pakistan (1947-71) and was known as East Pakistan. Prior to this, different parts of the present Bangladesh territory were under the British India (1765-1947), the *Mughals* and other Muslim rulers and before them under *Buddhist* and *Hindu* rulers.

The country is bounded by India in the west, north, north-east and east, by Myanmar in the south-east and by the Bay of Bengal in the South. The present area of the country is 56,977 square miles or 147,570 square kilometres.

Climatically, the country belongs to the humid tropics and is vulnerable to a number of natural disasters like cyclones and flood and riverbank erosion which almost regularly displaces a large number of people. Physiographically, Bangladesh is predominantly a delta plain of one of the largest river systems of the world, the Ganges, while only a part in the south-eastern area is some what different with hills. The total population of Bangladesh is 12,21,25,000. The growth rate of the population is 1.53 per cent. (*Source BBS 1998*).

Table 1

Population		Level of Urbanization (As % of total population)	GNP per capita
Female	Male		
659411000	62714000	20.15 %	\$ 270 *

Source: BBS, 1998; *World Bank Report 1995 and 1997

Bangladesh is still considered predominantly as a rural and agrarian country, with only about a fifth of the national population living in areas officially defined as urban¹: Bangladesh is characterized by a low level of urbanisation (with 20.15 percent of the nation's population living in urban areas in 1991). However, it has experienced the most rapid rates of growth during the past three decades with an average of around 8 percent during 1961-81, and 5.4 percent in 1981-91.

According to the above definition, Bangladesh has 522 urban areas, although not all urban centers are given municipal status. According to the latest government report there are 225 urban centers which have a municipal status². The four largest cities have a city corporation status, while the rest are known as Pourashava or municipalities, which again are classified according to their financial strength. Urban Local Government is structured as follows:

Table 2: Categories of municipalities by annual income

Categories of municipalities	Annual income
a. Class – 1	6 million +
b. Class – 2	2 million +
c. Class – 3	Less than 2 million

The urbanization rate was 2.32 per cent in 1981 and 2.17 per cent in 1991. The level of urbanization was estimated to reach 26.40 per cent by 2000 and it will reach 36.8 per cent by 2015³.

Table 3

Year	Population of Five (5) Largest Cities				
	Dhaka	Chittagong	Khulna	Rajshahi	Barisal
1960	5,56,712	3,64,205	1,27,970	56,885	69,936
1970	16,79,572	8,89,760	4,37,302	1,32,909	98,127
1980	34,30,311	13,91,877	6,46,359	2,53,740	1,72,905
1990	69,50,920	2,348,428	10,01,825	5,44,649	1,87,742
2000	*				

Source: BBS, Statistical Year Book of 1998, p.38. * Was not available;

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. Among the poor, women are the poorest and most backward. This is due to poverty, unawareness of the benefit of education for women and other social stigma (for example once female education was considered invaluable for women.)

Table 4

	Level of Education Enrolment Levels							
	Primary		Lower Secondary		Upper Secondary		Tertiary	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Urban	7937576	2624484	2282698	4093057	483507	1975669	18375	234600
Rural	2135854	2624484	1162747	1698942	621392	1416994	187442	465654

Source: BBS 1998. Page 557

Table 5

	Infant Mortality	Under 5 Mortality	Maternal Mortality	Number of Children per Woman (Total Fertility Rate)
Urban	50	7.5	850	2.48*
Rural	76	12	Per 10,000	3.76*

Source: BBS 1998; * per 1000 women

There are some differences between enrolment rates and education levels because of frequent dropouts. The government is encouraging more enrolment and wishes to reduce dropout rates, specially for women. Up to the primary level schooling is free for both sexes; up to class eight (lower secondary level) it is free for girl students. The government also gives incentives (food, various education programme) to female students. The government has targeted eradication of illiteracy by the year 2003. Adult mass education programmes have been introduced with the collaboration of NGOs.

Table 6

	Labour Force	Percentage of Women in Labour Force	Share of Income of Women
Urban	10.2 mio	2.8	44.4% *
Rural	45.8 mio	18.5	

Source: * Human development report (Female economic activity rate)

1.2 Politics and governance

Bangladesh has a unitary and parliamentary political system that is run by the Prime Minister, the chief executive of the government.

The country is divided into six administrative divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sylhet. Each division is placed under a Divisional Commissioner and is further sub-divided into districts with a District Commissioner (DC) as the chief administrator. After the administrative reorganisations carried out in 1982, the country was divided into 64 districts. Some of these districts have existed for a very long period while the rest were upgraded from former sub-divisions. Below the district level there are Thanas which number 496 (BBS 1998) throughout the country. During 1982-1990, 460 of the Thanas were upgraded to Upazillas or sub-districts. With the abolition of the Upazillas in 1991, the upazilla regional administrative system reverted to the earlier Thana structure. All divisions and district headquarters and most of the Thana headquarters are urban centres. Local government in urban areas is elected by the people. Such bodies are called municipalities or *Pourashava*. The latest number of municipalities is 225. Below the level of Thana, there are rural micro areas known as unions (4,451 in number) and *grams* or villages (more or less 80,000).

The divisional level is the highest tier of administration after the national level. The divisional commissioner (popularly known as Commissioner) is the head of the divisional administration. The district administration is headed by a deputy commissioner (popularly known as the DC) and the Thanas (sub-district) administration are headed by the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO). The district and thana executives are assisted by a large number of officials, professionals and technical personnel appointed by the central government. Most of these personnel are recruited by the central government; only few posts are appointed by the local government. The government appointment is made through district recruitment whereas the national recruitment is done by the Public Service Commission on the basis of open competition.

Governmental control over local urban elected bodies is extensive and rigid. This control has many forms. The relationship between government and municipal government is a superior-subordinate one. The former is the prescribing authority for the latter. Urban local governments, due to inadequate funds of their own, are absolutely dependent on government grants and hence have to work within the limits set by the procedures of such grants⁴.

Bangladesh is a democratic country, although it has a long experience of martial law government. Now there are no restrictions on political activities. To figure the exact number of political parties is very difficult. Maybe more than 100 political parties exist but only 5 parties were represented in the last parliamentary election. The main political parties are Awami League, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islam of Bangladesh and Islamic Okkya Jote. Besides these parties, there are few other political parties that have some direct political activities.

The newspaper and press media have full freedom. National parliamentary elections are held in every five years. Similarly, the terms of local governments are also five years. At present however, due to political reasons, many Pourashava's or municipalities' and city corporation's tenure is over and the election commission could not conduct election.

The electoral system at both national and local levels is based on a term basis. Each term or tenure is for five years. Any person over 18 is eligible to vote and any person at 25 years or older is eligible to contest for Chairman, member, commissioner or MP⁵.

Urban local governments are elected on a ward basis. Commissioners are elected on a ward basis too. But the Mayor or Chairman is elected by all the voters of the corporation/municipality. Theoretically, no political party can nominate any candidate, but in practice all candidate-commissioner/mayor/chairman are individually supported by political parties. The Bangladeshi constitution gives the right to vote and hold elected office⁶.

Every citizen of Bangladesh, irrespective of gender, has a constitutional right to vote and to stand for election if his/her age limit permits to do so. Since 1972 elections have been held at regular intervals⁷.

1.3 Participation and representation of women in politics

Historically, women's voting right was established long ago but women's participation in the political and national movement has been negligible. At present both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition in Parliament are women. However, their high positions in politics do not reflect the whole scenario of women's position in politics. Both the Prime Minister and the leader of the opposition come from political families. The Prime Minister's father was founder and first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, while the husband of the leader of the opposition led a military coup and was subsequently elected as President. Women are still subordinated to men in many cases but they are coming out. Gradually women's participation is increasing.

The increasing political involvement has inspired women to contest for the Rural Union Council and Urban Municipal election (there are $\frac{1}{3}$ seats reserved for women) more than before. In the last union council election (1997) nearly 48000 women contested for the member post. Directly elected women councillors/members are demanding for their defined responsibilities and jobs.

Table 7

Number of votes National Parliament			Number of votes State/Provincial Parliaments		Votes Cast for Urban Local Government Councils	
Year	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
1996	28,759,994	28,956,941	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
2000	36,239,491	38,436,258	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Election commission office

Table Number 8

Year	National Parliament			Urban Local Government Councils	
	Female	Male	%	Female	Male
1960					
1970	15	300	4.8		
1980	32	298	9.2		
1990	35	295	10.6		
2000	37	293	11.2	887	2661 *

Source: 1. Journal of Public Administration by - PATC, Vol-15, June 2000. Dhaka;

2. List collected from ministry of local government (Please note here four city corporation was not included in this list). Ratio of four city corporation-M:F=190:63 (Source: BBS 1998.)

There are 300 seats in the national parliament; out of these 15 were reserved for women in 1970. In 1980 the seats reserved for women were doubled to 30. The rest of the seats are contested in direct elections. In 1980 two women were directly elected, increasing the total number of women in parliament to 32. In 1990 five women were directly elected and in the 2000 election seven women were directly elected, increasing the number of women in parliament to 35 and 37 respectively.

Table Number 9

Year	Number and Percentage of Women in Federal Cabinet/Executive Branch		Number of Percentage of Women Mayors	
	Number	%	Number	%
1960				
1970	02	4		
1980	06	6		
1990	04	3		
1992	03	5		
2000	04	16		

The country was under military regime from 1975 to 1990. There was no democratic practice at all during the martial law government. After the fall of the martial law government in 1990 democracy was established in 1991. The prime minister and the leader of opposition are women. At present *Sheikh Hasina* is the prime minister and *Khaleda Zia* is the leader of opposition. *Khaleda* was prime minister in 1991 and *Hasina* was then leader of opposition. Though both main political parties are under the leadership of women, this has not as yet resulted in massive participation by women in politics and government.

Table Number 10

Title of Post (Top Four[4] Levels)	Number and Percentage of Women Appointed to Decision Making Level Positions of the Civil Service (Federal)		Number and Percentage of Women Appointed to Decision Making Level Positions of the Civil Service (Local)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Secretary	2	1.76	DC - 0	
Additional Secretary	-	-	ADM - 1	1.58
Joint Secretary	5	1.80	ADC - 3	4.68
Deputy Secretary	5	0.74	UNO - 19	5.2
Assistant Secretary	335			

Source: List collected from ministry of Establishment (20 Sept. 2000); DC - Deputy Commissioner; ADM - Additional District Magistrate; ADC - Additional Deputy Commissioner; UNO - Upazila Nirbahi Officer

It is important to mention that in 1987 only 1 Joint Secretary, 1 Deputy Secretary and 15 Assistant Secretaries were appointed⁸. At the bottom of the hierarchy of bureaucrats, the Assistant Secretary number has increased due the effect of the government policy on a quota system.

2. WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN URBAN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

2.1 Women's participation in urban local government

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

The span of responsibilities for ward commissions has been well defined in the government gazette. But there is no definite responsibility narrated in such a Gazette for women ward commissioners. The government Gazette notification has described the nature of meetings, panel chairpersons etc. So the status of women ward commissioners (reserved seats) has been undermined. Still there is some confusion and misunderstanding between commissioner and women ward commissioners.

Every political party has a women wing to encourage women to join politics either at national or local level. Women's participation in politics has no doubt increased tremendously. All NGO's, women's organizations and civil society organizations are very active in this regard. Recently there has been a phenomenal change. During the last 1998 local government election (Union Parishad) more than 12,000 women members were elected directly for reserved seats. In the near future, after completion of municipal election, another 887 women ward commissioner will be directly elected. Contesting for reserved seats, women's participation in elections will have a positive

impact on women's political consciousness. Beside this, the media are playing a vital role educating women. The total number of women voters enrolment has increased compared to the previous enrolment.

Table 11

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

Source: FEMA, election report (1996)

From the above table we can see that the ratio of female voters has increased from 46.86 to 49.7 per cent by the year of 1991-1996.

Local government has initiated different programmes to encourage women's participation in governance. Women ward commissioners mainly deal with women's issues, particularly for poor women, such as micro credit programmes, handicrafts and professional training programmes attracting women to join such programmes. There are some positive impacts of these programmes initiated by local government. Women are becoming very concerned about their rights and unnecessary cases. Local governments are compelled to facilitate their rights. Very recently the government has introduced transport facilities for women, child care facilities, violence against man. All these are the result of the women's movement.

2.2 Gender sensitization of urban local government

Women's participation in politics at national level and at local level is very much needed to strengthen democracy. Various steps have been initiated and implemented following the programme parts of WID, GAD, Beijing plus 5 etc.

The constitution of Bangladesh provides for formal equality of men and women. Women are entitled to the same fundamental rights as men. Article 10 of the constitution ensures participation of women in all spheres of national life. Article 65(3) provides for reserved seats for women in the parliament and article 9 promotes the special representation of women in local government. Besides the participation of women in politics and urban governance, many programmes have been undertaken in local governments (urban and rural). Gender training is being conducted in national institute for local government for ward commissioner, government official etc. There are other government, semi-government institutes and non-government (NGOs) that are conducting gender training. Through this sort of training programme to sensitize the population on gender issues in urban local government, the national government endeavours to overcome the backwardness of the position of women and to ensure more participation in urban local government. There is some research work done on women's problem in urban life, like women's housing, employment, health, transport, women's safety issues. In many development work, the gender issue gets priority nowadays. However, there is no regular event or programme being introduced for the ward commissioners to be aware of gender issues. Although some the commissioners have attended international conferences occasionally.

3. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

3.1 Legal and political initiatives

The indirect election of women for urban local governments and pourashavas in 1994 created the scope of women's involvement in urban local government. In 1998 the ordinance was amended and direct elections for seats reserved for women were mandated. This amendment is a milestone in the history of Bangladeshi local level elections. One third of the available local seats of any municipality or corporation have been reserved for women. The commissioner on a reserved seat will be elected through direct election.

Although local government election is officially a non-government election and officially of a non-political basis, it is common practice that political parties give support to their own candidates. Political parties, civil society and NGOs are all involved in encouraging women to participate in politics. The number of women members in local governments is increasing in each election. Before the pourashava ordinance (1998) there was no scope for women to participate in elections.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, the government sanctioned a 10 per cent quota for women to participate in civil service. This quota was introduced to bring more women in the administration to overcome women's subordinate position. Still there is a big gap between men and women members in civil service, and even the quota has not been fully filled. But with an optimistic view it can be said that the members or percentage of women civil servants is increasing day to day. Now in the police service, judiciary service and even in armed forces, women's appointments are very much significant. In the near future it will bring a significant change in women's position in Bangladesh. A few years ago, a woman A.D.C or chief executive in pourashava was unthinkable, now they are coming.

3.2 Training and support mechanism for women in urban local government

Usually the National Institute for Local Government (NILG) conducts training programmes for elected/selected chairmen, commissioners etc. The programme schedule includes women empowerment, gender and development, women's rights etc. In addition, local and foreign NGOs, other government organisations, and civil society organizations are focussing on women's empowerment and women rights. Different organisations have arranged workshops, seminars, and research on gender issue and enhanced the initiatives for the advancement of the position of women. In the last union council elections, NGOs like "Nijera Kori" organised women and motivated them to participate in local level election. Besides, local level training the government, different NGO, funding organisations such as DFID, CIDA, NORaid and UNDP, help local women urban leaders to be sent to participate in different international seminars and workshops particularly on gender issues.

4. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCE OF WOMEN IN URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

4.1 Introductionary remarks

The findings of this study have been collected through my recent research done for UNESCAP. It was conducted from July to October 2000. I have selected 20 women ward commissioners from four cities. Only one of them is directly elected by the people, the others are nominated by the party, but elected indirectly⁹.

Due to the time constraints and communication problems¹⁰ I have selected 12 women ward commissioners from Dhaka City Corporation, 3 from Tongi, 2 each from Tangail and Savar, and 1 from Manikganj as the respondents for this short time research.

Compared to all the women ward commissioner of Bangladesh, 20 is not a representative number at all. Yet the sample size is significant for Dhaka City Corporation and the other four municipalities. Moreover I have no intention to make a generalized statement. Rather the objective of this research was to understand whether the election procedure and official status have any inequality. I see my work as opening up an under-researched area for the future. Nevertheless I have achieved some insights, and have come across questions and subjects that should require more intensive and in depth research in future so that we can properly evaluate women's position in urban governance. This chapter has five sections: (1) Introduction, (2) Socio-economic demographic status of women ward commissioners, (3) Kinship and political connections, (4) Gender discrimination, election procedure and office sphere, and (5) Recommendations.

4.2 Socio-economic and demographic status

Although women ward commissioners are representing all women living in the cities they are mainly Muslim (one Hindu), middle class (18 out of 20), highly educated (13), Married (14) and of an age that ranges from 31 to 50 (8).

Income, class and status

While mentioning the income group women prefer to claim themselves to be of middle class¹¹ (where the income range varies from 10 thousands taka). However, while defining "middle classness" they have asked the researcher to include other parameters such as education, family & social context, social status and power. In this regard they have claimed that their present political identity has given them higher status and power within the society. They made it clear by giving examples that people rely more on them than on a female researcher/ a university teacher (me as such) or most men who are professionals. Similarly, administration, police and even 'mastans' (muscleman) can not avoid their 'calls'. So it is not wise to calculate one's socio-economic status without understanding these additional factors. Nevertheless, they are highly sensible about their own limitations, with frustration they have commented that "when we wish to help the poor & vulnerable people but cannot do so, then we cannot see us better than the 'poor'".

Educational qualifications

Generally women ward commissioners are highly educated, 13 are graduates or more, 4 have secondary education, 2 have higher secondary education and only one has primary education. Except one, most of them had taken general degrees, such as Bachelor of Arts, rather than qualifying them for any particular occupation.

Level of Education	Number of Women Ward Commissioners
Masters	1
Bachelors	12
H.S.C	2
S.S.C	4
S.S.C	1
Total	20

The exceptional one has had a degree on physical education and later she has established a physical training center in Manikgonj. Along with this she has opened a beauty parlour and a dance school. She peruse her political career along with these. Regarding the general degrees, we must remember, that it represents and secures middle class-ness, which is quite important for one's political career.

Occupations

The level of education has been reflected through their various occupational identity: 4 of them are teaching in schools, 3 are land-ladies or shop-owners, 2 are business-women and contractors, 1 is an industrialist, 1 is the founding member of an NGO, and another one is working in a food processing factory.

Type of Occupations	Number of Women Ward Commissioners
Teaching in schools	04
Land/Shop ownership	03
Business/Contracting	02
Industrialist	01
Founding member of an NGO	01
Working in food processing factory	01
Housewifery	08
Total	20

Apart from these occupations 8 women have identified their occupation as housewife. However, 2 of these housewives have also worked as teachers before coming to politics. Nevertheless, all said, it is extremely difficult to be occupied in the other professions while doing politics and being a housewife as well. They have identified housewifery as the most time consuming and intensive service work.

It is significant to see that women themselves are not willing to talk about housewifery as an occupation. Rather they have explained it as their 'sacred duty'. It is perceived as a women's duty only, which has been given 'naturally' to them by society. Hence, some ward commissioners have shown their frustration at some points saying that: "We have neglected our prime duty, for the politics means we did not give enough time to our family and could not take care of our children. However, we want to continue

with the responsibilities of urban governance but may not go for extra jobs.” This analysis by the women ward commissioners is the reflection of our social values regarding women’s ‘duty’¹².

Marital status

Among the interviewed Women Ward Commissioners most are presently married, two are never married, one was once married, others are widowed

Marital status	Number
Unmarried	02
Married	13
Once married	01
Widowed	04
Total	20

In Bangladesh context, marital status is quite a vital issue for a person’s identity and career development. It is further crucial for women in Bengali society. Marital responsibilities may create obstacles for women if they live in a complex household, as the same time husbands and in-laws may work as a source of political connections as well as inspirations for them.

Understanding this context, the presently 13 married Women Ward Commissioners have managed to negotiate the responsibilities and submissiveness within the marital relationship. The work of a full time ward commissioner is in a sense a contradiction to the marital expectation. Women go to the public places or outside the home any time. They face people, thana-police, they conduct ‘shalish’ (local justice) also they distribute relief to the distressed people and all these includes dealing publics in public places, whereas they should be or are supposed to be contended to their houses.

Nonetheless, changes in attitudes are happening. It may not be a significant number but some (4), have already taken relief from the responsibility of doing household work & child care, 2 of them were unmarried. One was once married, but is at present single, one is married, but their families (mothers/ sister) have released them from the domestic responsibilities. This situation makes them understand that women are not bound to adhere to ideological responsibilities in their life and they also encourage other women to join with them, saying, “we have encourage our sisters to come out of the kitchen and join politics with us”.

This would not have been possible if their families /communities were not co-operative (all respondents said so). This socio-political context may encourage women’s changing position in the society. Clearly this instance is creating alternative discourses to our ideologies and is changing the structural conditions where man and woman relations may have a chance to be changed in relation to home and politics (private and public). Hence we can see women’s participation in urban governance as one of the initial procedures of that change to be happening.

Age profile

All Women Ward Commissioners’ age ranges within the reproductive age (13 to 45), only one has reached to her fifties. Usually, the reproductive age (13 to 45) is a

crucial factor that influences whether women will be engaged in a public sector job or not. Bengalis are very critical about the purity of women in this age group, yet we see a significant difference among the ward commissioners. Most (18) women ward commissioners of this age group have children to take care off, and mothers are supposed to be the main carer. Yet, the structure of the household and the close proximity of helping families/friends (own mother/siblings, in-laws) may help to sustain women with their political/occupational career.

Age ranges	Number
21 – 30	01
31 – 40	11
41 – 50	07
50 +	01
Total	20

At the initial stages of their joining politics, they received lot of criticisms, and faced obstacles from their local communities and neighbours. Later their sense of responsibilities, work performance and sincerity convinced the people who have gradually accepted them as their leaders.

Nevertheless, all of them think that the support (both financially, materially, morally) they have got from their own families was remarkable, which has helped them to be accepted in the society. The constant encouragement from their family, kin relations and the local people is the source of their strength to survive in this new arena. However, they had to create an image of ‘morally’ sound women¹³.

Kin relations & political connections

The life stories of women ward commissioners are proving the common belief that “women are not politically aware” is wrong. All these commissioners were politically conscious from their childhood and were involved in politics from quite a long time. Even in some cases their marriage partners (husband’s) were being selected by their parents considering the political affiliation of the bridegroom’s family. A number of women (6) commissioners has been encouraged by the powerful political leaders (from local to national) who are closely related or distant relations of them.

Number of Women Ward Commissioners with kin in politics	Relations with the kin	Positions of the kin in politics/government
1	Father	Local Activist (AL)
2	Husband	Ex-student leader (BSL)
3	Uncle	Ex-Ward Commissioner
4	Husband	EX-MP (AL)
5	Uncle	Ex-MP (AL)
	Brother-in-law	President (Riyadh AL)
	Husband	Ex-student leader (BSL)
6	Father	Present local leader (AL)
	Grand father from both side	Ex-chairman UP/UC
	Husband	Leader, Labour league (AL)

Number of Women Ward Commissioners with kin in politics	Relations with the kin	Positions of the kin in politics/government
7.	Father, Uncle, 4 close relative	Ward Commissioner (AL)
8.	Brother-in-law	Ex-MP (AL)
	Husband	Current Treasure of City AL
	Brother-in-law	Ward Commissioner
9.	Father-in-law	Top level AL leader
	Husband	Member of AL
10.	Brother-in-law	AL leader
	Husband	Ex-Ward Commissioner
	Father	Member UC
11.	Husband's cousin	Ex-MP, Chairman of the Municipality (AL)
	Uncle	BNP (Jessore)
12.	Son	Member (BNP)
13.	Sister's husband	Ex-president of Bangladesh (AL)
	Cousin brother	Ex-Mayor (DCC)
14.	Father	Ex-Ward Commissioner (AL)
15.	Cousin brother	General Secretary (District level), Member (AL)
	Brother	Municipal Commissioner
16.	Uncle	High official (AL)
	Distant cousin brother	Member central committee (BNP)
17.	Husband	Information and Research Section of AL (District level)
18.	Uncle	Ex-Parliament Member and Minister (AL)

Ward commissioners have kin relations with members of parliament, the vice-president, Mayors, other ward commissioners and influential party (political) members. Regular and close contacts with these people have always inspired them to join this job. They explained the issues of commitment to politics, and links with political personnel in various ways, i.e. "our blood speak of politics" or "we have grown up in this environment". "This is more than addiction, kitchen, children, nothing could have stopped me from working with the public."

These comments prove that their first initiation in politics had happened from their family environment or wider kin relationship. Kinship was not only responsible for bringing them into this field, it has also encouraged women to be skilled and competitive. These women ward commissioners have given enough examples that they are qualified to administer governance, and that they could not make it earlier as there was no scope for them.

Nevertheless, they have tried to reduce their political limitations which are created by the system "by the help and co-operation of their kin contacts". For example, the ward commissioners of Eastern Dhaka are close kin's. Although the work limit for a women ward commissioner restricts her work only to slum develop projects, with the help of their father's/uncle's, brother-in-law's help, they have managed to initiate or participate in further activities and programmes. In some cases after the death of their husbands, local people and wider kin-families insisted them to join the post. However to come to their present post, they have proved that they are as sincere as their predecessors.

Kin ties are so strong that even in some cases where they have different political affiliation, they got support from them. For example one the women ward commissioners got the highest vote as she managed to convince all the Dhakayia (the original Dhaka people) commissioners because she is linked with them by Dhakayia kin ties. Similar incidences happened for some other women commissioners from Tangail, Tongi, Savar and Manikgonj. These women came through the BNP, as independent candidates but now are getting full support and co-operation from the Chairman or influential commissioners of the municipalities (Awami leaguer) because they are close kin.

This finding indicates that when women represent people even then, for various ideological constraints and structural conditions, they cannot/may not be allowed to do things independently. Women's moral identity and familiar or social position may be a cause for further constraint or support.

They said, *'It was my "local public" who inspired me and pressurized me to come to the power to represent them'*. Similarly, they also strongly claimed a number of prominent political leaders of the country, including the Prime-minister, Mayor of DCC, some Ward Commissioners, Chairmen of the Municipalities, who brought them up to politics. Particularly they stated, that some prominent women leaders were pulling them for politics. It is necessary to mention all leaders were being addressed by a kin terminology, such as Hasina Apa/Netri Apa (means sister, indicating Sheikh Hasina as the leader but sister), Hanif Bhai (brother Hanif) etc. Within a formal political structure kin morality is so reconstructed by the women leaders. It suggests when they could not achieve the access to power in the same way as their male colleagues Ward Commissioners through the formal Gazette, they used the kin ties as a media/means of negotiations. They also practice this strategy in their relations with the public, who can address them as "Apa" (sister), and can come to their home, be entertained by their families, and get heard by Women Ward Commissioners when necessary¹⁴

4.3 Gender differences in election procedure

Until 1994, most women commissioners were elected by male commissioners (through indirect election). Out of 20, only one is directly elected by the people (in DCC), and 2 are elected by the people but through the reserved seats for women.

The Mayor election of 1994 is a remarkable event in the history of urban governance in Bangladesh. Before this the Mayor and women ward commissioners were used to be selected by the government. For the first time in history, in 1994 the Mayor has been elected directly by the urban people and women ward commissioners by the votes of the male/directly elected women commissioners¹⁵.

In Dhaka City Corporation (D.C.C.), three women came through the direct election. Besides, 19 Women Ward Commissioners were elected by directly elected commissioners. The electoral area for each Women Ward Commissioner comprised of 5 wards. Whereas, the directly elected commissioners each (regardless of their gender) contested for only one ward.

Any person can contest for the commissioner's seat, but the reserved seats are only for women to contest. The provision of reserved seats was created to promote women's involvement in local government and wider politics. The ratio of ward commissioners and 'Women Ward Commissioners' was 5:1. This means 90 ward

commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation voted for 19 'Women Ward Commissioners'. Such system persisted from 1994 to 1997.

To establish uniformity and to evade the confusion within the election process, the local government ordinance 1997 was modified on 31st July 1988 and finalized in March 1999. From this date onwards the government kept the provision of $\frac{1}{3}$ reserve seats for women in urban and rural local government, with the total number of ward commissioners or members of union council depending from area to area. Accordingly, for the coming election, around 950 women are expected to be elected as Women Ward Commissioner for 4 city corporations and 225 municipalities¹⁶.

These changes in the election procedure for rural union councils, urban municipalities and city corporations became a mile-stone in the context of the previous status of women in governance. The experience of Women Ward Commissioners who are in power from 1994, suggests that the very word "women" commissioners clearly states and proves the discrimination towards women politicians. The limitations of the electoral process were responsible for such consequences. They said, that when the election of the mayors and the commissioners was taking place women worked day and night for them. They were crucial actors for the victory of those who won the election, however, due to the uniform system all the willing women could not contest directly for more seats¹⁷. Women think they were competent enough, but there was not enough scope for them. On the other hand their contribution to election campaigning went unrecognized, rather, as they came to the power through the votes of the 'ward commissioners', women have to be obliged to the 'ward commissioners'. A sad but true experience for all Women Ward Commissioners, is that the system makes them feel as they are "created/made of male commissioners". This feelings does not persist only on emotional level, it is also practised through the discriminatory right and status in the office

4.4. Gender discrimination in work environment

All 'Women Ward Commissioners' insisted that they must be taken seriously by the government. They had claimed that they came to the power through proper political participation and commitment, yet there are no work responsibilities given to them by the local government Gazette. The Women Ward Commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation created pressure on the Mayor of Dhaka to provide them with work, they said, "we do not want to be dolls/decoration pieces in the showcase, we want work". this sort of insistence encouraged the Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation to give the responsibility of slum development projects of Dhaka to them. Presently these projects are being monitored by the Women Ward Commissioners only.

Ironically women cannot show their commitment to the public, or to the office, as they are supposed to listen or convince five different ward commissioners for any project to be realized (due to the system mentioned before). According to the system they cannot take any development initiatives and actions without the permission or support from the relevant ward commissioners. For instance, while the 1998 flood happened, a number of Women Ward Commissioners felt strong urge to help the flood affected poor people of their wards. They asked for relief goods from their respective ward commissioners. In most cases they did not get the permission/support. Women ward commissioners see this non-cooperative attitude in two ways (i) men (Ward Commissioners are mostly men, except 3) did not like to see women to come to the lime-light (ii) men were not too keen to share the 'chance' of handling a big "financial

benefit" (indicating corruption while distributing 'relief') with those who had not any 'duty' (according to the Gazette) to perform.

The interviewed women mentioned that they perceived "public interest" in a different manner than male Ward Commissioners. Male commissioners can provide/recommend trade licenses, registration (birth, marriage, death) certificates etc. but they do not do these promptly. However, constrained as women are by the system, they try hard to work for public as much as possible. One of the Women Ward Commissioners of Dhaka said, *'we cannot arrange license/permit etc. for public, but I always use my "connections" with powerful people of the city corporation, I invite them (including Ministers, Mayor and Ward Commissioners) to come to my locality while a slum development project goes on, then I ask for 'this' and 'that'. They cannot say no in front of the public'*. Strategically, she has achieved permission to construct roads, take care of garbage collection vehicle, build clubs for the people and administer funds/goods to provide ration/relief to the vulnerable people within her electoral area, from the relevant ward commissioner

Some women achieve these through individual capacity of negotiation, but a lot of women are not quite successful, as they could not be/did not like to be a good negotiator. Even the best negotiators could not achieve the "equal" status as compared to their male counterparts. According to their domestic schedule, women ward commissioners cannot be the chairperson of any school/madrasha/college committee. Instead they can at best be members, whereas directly elected commissioners are the chairperson of these committees.

Also, the fund women ward commissioners receive to do their work is comparatively lower than their male counterparts. In relation to fund allocation women are extremely critical. A women commissioner from Tongi has mentioned it is not as simple as getting less funds, rather it is a more deeply rooted problem. Even if one can arrange the fund it may not be used properly/timely because of the discriminatory attitude of the male ward commissioner who may/not be the follower of her party. She insisted, that this has happened due to the discriminatory policy of the election procedure itself.

Within the office, subordinate staff respect their Women Ward Commissioners. All women Ward Commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation mentioned the centres of the urban development projects, from where they run their official work, consist of 2 health workers, 2 teachers, 1 secretary/office clerk and 1 guard. Usually the office clerk and the guard are males, the other staffmembers are either male or female. Women ward commissioners do not have any problem with them, however, one of the women commissioner deliberately had taken female office clerks in her wards – to promote women in official work.

Women Ward Commissioners have no complaints regarding the behaviours or attitude of the Project Director, or the Mayor, but in the Dhaka City Corporation Building they do not share a common office. To wait for a meeting, they use the director's room, which is not convenient for them. The feelings of Women Ward Commissioners of Tongi, Tangail, Savar, Manikgonj had reached a level of complaints. They are asking for their own office space. They find it extremely difficult to listen/see women victims of domestic or public violence in front of their male colleagues. There are individual instances where the Mayor/Chairperson and male colleagues had taken initiatives to reduce gender discriminations in the office environment, yet very little scope persists within the present office and work structure.

The perception of the public/local community has had a positive change regarding women's participation in wider politics and particularly in urban governance. All women clearly mentioned that people rely on them more than before and in some cases, they rely more on Women Ward Commissioners than on their male colleagues. Besides, the presence of women has changed the environment of politics/governance in various respects, specially in relation to the poor and females. According to them issues like: familial disputes, dowry issues, domestic violence, mother-child healthcare, women's and adult education, women's co-operative, income earning and credit programmes and arranging emergency fund and relief in a period of disaster have received special attention by Women Ward Commissioners. They feel that although they cannot take action directly, they can take these issues to the City Corporation or Municipalities. They find (a) making women politically aware and active and (b) making them understand their own political right and capacity are the most important achievement of their involvement in urban governance. Almost all women see their political career will not be bounded within the ward level, rather they are willing to represent their voices up to the national level, if possible up to the international level. They are planning to contest for the coming election and are interested to join in international conferences. Also a few of them are dreaming to take office responsibilities of foreign affairs.

Their work as a political person is not only constrained by the urban local governments office structure or the system, rather, it is also a socio-political, economic-legal and psychological state. Women Ward Commissioners recognize these obstacles and find the significance of their presence is basically initiating a process towards gender equality. They believe that they have helped the 50 per cent of the city's population that are women being heard for the first time by the municipalities and city corporations. Nevertheless most of the women surveyed had overcome these obstacles and few of them had managed to do some works for their local community. Within such initiatives and programmes, women achieved quite a success to run the small credit programmes, women's skill development and training programmes, education for children and aged people, dealing with the familial and communal 'Shalish' (jurisdiction), etc.

Most of all they are extremely positive about their role of making women aware of their political and civil rights. All the women commissioners of Dhaka, Tangail, Tongi, Manikganj and Savar had said the election procedure made them handicapped. Yet they are extremely sure that their presence in urban local government does have a significance. The vulnerable and the poorest have been voiced by the women ward commissioners. The women commissioners have brought out the various issues of women's oppression, injustice towards them, spelled out their real material needs (housing, security etc.) to the centre of the urban governance. They did not confine themselves within the allocated sphere only, rather they tried to find out where they are structurally discriminated and how they can overcome those. Even if they were not able to overcome these through their political power, they used their political connections with the powerful people, who are somehow linked with them as kin. In a country like Bangladesh, where generally women are subordinated, where women hardly get access to the resources and sources of power, they strategically used kin relations (Father, Uncle, Partner etc.) to increase their funds and work possibilities (Islam, F 1998).

All they wanted was to achieve people's reliability on them, which in the long run would allow them to sustain as political persons. Women find their attitude towards their duty and their style of work different than of men, which creates reliance on them among

the local people. They claimed they give importance to issues like family and marriage disputes, and dowry problems and handle these with care, whereas, men find these trivial. This approach is also based on honesty, sincerity, and an effort to creating a corruption free society. These women feel they work from their heart. Their own personal experience helps them to understand the causes and nature of gender discrimination. This understanding makes them more capable to make women aware, organised and active in urban as well as in wider politics.

5. ANNOTATED LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS

5.1 Annotated list of organizations

1. PROSHIKA 1/1-Ga, Section – 2, Mirpur –2, Dhaka. Phone. 8013398, 8015812, 9005797. Fax 880-2-8015811 Contact person: Dr. Kazi Faruque Ahmed. Proshika is involved in different activities like socio-economic, micro credit Human rights women's empowerment.
2. BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee); BRAC centre, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka, Phone: 884180-87, Fax- 8802-883542 Contact Person-Fazle Hossain Abed. Micro-Credit, Women's empowerment
3. Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha House No. 225, Road No. (acold), Dhanmondi, R/A, Dhaka – 1209 Phone: 880-2-811323, Fax- 880-2-9120638; Contact Person- Rokeya Kabir. This organization is one of the activist organizations for women's right voting right and women's empowerment.
4. Centre for Development services (CDS) 38/1, Block-F, Ring Road, Shyamoli Dhaka, Phone: 880-2-811319, Fax – 880-2-815512. CDS mainly media based organization. By exhibition documentary Film through TV, Cinema, new paper to award women's right, mass participation in election, discrimination between men and women in salary wage holiday, Targeting to minimize gender discrimination through media.
5. Nari Uddog Kendra, 22/18, Khilzi Road, Block –B, Mohammadpur, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh, Phone: 9115996, Fax- 880-2-813095; Contact Person – Masuda Khanam Shafali. NUK is active for Female garment workers accommodation problem. They also active for women's shelter in urban area.
6. Banchte Shekha (Learn how to survive); Airport Road, Arabpur, Jessore. Phone: 0421-6436, Fax – 0421-72568; Contact person- Angela Gomes; Micro credit, Self reliance programme, Women in right
7. Nijera Kori 3/3, Block A, Road 3, Lalmatia , Dhaka 1207; Contac person – Khushi Kabir; Phone: 811372, Fax – 880-2822250. They are involved actively for women's right in voting and election.
8. Women for Women (A Research and Study Group); 63/2, Laboratory Road, Dhaka; Phone: 504697, Fax – 880-2-813010; Contact person Dr. Hamida Akhter Begum
9. Mohila Samity; New Baily Road, Dhaka; Contact person- Ms Joishna Rahman; Women's Right.
10. Ain-O-Salish Kendra; 26/3, Purana Paltan Line; Dhaka 1000; Phone: 8351158; Contact person – Salma Sobhan; Legal Aid for women
11. Bangladesh Mohila Parishad; 10/B, Segunbagicha; Dhaka 1000; Phone: 9344765; Fax : 880-2-833510; Contact person – Aysa Khanam; Women's rights
12. Bangladesh Mohila Samity; New Baily Road, Dhaka 1000; Contact person – Nilima Ibrahim; Women's rights. For further details of organization please contact ASSOCIATION OF DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES IN BANGLADESH (ADAB) E-mail: adab@bdOnline.com

5.2 List of individuals¹⁸

6. Recommendations FOR FURTHER ACTIONS

Women's Incorporation in Urban Governance is an appreciable step, however the discriminatory election procedures and differential treatment in offices are responsible for perceiving women as 'partial' commissioners. I like to suggest a few words on the basis of the understanding of this study to change this present position.

1. As we know, the gender approach never focuses on 'women only' rather it sees women and men's relation in a particular socio-economic-political context. The government must take more concrete steps towards gender sensitization, among the ward commissioners as well as Governance. Along with the women, male commissioners should also be asked to participate in such trainings and mobilization programmes.

2. All must be appreciated for their positive attitudes towards women's participation in governance. Similarly one must be discouraged or punished if they do not show positive attitudes, or they harass women colleagues.

3. Attitudinal changes will happen if the election procedures get changed. All women must come through proper election. For the time being they may contest for the reserved seats, but gradually it must be phased out.

4. While working in the office they must get work responsibilities clearly defined by the Government Gazette. It should carefully include women in various important committees, which are perceived by the system as the "natural" work sphere for men. Such as budget committee, financial, technical sites, etc.

5. Women ward commissioners need their own office spaces with similar facilities like their male colleagues.

6. The Government and political parties and NGO's should introduce gender awareness programmes and manifestos. They, individually as well as combined, can regularly organize these trainings, seminars, workshops, lectures etc. They also can create a positive office atmosphere by monitoring their own members.

7. Above all ideological changes will materialize only when the civil society will take it seriously. So, academics and researchers must bring up these issues to the common people by their writing and work with simple and approachable languages.

8. Women Ward Commissioners, as well as, other politically committed women/men who are working whole heartedly to change the inequality between women/men, must be acknowledged and can be awarded by the government so that it becomes a source of inspiration to others.

Last of all I believe any sincere effort must work in a comprehensive manner. If we are really committed to change the gender differences, we must work simultaneously to bring about changes in the institutional structure, the cultural understanding, and the ideological conditions together.

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¹ According to 1999 census, the Urban areas are defined as the developed area around (i) an identifiable central place where (ii) amenities like metalized roads, communication facilities, electricity, gas, water supply, sewerage connections usually exist. (iii) Which is densely populated and majority of the population involved in non-agricultural occupation.

² List collected from the ministry of local government, September, 2000.

³ Islam. N. 1997

⁴ Khan 1997 p.17, in Islam & Khan et al. *Urban governance in Bangladesh & Pakistan*.

⁵ E, Ahmed - 1994 - *Public Administration in Bangladesh (Bangla)*, Pouroshava ordinance 1997.

⁶ *Human Development Report 1999* p.240.

⁷ Bangladesh Constitution article No.121 and *Human Development South Asia 1998*

⁸ Khan, Salma, 1988

⁹ The meaning of indirect election will be explained in paragraph 4.4

¹⁰ The Women Ward Commissioners were extremely helpful yet their work pressure, loads of unscheduled jobs and political incidences during the field work period has interrupted our work a number of times. I find it quite difficult as a researcher to pressurize them, when they were really busy.

¹¹ It is important to state that Bengalis see middle-class as gentry. Where income does not fit with the idea, they bring up other social factors to establish that. Education, family background, kin connection, political power/connections, are important to prove/claim middle classness. So, the questionnaire has itself had limitations by focusing on income only. However knowing our culture I have asked the Women Ward Commissioners to explain their income/class position, probed to see how they positioned themselves in social groups. According to their analysis I classify 18 out of 20 as middle-class. One as lower middle-class (she comes from a Hindu schedule caste family), one rich, (she has claimed that, as well as her range of income is also quite high, more than 1,00,000 per month). Methodological error may have happened when we ask women about their income status, as most Bengali women (including these Women Ward Commissioners) have no cash income, they achieve/share it from/with their fathers, husbands, sons. Usually male members do not disclose their income to their counterparts, unless it is one salaried source.

¹² Research on urban employed women, also finds 'housewifery' as a 'sacred duty'. While men get easy relief from house-work/familial responsibilities when they are employed, specially if they earn regularly (see, Islam, 1998)

¹³ Some of the senior ward commissioners commented on the activities, dress and behaviours of young commissioners as not 'proper'. A local news paper had also portrayed 5 young Women Ward Commissioners as 'immoral', as they work next to men in public. Two of the 'accused' commissioners insisted me to bring this issue in daylight to prevent that their heartiest commitment and feelings for public might get misinterpreted

¹⁴ While I was visiting them to interview, I was amazed to see the patience, hospitality and energy of Women Ward Commissioners who were carefully listening to the public till midnight (11pm). *"They said these people trust me as their 'ghorer meya' (a daughter of their own family), I cannot avoid them."*

¹⁵ Please see, the ordinance on XXVI of 1997, BD and Bangladesh Gazette, additional number-22.

¹⁶ In the rural context 12,828 women had achieved the space to be elected.

¹⁷ Women Ward Commissioners of Dhaka City Corporation pointed towards one of the Ward Commissioners, who is a women but directly elected, she is working with confidence, her efficiency and sincerely is acknowledged by all. So, they challenged, if they were getting the same status, they could have worked like her. In an interview with this particular women this is also got confirmed by her, she said, *'if I can do it any other sincere woman could have done it. The fact is simple, the system is not ours.'*

¹⁸ As there is no women in the position of decision making in local urban governance at the moment. So individual's list could not made possible.