

## **The Role of Women in Decision Making Process of Local Government in Bangladesh: A Study of Rangpur City Corporation.**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the age of modernization , the fact has now been recognized without ensuring women participation, the sustainable development cannot be achieved. The present study was carried out on Rangpur City Corporation. The study is based on survey of Rangpur City Corporation where 80 people are randomly selected from the total population of that city corporation. Both Qualitative and quantitative data has been collected through a structured questionnaire .Outcome of this research shows that there is a crucial need for a gender specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and development planning .After analyzing data it is proved that the local governance women representatives have been able to exercise their new roles in more constructive ways. However, unequal participation of women and men in the government planning acts as a barrier to ensure good decision maker at local government.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

The development of a country depends upon the maximum utilization of her people, both men and women. In Bangladesh, though women comprise nearly half of the total population but the status of women is much lower than that of men in every sectors of life (N. M. Zakir Hossain, 2015).

Women are identified with domestic life while politics is viewed as a male-dominated public activity that is typically masculine in nature. With the advancement of time, the fact has now been recognized without ensuring women development, the national development cannot be achieved. Women participation in politics plays a pivotal role in the general process of the advancement of women(Jahan and Momtaz,1997). 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. But despite the existence of reserved seats and a vibrant feminist movement, the political and administrative structure, culture and norms are gender biased(Nazneen, S. and Sultan, M., 2009). Though women constitute half of the total population of Bangladesh, their participation in both electoral and representation in politics is insignificant(Siddiqui Kamal, 1995 ). Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. 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 governments. Women role in decision-making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment. As a strategy of affirmative action for providing the structural framework for women participation in political decision-making and provided an opportunity to bring women to the center of local development and develop new grass-roots level leadership.This paper is an attempt to explore the status of women participation in decision making by observing their participation in the Rangpur City Corporation. This research was also designed to identify the factors that hinder women participation. At the same time this study gives some suggestion in order to increase women empowerment in decision making process at local government.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The prime objective of this research attempts to focus the real scenario of female ward councilor of reserved seat in decision making process at local government. The specific objectives of the study are given below in terms of women participation:

- I. To identify the socio-economic conditions of the elected women in the study area and
- II. To identify the barriers and complications for women representatives in their performing duties .

## **III. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

There are a number of literatures available where intellectuals and researchers have discussed the activities, present structure, function and shortcomings of the Local Government institution (LGIs) of Bangladesh. Based on those findings, a brief literature review has been presented here.

*'Local Governance in Bangladesh Leading Issues and Major Challenges'* by Kamal Siddiqui, the issues of the local government has been discussed in a wider sense like the tiers of the local government, the relationship between elected officials and their bureaucratic counterparts, role of local government in land management etc. Different types of participation were discussed in this chapter but no legal bindings were mentioned here. The formation, functions, duties of the local government standing committees were also described in this book. This book mostly touches my topic but not fully. In the article "Women in Urban Local Governance: A Bangladesh Case Study", was done by Nazmunessa Mahtab. Information was gathered from 15 out of 30 women in the reserved seats from all city corporations. The author explained the power of the elected women, their political agenda, participation and problems faced. But women participation in decision making process is ignored here. "The Direct Participation of Women in Local Level Elections: A Review on City Corporations Elections" is a thesis that was done by Nazneen Islam Khan in 2006 from the University of Dhaka. The study had focused the power and politics of the elected women in quota system, their political agenda, participation, responsibilities, performance and problems that the elected women representative had to face. But the author failed to clarify the barriers of the women in the decision making process. In the book 'Local Government in Bangladesh' by Kamal Siddiqui, much important information was found about the evolution of the local government in Bangladesh. The changes made to these institutions in the past in respect of its structure, functions and duties are discussed very well. The issue of inadequate finance, lack of budget provision and personnel(s) in the Union Parishad are mentioned and suggestions given for more active role for the women to play as local government is the most important tier for decentralizing political empowerment. Salma Khan, In her book *"Institutional Mechanism to Strengthen Women's Role in Decision-making"* discussed about women's role in decision-making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment. The elected female ward councilor's participation in local government bodies remains generally insignificant, as they are not given any specific duties. The absence of operational guidelines and terms of reference for female elected representatives, the limited capacity of the female elected representatives to operate in public institutions of this nature, the lack of awareness over their roles and responsibilities, the systematic discrimination and biases by male elected colleagues are seen as factors impeding women's meaningful participation in local government.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:**

The present study is exploratory in nature. Both quantitative and qualitative approach have applied to here. In this research data and information are mainly collected from the primary source through field survey in the Rangpur City Corporation. Secondary data such as books, journals, newspaper reports, articles (published and unpublished) had been studied with care to develop possible explanation. The researcher has developed a standard questionnaire in order to understand the real scenario from the selected respondent. The sample size of the study is 80. In the study 10 male and 10 female ward members / councilors have been randomly selected among them in the consideration of their age, experience etc. In addition, 60 local people have also been chosen for understand their view on the people's representative. The questionnaire of the study was both open ended and close ended. It was also pre-tested in the field before finalization. Observation method was again used in this research.

### **5. Theoretical framework:**

The theoretical framework is given below with brief discussion. These are

#### **5.1 Operational Definition of Women:**

A "woman" is a mature female human being, as analogized to men, a grownup male, and a teenager, a female child. The term woman used to entitle biological sex differences, ethnic gender role divisions, or both (Wikimedia .2017). Women constitute about half of the total population of the country provided with by 2011 primary data source of the BIBS. Apart from these domestic accomplishments, they are contributing significantly to the domestic economy. Bangladesh is one of the first developing countries to establish a

Ministry of Women’s Affairs in 1978, three years after the First World Conference on Women in Mexico. In spite of these attainments, the popular of women in Bangladesh have yet to be empowered to join actively in the social, cultural, economic, and political life of the country. Gender discrimination is common in all domains and at all levels although. The Constitution of Bangladesh [Article 27, 28(1), 28(2), 28(3), and 65(3)] guarantees equal rights to all citizens clearly incorporated provisions for equal status of women. The strategies and programs of the Government, NGOs, and other institutions do not satisfactorily discourse the requirement for womenempowerment( ADB . 2001).

**5.2 Empowerment:**

Empowerment means giving power & authority. So, by women empowerment, we mean giving power and authority to the women. The process of empowerment requires transformation of structures of sub-ordination, control over material and intellectual resources, gaining decisions, making authority and reduction of gender inequality. Vanessa Griffin has identify, some components to illustrate what the term empowerment indicates (Griffin, Vanessa .1987).



Empowerment means a practice to establish control over resources to obtain ability and opportunity to participate in decision-making process and its implementation.

**5.3 Local Government:**

Local government is basically an organized socio-political entity with a feeling of oneness. By definition, local government means an intra-sovereign governmental nit within the sovereign state dealing mainly with local affairs, administered by local authorities subordinate to the state government. In political terms, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political sub-division of a nation, state, or other major political unit. In the performance of its functions, it acts as the agent of the state. In other words, the local government is an integral part of the political mechanism for governance in a country. Then, as body corporate with juristic person, it represents a legal concept( Muttalib, M. A. and Khan, Md. Akbar Ali . 1983).

**V. FINDING OF THE STUDY AND DATA ANALYSIS:**

The women representatives think that women should come to politics willingly. They also think that political empowerment will be effective if women come to politics. Women are enjoying exercising political power properly for the purpose of development. women participation should be increased in the Local government . Women empowerment will be possible if every kind of political discrimination is removed. From this point of view, the study wants to know the level of participation in terms of their (women members) experience.

**Table .1: Experience of Women memberin participation at local election:**

Category	Women members	Percentage
First time participation in LG politics	8	80%
Previously participation in LG politics	2	20%
Total	10	100%

Source: [Field survey].

Table -1 show that 8 women (80%) members have participated in first time in the election and rests of other(20%) were re-elected in election. Most of the female members have been elected for the first time acknowledged that the training is important and necessity for them. The training has developed their understanding of the role and function of city corporation , and improved basic managerial skills.

**Chart -1 : Opinion of the Respondent Regarding the Present Situation of Local Politics**

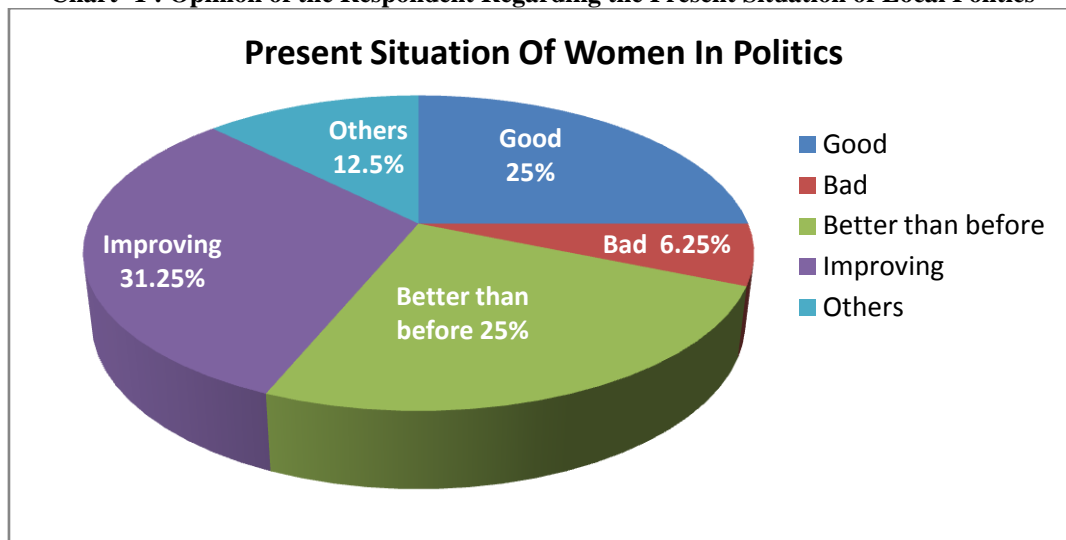
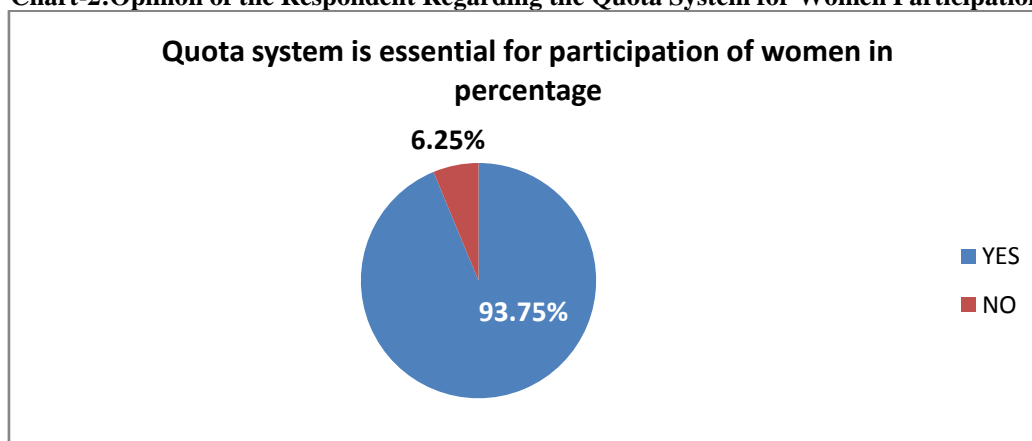


Chart -1 demonstrate thatfrom the local people interviewed and the elected representatives interviewed we find out the present situation of women in politics. Therefore 20 respondents (25%) opined that the present situation is good, 6.25% respondents (5) mentioned that the situation is bad, 25% respondents mentioned that the situation is better than before ,31.25%respondents mentioned that the situation is improving at women in politics. Restof the 10 12.5% respondents ( 10) mentioned others about that.

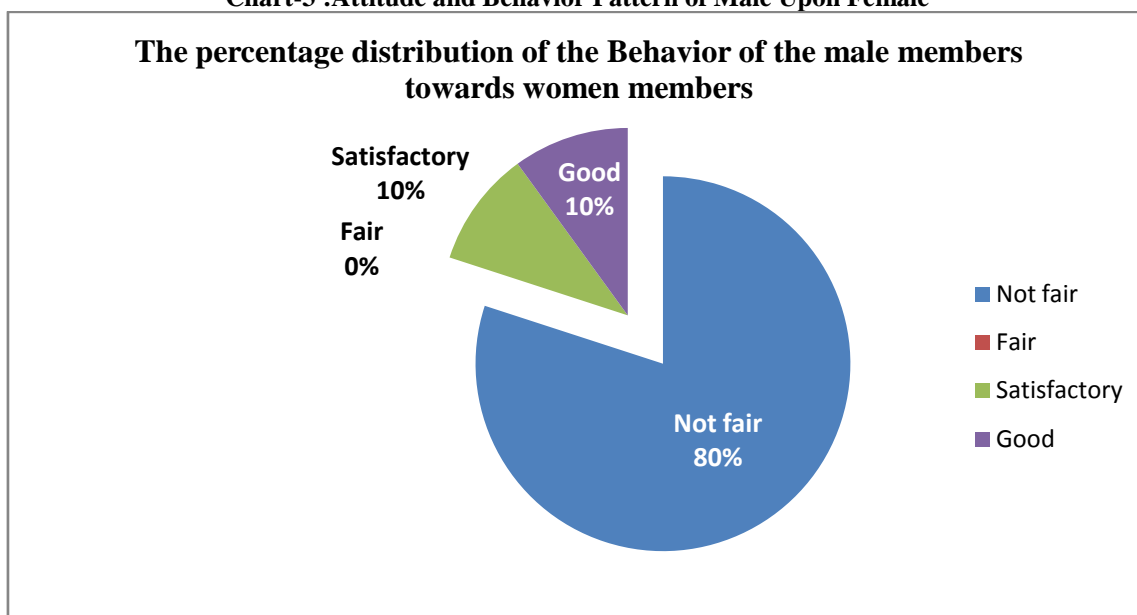
**Chart-2:Opinion of the Respondent Regarding the Quota System for Women Participation**



The respondent of the local people and the elected representatives expressed that they could be the part of development but opportunities are limited due to limitation and variousbarriers and problems. Therefore, 75 respondent (93.75%) strongly believe that Quota system is essential for participation of women and restof the 5(6.25%) women mentioned that quota system is not essential for all sector.

Female ward councilors of reserve seat have got some unexpected experiences. Our patriarchal society does not want to see women as a political leader. They always try to engage them with domestic works. Some of the female ward councilor shared their bitter experiences, such as ‘‘when I go to meeting , I don’t any seat in front of the Mayor. If I seat in front of them . They (male) suppose to tell directly without any hesitation, seatbehind us. No need to seat here . You just see the meeting. You arenot appropriate person to do the work . Because you came from reserveseat .’’

Chart-3 :Attitude and Behavior Pattern of Male Upon Female



Women representatives who had given their opinion regarding the attitude and behaviors of the male counterparts towards the women representatives are being stated here. The study find that 80% respondents informed that their behaviors towards women were “not fair”. 10% women respondents had told “satisfactory”, and rest of them (10%) respondents had mentioned, “good” and other mentioned 0% “fair”. However, these women members often encountered discrimination from the male members.

Decision making capabilities in political sector is most important for women in sustainable development. Female ward councilors of reserve seat are the basic unit of democracy and they can ensure empowerment from urban local governance as RCC. But the present status shows us different picture that is not positive. As a researcher we think that if we want the proper empowerment, we should start it from local level of government.

Table .2 :Conception of the Respondent Regarding the Study of Women as Human Being

Category	Male Respondents	%	Female Respondents	%	Local People Respondents	%
A human being	3	30%	2	20%	5	8.33%
A woman	2	20%	6	60%	40	66.66%
Others Treat Both As A Woman And As A Human Being Depending Upon Their Need And Circumstances	5	50%	2	20%	15	25%
Total	10	100%	10	100%	60	100%

Source:[ Field survey].

Table -2 ,Shows the conception of the respondents regarding the study of women as human being.Among them 10 male respondent 30% expressed a human being, 20% expressed a woman, 50% expressed others treat both as a woman and as a human being depending upon their need and circumstances.Among them 10 female respondent 20% expressed a human being,60% expressed a woman, 20%expressed others treat both as a woman and as a human being depending upon their need and circumstances.Among them 60 local people respondent 8.33% expressed a human being,66.66% expressed a woman, 25% expressed others treat both as a woman and as a human being depending upon their need and circumstances.

**Chart-4:Opinion of the Respondent about the Main Barriers for Participation of Women**

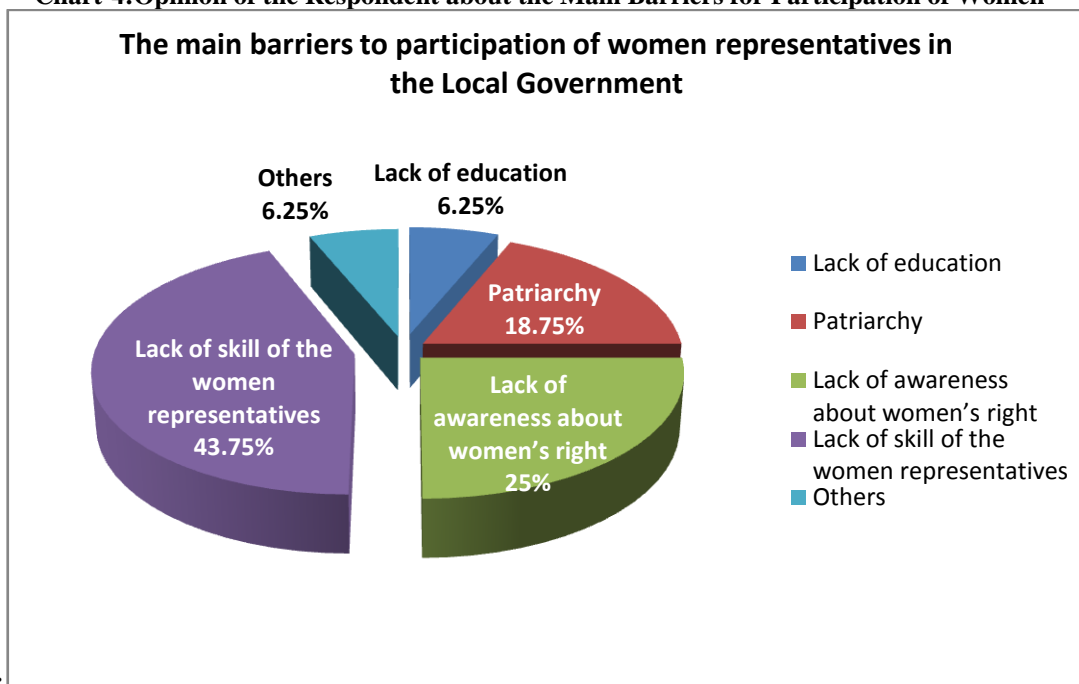


Chart-4 shows that the main barriers for the women representative in discharging their duties while in office.5 respondents (6.25%) had said that lack of education is the major barriers for less number of participation of women in local government. Education is the strongest factor influencing women's control of their own destiny. Women are furthermore poor in a scene because of lower educational achievements and the prevalence of social norms that severely restrict their freedom of movement in the public place. Therefore they do not show interest in participating in local government activities.

15 respondents (18.75%) reported that patriarchy system of Bangladesh was one of the major factor. Patriarchy as a system, an ideology and practice impacts in different ways on the lives of women wherever they are. Patriarchal attitudes become so embedded that they are taken as normal. The patriarchal society enforces rules 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 compared to men. Although women have equal political rights to participate as voters and representatives, in reality they can be actively discouraged to do so.

20 respondents (25%) thought that lack of awareness about the women's right which is ensured by the constitution, was the one of the main reason for less participation. They explained that priority must be given to monitoring the status, conditions and rights of women.35 (43.75%) respondents thought that Lack of skill of the women representatives ,they do not show interest in participating in local government activities.Rest of the 5 (13.88%) respondents could not specify any particular reasons.

**Table .3:Opinion of the Respondent regarding the Removal Approach**

Category	Number	Women Respondent	%	Male respondent	%
Remove quota system	15	5	12.5%	10	25%
Specific duties to be given to Women members	10	5	12.5%	5	12.5%
Free from political influence	25	20	50%	5	12.5%
Active participation as an elected representatives	17	2	5%	15	37.5%
Equal distribution of work	13	8	20%	5	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>40</b>	

Source: [Field survey].

Table -3 demonstrate that in reply to the question “what is your opinion regarding the removal of barriers of the women representatives.” 5 women (12.5 %) and 10 male (25%) members are in favor of

Government removal of the quota system. It is mentionable that the implementation of quota system in Bangladesh (1997) has been regarded as a historical step, not only to increase the number of women in formal politics but also when it comes to political empowerment for women in the region.

5 women (12.5%) and 5 male (12.5%) reported that specific duties to be given to women members, so that women member can meaningfully participate in all type of functions. Roles and responsibilities of the women members should be clearly defined in the manuals and ordinance of local government. 20 women (50%) and 5 male (12.5%) suggested for the local body to be free from political influence. It is stated that, the elections to City Corporation are technically non-party based. Active participation as elected representatives is important. 2 women (5%) and 15 male (37.5%) representatives had emphasized the fact that when women are directly elected by the constituency can also legitimizes their right to act on behalf of other women. Rest of the 8 women (20%) and 5 male (12.5%) asked for equal distribution of work and responsibilities. They had claimed that work should be fairly distributed among the male and female members and this be incorporated in the manual.

## **VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS:**

### **7.1 Recommendation(s):**

Several recommendations have been given here for further advancement of the local government through women empowerment in the decision making process.

- Female ward councilors should be given various/ several training the issues of women empowerment, the impact of globalization, the role of media, modern technology etc so that they can perform their duties effectively. Policy makers have to give their social status in which they do not hesitate to perform their duties.
- Transparency and accountabilities should be monitored by the government. A **Monitoring Center** may be established in the City Corporation. Print and electronic media can also play a vital role to improve the quality of women members of the City Corporation.
- Women members are elected from the three wards but are getting allocation from one ward. For this reason their roles sometimes become controversial among the general people. Government should take initiative to resolve this matter.
- Government may be taken some initiatives such as gender awareness training, gender sensitization for attitude change among all members. The orientation should be arranged immediately after they are being elected. Coordination between government and non government initiatives should also be addressed.
- Initiatives should be taken into account to inform people on underlying laws, ordinances, policy and public affairs circular related with City Corporation function through the national broadcasting system.
- Women member's decision on local issues should be given equal value in times of taking any decisions or in policy interventions which will enhance their confidence level.
- To increase the number of women in decision making sector the quantity of women representatives need to be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of participation.

Finally it can be said that provision of inclusion of direct election of women local representatives, have created a new possibility for the women in grass root level to participate in the decision-making process in the only democratic local institution like City Corporation.

### **7.2 Conclusions:**

Local government would never be effective unless it is empowered politically, socially and economically. Local government is the most vital vehicle in the evolution of the democratic process and participatory development. After six months of extensive field work for data collection and comprehensive study and review of literature and an extensive and sincere data analysis, it was possible for me to come to the conclusion. After all findings and analysis, the researcher is mentioning here some significant results which are the actual outcome of the present study. In the Rangpur City Corporation, it is evident that women's voices were not heard and options were not accepted. Moreover male colleagues showed a negative attitude towards women members. Participation of female ward councillor of reserve seat is not positive for making decision freely. It is much unexpected situation for female ward councillor of reserve seat that they are neglected by male ward councillor in all spheres of decision making sectors, especially in financial sectors. These are made in consideration of the basic problems at the field level faced by the women representatives as well the local people. In Rangpur City Corporation, women have very low political status as compared to men. The study has identified the barriers of the women representatives in decision making process at local government. Despite the overall progress made in narrowing gender gaps, the position of women in RCC remains unequal compared to that of men. It is clear that there is a vital need for a gender-specific development paradigm into all areas of policy making and planning so that women's needs can be met and their participation to be ensured. As a step towards achieving women empowerment, the elected reserve seats for women helps to promote participation and women's access to the decision making process numerically and gradually, though not practically much

ensured. A lack of decision making space undermines the integration of local people's priorities, in particular women's interests that may also undermine local government legitimacy in the long run. This is why research is imperative and essential in order to get the participation of women in decision making process enhanced at City Corporation. Environment of politics of Bangladesh for women today is much different from that of the past. Throughout the history of political relationships women has always been involved in politics, although their participation has been obscured. Now a day, women's active political participation is appearing at an ever-increasing rate.

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