In 2009, the Royal Norwegian Embassy, India signed an agreement with Unifem, now UN Women, South Asia Regional Office to initiate a three-year programme entitled ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’. The programme aims to empower elected women representatives in local governance to make public policy and resource allocation patterns responsive to women’s human rights. The programme covers 5 countries of South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan). In India, the programme is co-owned by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India.

The Programme has been designed with the spirit to capture the specific issues and challenges with regard to women’s political empowerment that each country experiences. This is a demand driven programme that seeks to understand and address issues of women’s participation in local governance from the grassroots perspective. Generation of a body of knowledge on women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia is one of the key outcomes of the programme.

There are two main purposes of the research component of the programme –

(a) To build a body of knowledge on women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia – this is especially significant since no on-going programme on women’s political empowerment in the South Asia region is working at the grassroots level – down at the level of the village councils. This being the value addition of the programme in the region, and there being very little existing policy literature which analyses governance at its fundamental grassroots institution; this programme provides an opportunity to develop innovative and unique literature based on experiences from the programme on strengthening village councils – the structure of local governance closest to ordinary citizens – to enable women as equal and fair participants and decision makers at the local level.

(b) As we build this body of knowledge, the data gathered from field experiences will in turn help to inform programme implementation and fine tune the intervention strategies as the programme progresses. Such a large and complex programme is, by nature, dynamic, and hence useful feedback in terms of baseline data, focused studies such as barriers and promoters of women’s political leadership and governance in India and South Asia throughout the course of the programme will be useful for the programme interventions.

UN Women

UN Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their rights worldwide.

UN Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. Its stands behind women’s equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women’s leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women’s economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system’s work in advancing gender equality.

Disclaimer:
The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.
Towards Gender Responsive Governance in Bangladesh

A Mapping Study

Prepared by

Dr. Reena Marwah and Ms. Jeba Lovely
The mapping study initiated by UN Women aims to develop an understanding of the progress of women in local politics in Bangladesh through interventions undertaken by Government, donors, development partners and civil society organizations. This will help identify the gaps where UN Women has a comparative advantage to undertake interventions for the improvement of women’s participation in local governance in Bangladesh.

Women’s political participation improves democracy by providing public space for discussing human rights and women’s empowerment. It makes it easier for women to realize their political, civil, economic and social rights. While there has been progress globally, there is still a long way to go. Women’s political participation is likely to increase accountability to women which is fundamental prerequisites for gender equality and genuine democracy. Creating this accountability calls for many changes in the governance issues – that includes building leadership of women, creating spaces for participation and decision-making, advocating for special measures to ensure participation of women, mobilisation of women’s groups on access to local resources, sensitising the informal justice system etc. It will also require systematic advocacy for gender responsive budgeting and planning.

Women’s opportunities and public participation have gone through significant changes in Bangladesh in recent decades. Large numbers of women are now members of local government councils which are the hubs for rural and urban development. At the policy level, government has played leadership roles in many policy issues with strong gender equality agenda, e.g., the National Policy for Women’s Advancement, the 6th Five Year plan and the gender responsive budget initiative under the Annual Budget and Planning exercise. Women in Bangladesh have shown gradual improvement in almost all sectors of life based on their own expertise. Leadership by and participation of women have grown in all sectors although the proportion is still low as percentage of population.

With the aim of making further improvements, I do hope that this report and the subsequent initiatives by UN Women will pave the way for making positive changes in the lives of women in Bangladesh.

Neal Walker
UN Resident Coordinator
Bangladesh
Introduction

This mapping study of ongoing initiatives in Governance in Bangladesh has been supported by UN Women in 2011. It helps to identify key possible areas for its intervention to promote women’s political leadership within the larger scheme of initiatives in the country which aim to promote gender responsive governance.

The Mapping Report offers useful insights about the context and dynamics of women’s political participation in the Bangladesh. By providing a succinct overview of the system of Governance and legislations/policies in Bangladesh, the Mapping Report analyses the challenges faced by women in politics and the next generation issues for the reservation system in Bangladesh. These challenges are underpinned by patriarchal institutions, lack of resources and effective avenues for women to enter politics in large numbers and constraints of training modules. These compounds the challenge of marginalisation faced by women leaders in the political set up, even after progressive electoral reforms (including quotas of women in parliament and local bodies) since 1997. The report reveals the urgent need for engaging with men and for negotiating political space for women.

South Asia, especially Bangladesh, is undergoing a large scale experiment in grassroots democracy and one where women’s political leadership is critical. The Report underscores the niche for UN Women in Bangladesh to engage and promote women’s effective participation through advocacy, networking, research and capacity building; recommendations that are crucial to promote women’s participation in the political leadership and governance. The recommendations will offer entry points for UN Women’s South Asia Programme to support women as effective leaders and champions of good governance. At the same time, the Report provides a way forward for enhancing women’s political participation and leadership, as the country continues to affirm its commitment to strengthening women at the local governance structures.

UN Women would like to thank the Government of Bangladesh, UN Agencies, various developmental agencies and civil society actors for providing insights and concrete recommendations for promoting women’s leadership in Bangladesh. We would also like to thank Ms. Jeba Khan and Prof. Reena Marwah for taking on this important study. Thanks are also due to our Bangladesh Programme Office and to the Regional Programme on, ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’ for providing support in the completion of the mapping exercise.

Anne F. Stenhammer
Representative and Regional Programme Director
UN Women South Asia Sub Regional Office, India
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Executive Summary

A team of two consultants engaged by UN Women has undertaken a mapping study of ongoing initiatives in Governance in Bangladesh. The objective of the mapping study is to develop an understanding of the progress of women in local politics in Bangladesh through interventions undertaken by Government, donors, development partners and civil society organizations. The purpose is to identify the gaps where UN Women has a comparative advantage to undertake interventions for the improvement of women’s participation in local governance in Bangladesh. The ultimate objective of the study is to develop a comprehensive proposal for further funding for a programme on promoting women’s political leadership and governance in Bangladesh.

Methodology

The team, in addition to undertaking a literature review, met with UN agencies, Government officials in line Ministries, international and national NGOs and other stakeholders in Bangladesh and interviewed 22 key personnel including the State Minister and Standing Committee Chair of MoWCA.

After the desk review and interview process, UN Women organized a dissemination workshop to disseminate the findings of the Mapping Study. This workshop was held on Sunday, July 31, 2011 at the Lake Shore Hotel in Dhaka. The Chief Guest of the workshop was Honorable Deputy Speaker of Bangladesh Jatiya Sangsad Col (Rtd). Shawkat Ali. The Special Guest was Mr. Neal Walker, Resident Coordinator of UNDP. The workshop participants numbering more than 50 included representatives of development agencies, civil society organizations, government officials, academia and journalists. The participants shared their concerns and suggestions during the open discussions which followed the presentation by the senior consultant. ‘The Way Forward’ for UN Women Bangladesh Program Office has been constructed on the basis of the process described above.1

Justification and Rationale for the Programme on Strengthening Women’s Participation and Leadership in Local Governance in Bangladesh

The UN Women SARO has initiated in 2010, a regional programme, ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’. This programme that has already been rolled out in India, Pakistan and Bhutan identifies the importance of transforming the governance frameworks and policies in South Asia to deliver better outcomes for women. One of the key elements in this programme is to support efforts to effect change in the macro level policy, legal and regulatory frameworks. The focus is on creating an evidence based advocacy base through research in gender in governance that will target specific policy processes and outcomes that impede women’s participation at the local level.

1 The seminar was the result of the two week desk review and FGDs undertaken by senior consultant Dr. Reena Marwah and Ms. Jeba Lovely, national consultant.
In India and in Pakistan, UN Women is working together with other UN agencies to ensure that the United Nations entities work in close cooperation/understanding with one another (MOUs have been signed for this purpose) for enriching the outputs and outcomes.

Thus, it is within the context of the UN Women-SARO programme that the same is initiated in Bangladesh at the earliest, given the following points which merit urgency:

- Achieve the outputs and goal of the 5 year regional programme (2010-2015), i.e. to scale up the learnings from India, Bhutan, and Pakistan to Bangladesh. As an exit strategy, the programme will institutionalise the above functions in a South Asia Regional Centre of Excellence for Gender Responsive Governance by 2015.
- UNDP is engaged in strengthening governance at all levels of governance and there exists tremendous scope for UN Women to play a complimentary role in this context.
- Willingness of the present government of Bangladesh (elected for the term 2008-13) to strengthen women’s political leadership in the context of the National Women’s Development Policy 2011.
- 19 elected women parliamentarians, among whom several are responsible for portfolios through which they can make a significant change.
- Reserved seats for women in the sub-district (Upazila level) and local level of governance (Union Parishad).
- Election Commission (EC) set 2020 for all political parties to have women in at least one-third of all party committee posts.
- MoWCA’s National Plan of Action, to be finalized by December 2011 (based on the recent Women’s Advancement Policy), for creating economic opportunities for women as well as for addressing the issue of feminization of poverty through engendering safety nets.
- The civil society organizations are also active in the development sector.

A. Context Analysis

This section provides a framework of the system of governance in Bangladesh and also delineates the supportive legislations and policies.

A1. System of Governance

Bangladesh is a two-tier parliamentary democracy with a unicameral central legislature. The central legislature/Parliament is elected through direct elections based on universal adult franchise for a five year term. The Prime Minister leads the government and is the head of the party/coalition that forms the majority of the Parliament. The Parliament has 345 seats including 45 reserved seats for women (being enhanced to 50), occupied by members elected from single-member constituencies for a 5 year term. The President is the constitutional head of state but this is mainly a ceremonial post elected by the Parliament.

The country is divided into seven Administrative Divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet, and Rangpur (added in 2010). Each Division is placed under a Divisional Commissioner and is further divided into Districts (Zila) headed by District Commissioners. The Districts are further divided into Thanas or sub-districts, and Thanas are divided into Unions or rural micro-areas, which are divided into Grams or villages. Governance at the local level in rural areas is entrusted to Gram Parishads, Union Parishads, Thana/Upazila Parishads and Zila Parishads, while in urban areas it is entrusted to Pourashavas/Municipalities (for which three classifications exist based on size of population) and City Corporations (in four of the largest municipalities) which have been given Metropolitan status – Dhaka, Khulna, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

A2. Supportive Legislations and Policies

The Constitution of Bangladesh in 1972 stated that women’s rights in all spheres of national life must be ensured. Article 9 states that the state shall
encourage local government institutions composed of representatives of the areas concerned, and in such institutions special representation shall be given as far as possible to peasants, workers and women.

**National**

While quotas for women in the Parliament were introduced in 1972, reserving 15 of the 315 seats in Parliament for women (to be filled through indirect elections by the directly elected 300 members), in 1978 a presidential promulgation extended reservation for women to a total of 30 seats and the number of seats in Parliament was also increased to 330. This promulgation lapsed in 1987, was reincorporated in 1990, and lapsed again in 2001. **In 2004, a constitutional amendment raised the number of seats in Parliament to 345 from 300, and the quota for women was re-introduced, raising the total number of seats reserved for women to 45 from 30.**

**Local**

The **Local Government Ordinance of 1976** was the first ordinance to be issued with a provision for increasing women’s representation in local governance. It established a three-tier local governance system, comprising the Union Parishad at the union level, the Thana Parishad at the thana level and the Zila Parishad at the district level, and provided for the reservation of two seats for women members who would be nominated to the ten member Union Parishad.

The **Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance of 1983** raised the number of seats reserved for women in the Union Parishad from two to three, although their entry still depended on nomination.

The **Local Government (Union Parishads) (Amendment) Act of 1993** introduced a system of indirect election for the three seats exclusively reserved for women members in place of the earlier system of nomination. The women members on reserved seats were now to be elected by the other members of the Parishad.

The **Local Government (Union Parishads) (Second Amendment) Act of 1997** increased the number of seats in the Union Parishad to twelve and kept the number of seats reserved for women at three. However, it introduced direct elections for the three reserved seats, along the same lines as the elections to the general category seats. Additionally, the Act divides the union into nine wards for the election of the nine general category seats (one seat from each ward). For the three reserved seats, the union is divided into three wards, each of which is formed by grouping together three of the nine wards for general category seats.

Following this, several circulars have been released by the government with the intention to assign more responsibilities to women in committees by including them in bigger numbers and giving them the chair of committees on particular issues such as primary education, old age benefits etc. Committees such as the Village Social Development Committee are also headed by women, and deal with issues such as collection of information on births and deaths, education, health awareness, family planning, violence etc.

**A3. Women in Politics: Assessing the Current Scenario**

Women’s opportunities and public participation have gone through significant changes in Bangladesh in recent decades. At the policy level, the government has brought in a strong gender equality agenda, e.g., the National Policy for Women’s Advancement, the revised National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR-II), gender responsive budget etc. Several women occupy positions of distinction as Ministers and parliamentarians as well as chairs of Parliamentary Standing committees and vice chairs at the upazila level.

This change is visible mainly after 1997, when women could be directly elected to the Union Parishads. Women constitute 18.55% of the strength of the current Parliament of Bangladesh, i.e. 64 of the...
345 members are women, although the elected representatives were only 19 (In the 2008 elections, 59 women contested – 19 were elected). At the national level, in addition to the Prime Minister and leader of the Opposition Party the government has five women Ministers, viz. foreign minister, minister for home affairs, minister for women and child affairs, minister of agriculture and labor minister. Several others are in positions of decision making. In addition 45 seats, (now being increased to 50) are the reserved seats for which the women parliamentarians are selected by their male counterparts.

As the Union Parishad remains a significant tier of governance it is important to briefly review the recent amendments. The Local Government (Union Parishads) (Amendment) Act of 1993 introduced a system of indirect election for three seats exclusively reserved for women members in place of the earlier system of nomination. The women members on reserved seats were to be elected by the other members of the Parishad.

The Local Government (Union Parishads) (Second Amendment) Act of 1997 increased the number of seats in the Union Parishad to twelve and kept the number of seats reserved for women at three. However, it introduced direct elections for the three reserved seats, along the same lines as the elections to the general category seats. Additionally, the Act divides the union into nine wards for the election of the nine general category seats (one seat from each ward). For the three reserved seats, the union is divided into three wards, each of which is formed by grouping together three of the nine wards for general category seats. Thus, while one male elected representative is responsible for one ward, one female member (reserved seat) is responsible for three wards. With responsibilities not being clearly defined the women continue to be at the periphery in the structure of local governance. Many of them secure the seat as they are teachers or spouses of influential males or in rare cases empowered women through the network of women NGOs.

Thus, the imperative for meaningful intervention by the international community, the Government and the civil society towards the ultimate realization of gender equality remains, especially as Bangladesh continues to rank a low 108 out of 109 countries in the Gender Empowerment Measure (UNDP HDR 2009).²

A4. What Prevents Women from Entering the Political Space in Bangladesh?

The most recent elections conducted in Bangladesh in 2008 saw women form 18.55% of the strength of the current Parliament of Bangladesh, i.e. 64 of the 345 members are women.³ However, for the 45 seats women are not elected but selected by their male counterparts. The reasons are given below:

**Absence of an enabling environment for women’s political participation:** Social reluctance to accept women’s leadership and non-cooperation by members of political parties, concerned representatives and functionaries contribute to women staying away from politics.

**Patriarchal structures and bias against women’s participation in the public sphere** reinforce gender inequality in governance by limiting women’s access to the resources and means of participating in decision-making. Women find themselves disadvantaged as compared to men in social institutions such as the family, schools, religious institutions etc. Lack of family support and restrictions on women’s mobility also impede their entry into politics.

**Women lack political linkages and contacts** and these are of critical importance in being able to secure power.

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² The GEM is calculated on the basis of seats in parliament held by women (% of total), ratio of estimated female to male earned income, Female professional and technical workers (% of total), women in ministerial positions (% of total).

³ http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/2023_A.htm
Besides, women’s dependence on their male family members in addition to restrictions on their mobility and social interactions diminishes their ability to develop such linkages.

**Lack of economic resources** is another obstacle to women’s participation, as most women candidates do not have a source of sustainable income, property or other assets and were generally dependent on their husbands or other male relatives for financial support.

**Lack of education and training** for the successful discharge of functions also present important barriers to women’s political participation. Besides, women are also hampered by their lack of political experience, familiarity with formal institutions and their functioning.

**Security concerns** throughout the election process, especially during campaigning, and during tenure is another barrier identified to women’s political participation in Bangladesh. Violence, sexual harassment/molestation in public, and threats from fundamentalist religious and social groups opposed to the participation of women, as well as the fear of the same, compound the problems faced by women who wish to contest elections.

A5. Barriers to Women’s Effective Participation in Local Governance

- 45 seats reserved for women out of 345 in which they are selected or nominated, not directly elected. Women members of parliament are often responsible for constituencies they do not belong to and thus find it difficult to relate to them. The men often describe these women colleagues as mere ‘ornaments.’ With low levels of literacy, especially among women\(^4\) and no minimum criteria for educational attainment required of contesting candidates, these selected women MPs fail to participate in the debates and discussions.

- While the reservations for women under the 1976, 1983 and 1993 ordinances increased women’s representation in government bodies at the local level, it did not have much bearing on their participation because their entry depended upon nomination, and later indirect election, due to which they lacked the support base of a constituency. This diminished their legitimacy to govern as compared to those representatives who had been elected by their constituencies. Moreover, the roles and responsibilities of the women on reserved seats were left undefined by all three Acts.

- The 1997 Local Government Act did not do much to spell out the specific roles of women, but it provided women on the reserved seats with greater legitimacy by introducing direct elections for them. However, these women were at a disadvantage as they had to cover three times the area to be covered by general category candidates, as three wards electing one general category seat each were combined to elect one reserved seat. This also limited the role of women elected on reserved seats, as they did not have a dedicated constituency – they functioned merely as additional representatives. In some cases, representatives elected on reserved seats had to obtain permission from those elected on general seats before implementing development plans or policies.

- It has been found that women’s functions have by and large remained very limited in the Union Parishads, due to resistance from male colleagues and the discrimination emerging from such resistance. Also, women’s knowledge regarding financial issues of the Parishads was inadequate, and their opinions were often sidelined in decision-making processes.

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\(^{4}\) According to Ms. Taleya Rahman of Democracy Watch, although there is 100% enrolment of girls at the primary level, at least 75% dropout by the age of 15. Interview held in Dhaka on July 22, 2011.
B. The Mapping Study: Responses from Stakeholders

The discussions with the representatives of Government, donors, organizations and institutions provided an overview of the position of women in politics. Despite the electoral reforms carried out in 1997, women continue to remain in the periphery of power. There is an urgent need for engaging with men and negotiating for political space for women. Women are increasing in numbers in local governance structures but their empowerment through provision of quotas is very limited. Training imparted to women at local levels by the women's associations and NGOs has been significant for enhancing social awareness, but training modules for political empowerment are largely ineffective.

B1. Interventions for Enhancing Women’s Political Participation and Leadership

The Government, UN agencies, donors, development agencies and civil society organizations are working through grassroot partners and women’s associations. Some of the significant initiatives being undertaken are outlined below.

Government

The Bangladesh Government’s NWPD 2011 envisages the empowerment of women in all political, social, administrative and economic spheres. In February 2011, the Election Commission (EC) set 2020 as the deadline for all political parties to have women in at least one-third of all party committee posts.

MOWCA is preparing a National Plan of Action, to be finalized by December 2011, for creating economic opportunities for women as well as for addressing the issue of feminization of poverty through engendering safety nets. The State Minister herself admitted to the imperative for strengthening women’s associations for social transformation that can ensue through women’s shared identity. The Government is also committed to strengthening women’s participation at the Upazila and the Union Parishad level. A training institute for the same purpose has been established.

The United Nations: Working with Government, Development Assistance Partners and Civil Society

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) proposed by the UN Millennium Summit of September 2000 affirmed the international community’s commitment to gender equality and women’s empowerment. The third of the MDGs addresses gender equality specifically. The UN system established a clear UNDAF management and accountability structure by identifying a UN convening agency per each area of cooperation responsible for coordinating the design and implementation of the UNDAF with the support of participating agencies and implementing partners. The seven areas of cooperation and the respective UN convening agencies for the period 2012-2016 for Bangladesh are outlined in Table 1.

UN Women SARO Programme – Expanding to Bangladesh

The UN Women SARO has initiated in 2010, a regional programme, ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in India and South Asia’.

UN Women Bangladesh Programme Office is working in close cooperation with the Regional office of UN Women in New Delhi. This programme to be initiated in Bangladesh will be enriched through the experience of the programme already rolled out in India, Pakistan and Bhutan. This programme identifies
Towards Gender Responsive Governance in Bangladesh

The importance of transforming the governance frameworks and policies in South Asia to deliver better outcomes for women. One of the key elements in this programme is to support efforts to effect change in the macro level policy, legal and regulatory frameworks. The focus is on creating an evidence based advocacy base through research on gender in governance that will target specific policy processes and outcomes that impede women’s participation at the local level.

In India and in Pakistan, UN Women is working together with other UN agencies to ensure that the United Nations entities work in close cooperation/understanding with one another (MOUs have been signed for this purpose) for enriching the outputs and outcomes. Similarly, UNDP resident coordinator has expressed willingness to include this programme of women’s political leadership under the United National Development Assistance Framework’s pillar of governance. UN agencies will work in consultation in Bangladesh within the framework of an MOU to achieve the outputs and goal of the 5 year regional programme (2010-2015), i.e. to scale up the learnings from India, Bhutan, and Pakistan to Bangladesh. As an exit strategy, the programme will institutionalise the above functions in a South Asia Regional Centre of Excellence for Gender Responsive Governance by 2015.

The rationale for rolling out the programme in Bangladesh stems from the fact that the present government of Bangladesh (elected for the term 2008-13) is committed to strengthen women’s political leadership in the context of the National Women’s Development Policy 2011. It is a good time for the government to work with UN agencies with national ownership.

Development Partners and Stakeholders – Working Both at the Policy Level and Making Interventions through National NGOs: Leveraging on the Networks Established at the Local Level

In addition to the United Nations entities, several international aid agencies are working in Bangladesh. While good governance has been a key component of the development discourse and country strategy for SDC, CIDA, DFID, USAID, Asia Foundation, NORAD/Royal Norwegian Embassy and DANIDA, the focus on enhancing women’s political participation and leadership is more recent; especially after the elections in 2008. Donors and aid agencies are making efforts

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Table 1: United Nations in Bangladesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNDP</th>
<th>UNICEF</th>
<th>UNFPA</th>
<th>WFP</th>
<th>UN Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governance and Human Rights</td>
<td>Social Services for Human Development</td>
<td>Gender Equality and Women’s Advancement</td>
<td>Food Security and Nutrition</td>
<td>Capacity building of ERs and GRB in 7 line Ministries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-poor Growth with Equity</td>
<td>Education and adolescent empowerment</td>
<td>Reproductive health for women and youth in Asia (RIHYA)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate Change, Environment, Disaster Risk Reduction and Response</td>
<td>Health and nutrition</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

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6 These are broad areas of work and the list is not an exhaustive one.
8 SDC has been working with government and NGOs for skill development and education.
9 CIDA earlier supported the Gender Fund; CIDA’s gender policy focused on promotion of women’s human rights encompassing human rights as well as enhanced participation in decision making (Interview with Ms. Tahera Jabeen, see Annexure for details).
to work through national and local level NGOs and women’s organizations towards advocacy and research on issues of women in local government.

**Civil Society - Catalysts of Change at the Local Level**

The NGO movement is a vibrant force in Bangladesh and has permeated the society in every sphere. Several of the NGOs have been registered in the early or mid 1990s. While microcredit and women’s economic empowerment have been crucially enmeshed in the NGO programmes, it is interesting to view the change in their mandate in accordance with the donor’s country strategy. Several women’s associations and *Mahila Samitis* emerged out of the need for combating violence against women and protecting women’s human rights. Thus most of the NGOs have moved from working for women’s social empowerment to economic empowerment and have in the last few years moved to working on issues of governance – both from the demand and supply side. Donors have worked with civil society partners to establish a Governance Coalition to address the growing demand for accountability and transparency in delivery of services. This coalition comprised of 43 NGO partners is working at the Upazila level in the divisions of Khulna and Rajshahi. Civil society organizations including NUK, Prip Trust, Democracy Watch, Steps for Development, Bangladesh Mahila Parishad to name a few are currently engaged in training women elected representatives in local bodies in both rural and urban areas.

However, despite the fact that significant progress has been made in this direction, the UN Women BPO has the space to negotiate with the government at all levels to strengthen policies and legal frameworks. The next section provides the details.

**C. The Way Forward – Potential for Intervention by UN Women**

The results of the desk review, the FGDs as well as the dissemination workshop point to the FGDs as well as the dissemination workshop point to the niche role for UN Women BPO especially in the following areas point to the role for UN Women.

The mapping study has brought out significant gaps in intervention and there is a tremendous opportunity for UN Women to engage at the national level, the zila level and the local level. UN Women guided by in depth research will take several initiatives to change the existing rules that limit women’s effective participation.

The areas in which UN women has the capacity and the mandate to make the change include the following:

**C1. Advocacy**

- Direct election system to be introduced in at least 100 reserved seats for women in the Parliament. These should be through direct elections and not through nominations.
- Roles, responsibilities and budgetary allocation for the reserved seat members should be ensured.
- Raising awareness of citizens about gender equality.
- Engaging with political parties for enhancing involvement of women.
- Promoting women’s participation in public institutions, i.e. Election Commission, Parliamentary Standing Committees, etc.
- Systematic change in laws and policies for enhancing women’s political participation and leadership in local governance.

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10 UN Women BPO organized a Dissemination workshop on July 31, 2011 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The feedback from the participants has been incorporated.

11 Feedback from participants at the UN Women “Dissemination of the Mapping study findings” seminar held in Dhaka, Bangladesh on July 31, 2011 have been incorporated.
C2. Networking

- Strengthening of women’s coalition – a Women’s Caucus for policy advocacy.
- Campaign, networking, lobbying with different stakeholders for ensuring men’s (male) awareness about women’s political rights and leadership.
- Creating synergies among the all current/ongoing women’s movements, identifying good examples/best practices and learning for effecting policy change.
- Coordinating civil society efforts for promoting women’s political participation.

C3. Research Issues

- Barriers to women’s effective participation.
- Enhancing effectiveness of training modules.
- Case studies and best practices from the region.
- Impact of women leaders in politics and as decision makers.
- Building research capacities of political parties and training institutes.

Linkages would be established with a research organization as CMI in Oslo, Norway.

C4. Capacity Building

- Women to be groomed to participate in elections and carve out a career in politics; popular perception is that women will be more effective, honest and transparent and more accessible.
- Training of women representatives and other potential women to participate in decision making, problem solving and management of local bodies.
- Provision of continuous support for capacity building of women representatives from the national to the local level along with technical assistance.
Bibliography


http://www.idea.int/publications/wip2/upload/South_Asia.pdf


12 The web links have been accessed during July 11- 30, 2011.
Towards Gender Responsive Governance in Bangladesh

Dissemination Workshop on Findings of the Mapping Study of ‘Promoting Women’s Political Leadership and Governance in Bangladesh’

**Date:** July 31, 2011, 10 A.M.
**Venue:** Lakeshore Hotel (Shomadhan Hall), Road 41, House 46, Gulshan 2, Dhaka.

**What strategies for capacity building and creating political space for rural women’s participation have had the greatest impact since 1997?**

- Created opportunities for women to participate in direct election at the local government.
- Enhanced leadership of women to participate in decision-making process.
- Direct election system in the reserved seats at UP level.
- Promotion of girls’ education.
- Creating women entrepreneurs.
- Civil society engagement increased.
- Grassroots focused leadership developed.

**What specific areas of women’s political leadership and participation in governance need further intervention?**

**Potential role for UN Women BPO**

- Strengthening of Women’s Coalition for policy advocacy.
- Building capacity of women representatives and other potential women to participate in decision making, problem solving, management, etc.
- Raising awareness of citizens about gender equality.
- Building capacity of women to participate in national level election, party politics and directly in local government.
- Direct election system should be introduced in at least 100 reserved seats for women in the parliament.
- Roles, responsibilities and budgetary allocation for the reserved seat members should be ensured.
- Need for involvement of women in political parties.
- Political parties should field more women in the elections.
- Need to enhance awareness among rural women to engage in social and political purposes and actions.
- Ensure effective participation of women in different coalitions.
- Women members need focused training and exposure to similar experiences in other countries in South Asia.
In this series:
Towards Gender Responsive Governance in Bangladesh: A Mapping Study
Women’s Political Participation at the Sub-national Level in Nepal: A Mapping Study
TOWARDS
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