

Role of UNO and Women Representative to Ensure Good Governance at Local Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of UNO and women representatives to ensure good governance at local level in Bangladesh. It is revealed that UNO is considered as vital position in the field administration. The officials are posted by the central administration. Therefore, they are very much loyal to their higher authority rather than public representatives or mass people. Though UNOs perform different types of tasks, covering Upazila administration to Union Parishad, urban to rural areas, neither they are accountable nor answerable for their activities to the people's representatives at the local level. In fact, UNOs play dual roles such as magistracy role and coordinating role between local government and central government. On the other hand, UP is considered as vital institution for local development. The UP personnel are elected directly by the mass people as their representative. Therefore, they are legally bound to be accountable to public/mass people and also answerable for their activities to the people at the local level. Moreover, they are also legally accountable and answerable to the officials of the field administration of the central administration for their activities. In fact, the UP personnel are accountable and answerable to both upper and lower sides for their activities. Consequently, the two actors have important role ensure good governance at the local level in the country. But the study finds that the women representatives elected from reserved seats could hardly play vital role to ensure good governance at the local level. However, the study is conducted following a mixed method research approach. Both primary and secondary data are used in the study.

Keywords: UNO, Women representative, Good Governance, Union Parishad, Bangladesh

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Introduction

The local government is a very important part of the government machinery. The governance system of the field level government depicts the phenomenon of the government machinery. So, Hossain and Habib describe that the local government system is deliberated as one of the key regulators of good governance in a country (Hossain & Habib, 2021). However, despite very old system, the achievements in terms of its effectiveness, democratic practices, and public participation, is insignificant. The successive governments after the independence of the country took many initiatives to restructure the governance system at the local government level. But it is observed that almost all the initiatives at different layers of local government was just nomenclature. Moreover, national and international development agencies have also played different roles, including projects implementation, to strengthen the local government system in the country. The initiatives, in many cases, brings positive effect, including higher participation of mass people at the local level. But, it is not enough.

While Union Parishad (UP) is one of the important catalysts for growth and development in rural area, the government of Bangladesh is still facing various challenges to provide basic services at the rural level. Some of the common rural basic rural services are infrastructure, health, education, water and sanitation, electricity etc. And UP is responsible for provisioning a number of these basic services. A good rural local level service delivery system is characterised not only by efficiency, effectiveness and coverage but also by inclusiveness. Rural people dominate the geographical coverage in Bangladesh. It is estimated that over 75% of its total population live in rural areas. But, rural local government institutions in Bangladesh lack funds and arrangements for operation and maintenance of facilities and services. The country, therefore, has been facing major challenges of building infrastructures of healthcare, water, sanitation, etc. Therefore, people living in rural areas generally receive poor services. So, governance matters for efficient service delivery in the one side and it is important to run local government institutions effectively on the other side.

However, local government and local administration is not similar though both works for local development, contributing to overall national development. Local government is run by people's representatives elected directly through voting by local people and local administration is locally run by government officials and they are neither directly elected nor nominated by the mass people. But they work simultaneously in their respective jurisdiction at local level. Therefore, governance and good governance issue is very important to implement their day to day tasks.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is considered as vital position at the level administration of the of central administration. They are posted by the central administration as its representative and treated as the junior bureaucrats. Therefore, they are very much loyal to their higher authority rather than public representatives or mass people. Though UNOs perform different types of tasks, covering Upazila administration to Union Parishad, urban to rural areas, neither they are accountable nor answerable for their activities to the elected people's representatives at the local level—Upazlia parishad to Union Parishad.

In fact, the field administration officials—UNOs—play dual roles such as magistracy role delegated by their higher authority—Deputy Commissioner (DC) located the district administration or by the competent authority, and coordinating role between local government and central government through its channels. As they are posted by the central administration, hence they are accountable and loyal to their higher authority, especially to their service cadre-line authority.

On the other hand, Union Parishad (UP) is considered as vital institution for national development. The personnel of UPs are elected directly by the mass people as their representative. Therefore, they are legally bound to be accountable to public/mass people and also answerable for their activities to the people at the local level—union to village level. Moreover, they are also legally accountable and answerable to the officials of the field administration—upazila and district administration—for their activities. However, both UNOs and UP personnel are involved in providing a number of services to mass people at the local level in the country. They also participate in the process of governance in different capacities. Therefore, they have the opportunity for playing important role to ensure good governance at the field level. However, still it is widely criticized that the local government bodies in the country are inefficient in terms of providing different services to mass people and also fail to make confirm people's effective involvement in governance system. To overcome these limitations, successive governments after the independence of the country initiated many reforms to improve the governance quality at the grass root level. Therefore, governance and good governance is considered as very important issue to run an organization or institution effectively at the local level in the country.

However, among many others, participation and accountability are considered as the vital elements of good governance. They are also used to measure the quality of governance for inter-related features.

Statement of problem

An impressive achievement is seen in terms of economic growth in recent years in the country. Accordingly, the decreasing rate of poverty is also

impressive. A World Bank report revealed that the number of poor people was reduced from 63 million in 2000 to 47 million in 2010 (World Bank, 2013). BBS also observed the same trend of poverty in the country (BBS, 2012). Despite such an impressive figure, disparity remains significantly in urban-rural areas. However, a significant disparity exists between rural and urban areas. According to official statistics of the government, the poverty rate was 20.5% in 2019 and COVID-19 temporarily caused a spike in poverty due to the loss of income and employment for many poor and vulnerable households (GoB, 2020).

To improve this situation, the government has undertaken many initiatives and accordingly has been implementing policies, programmes and projects through different agencies. With regard to local level implementation of such projects, the local government institutions (LGIs) are playing pivotal roles. So, governance appears one of the major factors to run these activities smoothly. Taking this into account, local government is placed in the priority in the policy agenda of the government. In the Sixth Five Year Plan (FY2011-2015), the local government was given importance for improving governance (GoB, 2011). Emphasizing on the issue, the government in its first 'Perspective Plan 2010-2021', acknowledges the important roles of local government bodies for good governance and rural development (GoB, 2012). Panday focuses women's political participation in the country. He makes an analysis institutional reforms, actors and outcomes (Panday, 2013).

However, the functions of local government are operated under two broad categories—delivering public goods; and, complementing the functions of the central government. In this regard, upazila administration plays a vital role, maintaining coordination between central and local, to run all activities smoothly at the local level of the country (Sarker, 2011).

Against the bleak phenomenon in terms of local governance system, it is imperative to conduct a study focusing the role of UNO and women representatives elected from the reserved seats for ensuring good governance at the local level in the country.

Objectives

The central objective of the research study was to explore the role of UNO and elected women representatives to ensure good governance at local level in Bangladesh. There were some specific objectives which were:

- (a) to assess the present role of UNO to ensure good governance at local level in the country;
- (b) to know the state and role of the elected women representatives to ensure good governance at local level in the country;

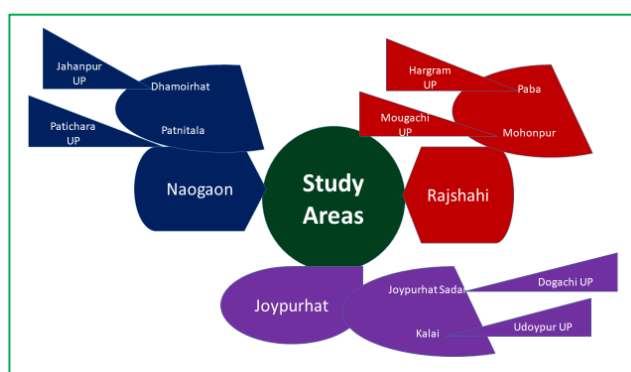
(c) to investigate the factors (if any) that impede the women representatives to ensure good governance at local level in the country; and

(d) to recommend suggestions to ensure good governance at local level in the country.

Method

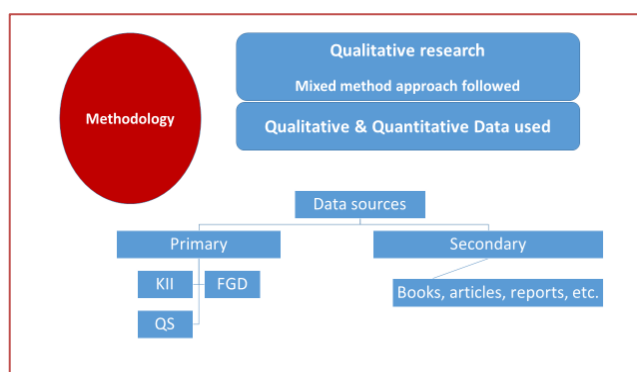
So, a mixed-method research approach was used in the study. Therefore, quantitative and qualitative both data have been used in this research. The use of case study method gives our study the strength to explain what makes matter to ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

Figure 1: Study area at a glance



The study covered six upazilas of three districts—namely Rajshahi, Naogaon and Joypurhat. Selection of the districts is a rational choice from the geographical representation perspective. After selection of the upazilas, one UP was selected from each upazila (fig.1). The selection of union parishads was purposive, considering the convenient and easy access to the respondents by the researchers.

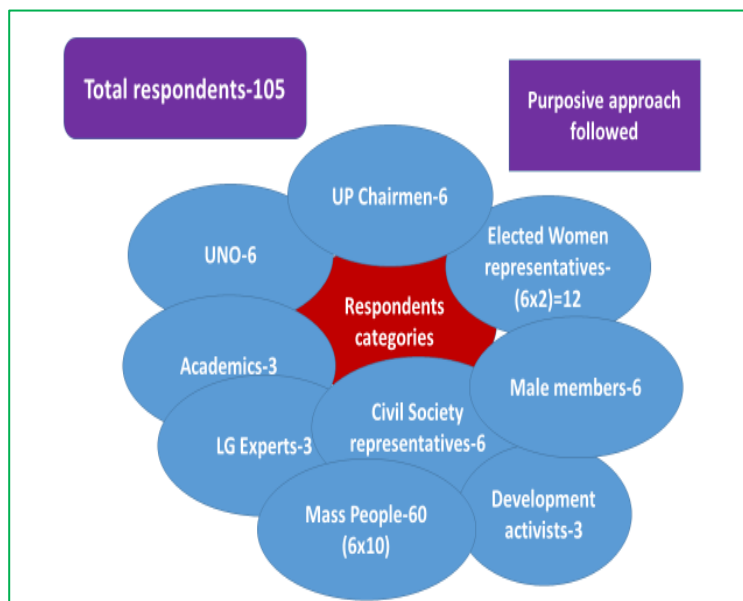
Figure 2: At a glance: Research Methodology



Both primary and secondary sources were followed to collect data. Different techniques such as key informant interview (KII), focus group discussion (FGD), and limited questionnaire survey were used to collect

data. UNO, elected women representatives of reserved seat of UP, chairman and elected male representatives of the same, and academics, local government experts and development activists as well as local people were the primary sources of data. Secondary sources for data were reviewing the relevant laws, regulations, research reports, journal articles, various government documents, newspaper reports, and websites. The figure-2 presents the research methodology, data sources and techniques of data collection.

Figure 3: At a glance: sample size and sampling methods



A total of 105 respondents were brought under investigation in this study. The respondents were selected purposively considering their expertise and position. However, six UNOs and chairmen were selected purposively as there was no alternative option. There were 18 women representatives from the reserved seats. Of them, 12 women representatives—two from each UP—were selected simply randomly. In addition, six male members from the general seats were also selected randomly to know a comparative perspective regarding the study issue. On the other hand, 60 respondents—namely mass people—were selected following the simple random technique. Three development activists were selected purposively considering their involvement in the development activities at the local level in the country. Six civil society representatives were also selected purposively for this study. Three local government experts and three academics were selected purposively considering their expertise with regard to local government and good governance in the country. The figure-3 represents the respondent's categories at a glance.

Results and discussion

The study focuses on the four basic elements of good governance in line with the study objectives. The following sections presents results and discussion of the study.

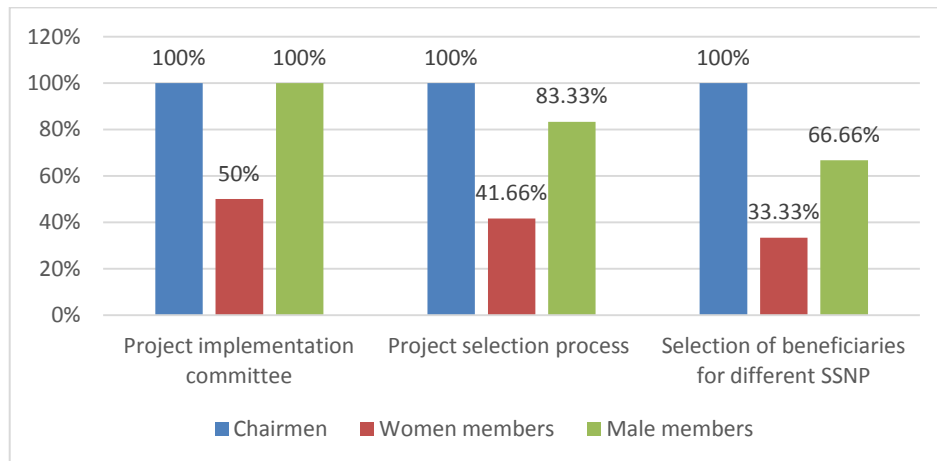
Participation

Participation is considered as an important element of good governance. Participation of different stakeholders leads to ensure accountability, another important element of good governance. Participation also ensures transparency, one of the important elements of good governance. Moreover, rule of law can be ensured by proper participation of stakeholders. Therefore, these four elements are considered as the corner stones of good governance. However, the UP personnel claim that there is no alternative of participation of UP personnel and other stakeholders to take part in the governance process and make decisions at the parishad meeting. Participation of all UP personnel and related members or fulfilment of quorum is a must for making and taking all decisions at the UPs. In the case of people's participation, the UP personnel claim that they have the opportunity to participate in UP activities, including decision-making process. They said people can participate in ward shova meeting, open budget meeting, mass hearing meeting and so on. Regarding the participation of UNO, the UP personnel said there is limited scope of UNO to participate at the parishad meeting. But there is an ample scope of UNOs for participation in the UP activities. Because, there are some committees at the UPs which are led by UNO. It makes ensure of UNO's participation at the local level in the country.

Participation of different stakeholders in decision-making process

The major activities of the UPs are holding parishad meeting, ward shova meeting, standing committee meeting, open budget meeting, dispute settlement meeting in different times. The survey reveals that there are several windows for participation of different stakeholders in the decision-making process of UPs. The interviewees informed that people's participation with a certain number of women is mandatory to hold ward shova at local level. The elected women members from the reserved seat are the advisers of ward shova. It is revealed that though they are adviser, they have nothing to play any effective role at the meeting. However, ward shova can constitute/form, if needed, many committees where people can participate as members of such committees. UP can co-opt people as expert members in the parishad meeting. UNOs participate as the chief guest at the open budget meeting of the UPs. Local people have the opportunity to participate the meeting and can raise their voice also.

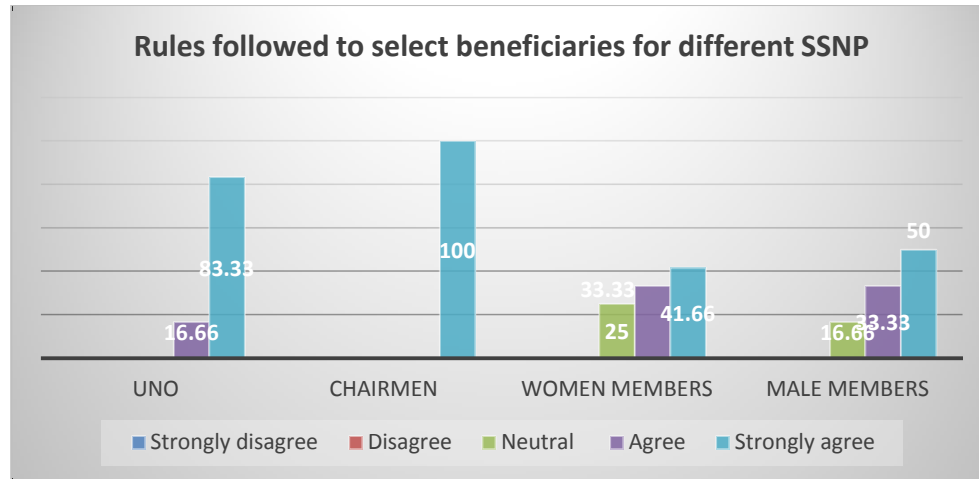
Figure 1: Voice of UP personnel in decision-making process



On the other hand, there are 13 standing committees relate to budget, law and order, health and education, women and children affairs, and so on the UPs to run the activities smoothly at the local level. When asked about formation of these standing committees, all the respondents—chairmen, male members and female members of reserved seats acknowledge that the committees are formed in accordance with the guidelines of the UP. However, some female members claimed that chairman’s choice got preference in formation of the standing committees. However, most of the women respondents claimed that they have limited role in project selection, project implementation and selection of beneficiaries of different SSNPs at the UP levels. The following figure-4 reveals the status of women in the different activities in the UPs. It shows that the women representatives elected from the reserved seat have limited role in decision-making process at the local level in the country.

Transparency

To ensure transparency, UNO and the UP personnel are considered as the major actors at the local level in the country. Ward shove, open budget system, citizen charter, and rule-based allocation of SSNP are the major mechanisms for ensuring transparency at the local level in the country. If these are maintained properly, transparency can be ensured at the local level. However, the following figure-5 reveals a mixed result in terms of selection of the beneficiaries of different SSNP at the UP level at the study areas.

Figure 2: Rules followed to select beneficiaries for different SSNP

Despite the claim of all chairmen about fairness of beneficiaries' selection, most of the other respondents' assert that the chairmen play the key role in making the list of the beneficiaries for different SSNP at the study areas. But it is done following the rules and in some cases there is deviated the hard and fast rules. They also assert that it is done due to political consideration. However, there is a role of the UNO to select the list of beneficiaries but there is a little role of elected women representatives in this regard. The figure shows that about 42 percent of the women respondents strongly agree with the following of rules to select the beneficiaries while about 33 percent of the women respondents only agree with this statement. But it is very remarkable that 25 percent of the respondents refrained from making any comments in this regard. So, it indicates that there is a deviation in following the rules to make the list of the beneficiaries at the study areas.

About transparency in terms of displaying the citizen charter, distribution of relief goods, other services and information of the beneficiaries of different programmes and projects, the study reveals that all the chairmen and male respondents claim that their all activities are transparent. There is no hide and seek in providing information of different programmes and projects and their list of beneficiaries. They display the citizen charter in front of the UP complex. But the figure-6 shows that some of the women respondents disagree with the chairmen's claim. However, it is revealed that the local people are not aware of the citizen charter and its utility in terms of getting different services from the UP at their respective areas. They depend on the words of the UP personnel (Chairmen, members, & secretary) to get their different services.

Rule of Law

Formation of different committees is done based on the rules. But it is in paper. Practically, the committees except few are formed considering the

will of the chairman of the respective UP. The figure-7 shows a mixed result in this regard. It reveals that the women members elected from the reserved seats disagree with the claim of UNO and chairmen in terms of formation of different committees at the UP level.

Figure 3: Transparency ensured in terms of displayed citizen charter, distribution relief good/SSNP & information of SSNP beneficiaries

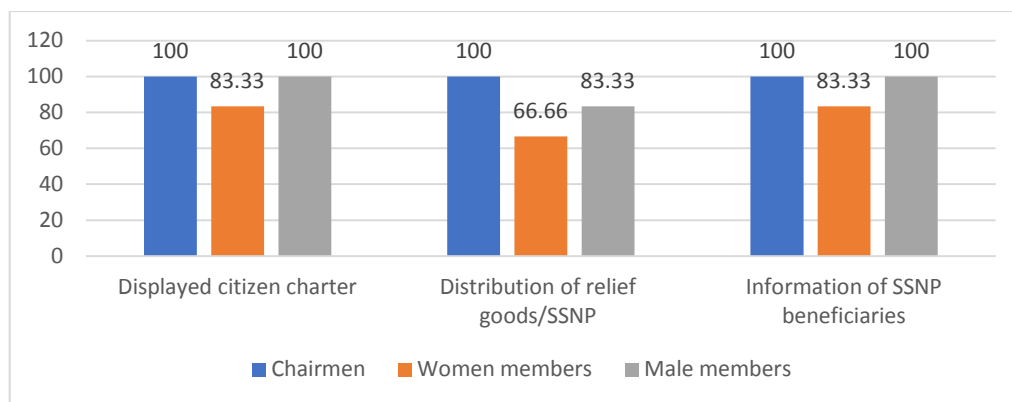
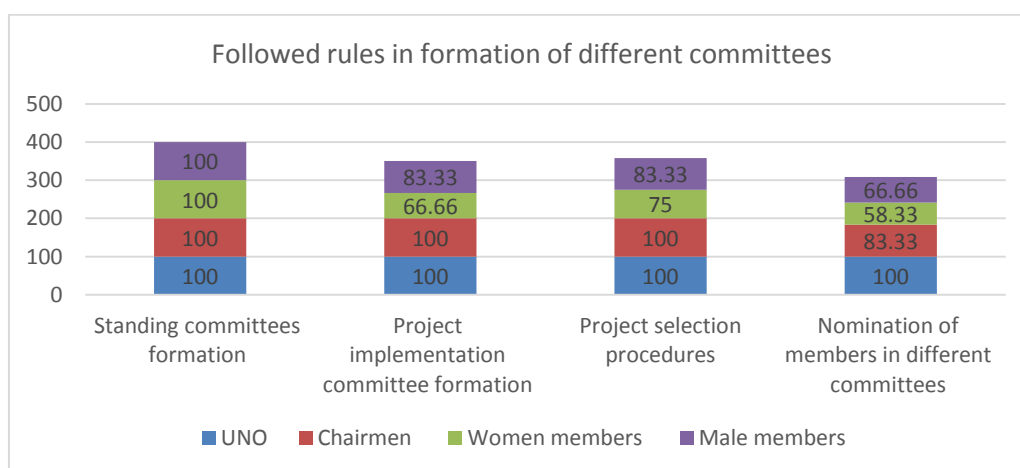
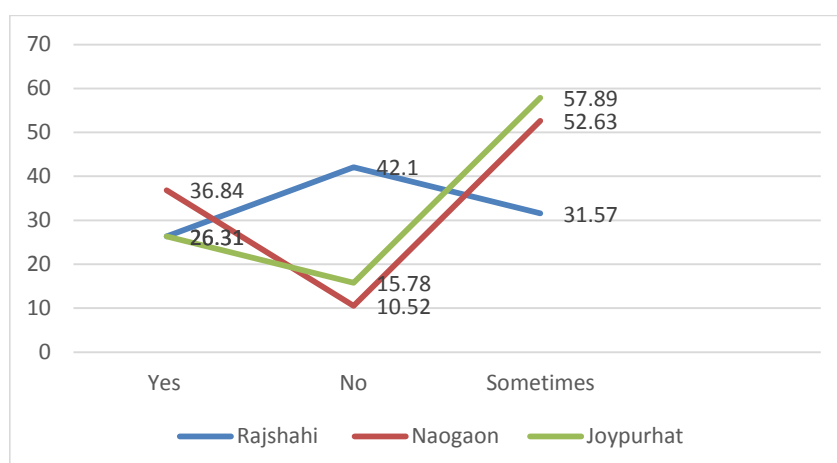


Figure 4: Followed rules in formation of different committees



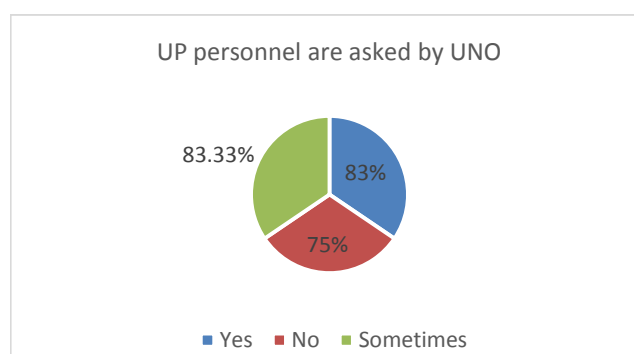
Accountability

Accountability means holding those in positions of authority responsible for their actions through the rule of law and due process rather than administrative fiat. Accountability may be practiced vertically and horizontally. DFID interprets the accountability to comprise the demand-side of accountability relations, in which individuals and groups exercise agency and use voice to claim their rights through interaction with state officials (DFID, 2011). The study explored the role of UNO to contribute to ensure accountability at the local level in the country.

Figure 5: Visit by UNOs to union parishads

Visit to UPs by UNOs

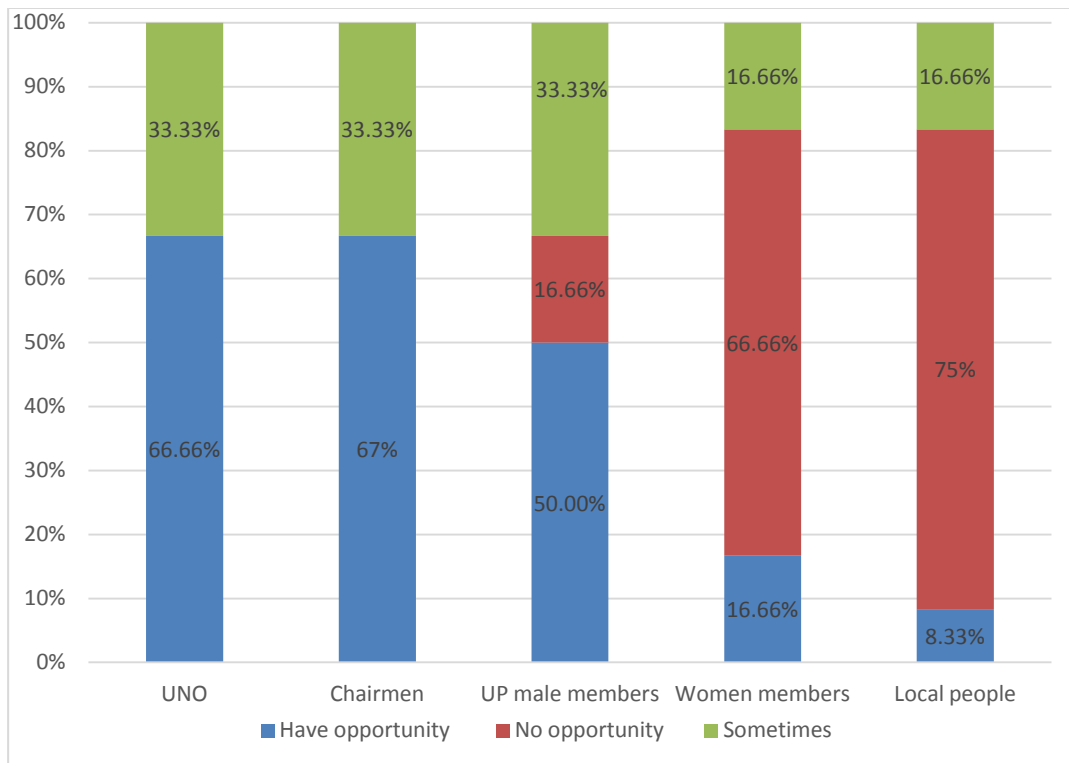
Is it possible to visit UPs every week by UNOs? Yes, it is possible if one wishes. But it is not needed. Is it possible to visit UPs once a month? Again, yes. If someone wishes, he can visit UPs once a month easily. And it is needed to ensure accountability at the local level in the country. But is it happened? Generally, it is 'No'. The figure-8 shows the scenario of visits by the UNOs. It reveals that UNOs visited the UPs hardly at the study areas.

Figure 6: UP personnel are asked by UNOs

On the other hand, the study reveals that the UP personnel (Chairmen & members), especially chairmen visit the UNO office for different purposes. For example, the UP personnel meet with the UNO for meeting purposes. Then, the UNOs ask the UP personnel about their different activities. It is also revealed that the UP personnel assure them that all activities are going well. The figure-9 shows it that 83 percent of the UP personnel claim they always asked about the UP activities by UNOs while the same number of respondents claim that they are asked sometimes about their activities. On the other hand, 75 percent of the respondents claimed that they are never asked by the UNOs about their activities. However, multiple responses were accounted here.

However, it is observed that the elected representatives are accountable to the non-elected and/or government’s nominated officials due to the government’s rules. But, in fact, the non-elected that means the government officials such as UNOs are not accountable to the elected representatives in the country.

Figure 7: UP Personnel (Chairmen & all members) are asked for their tasks by local people

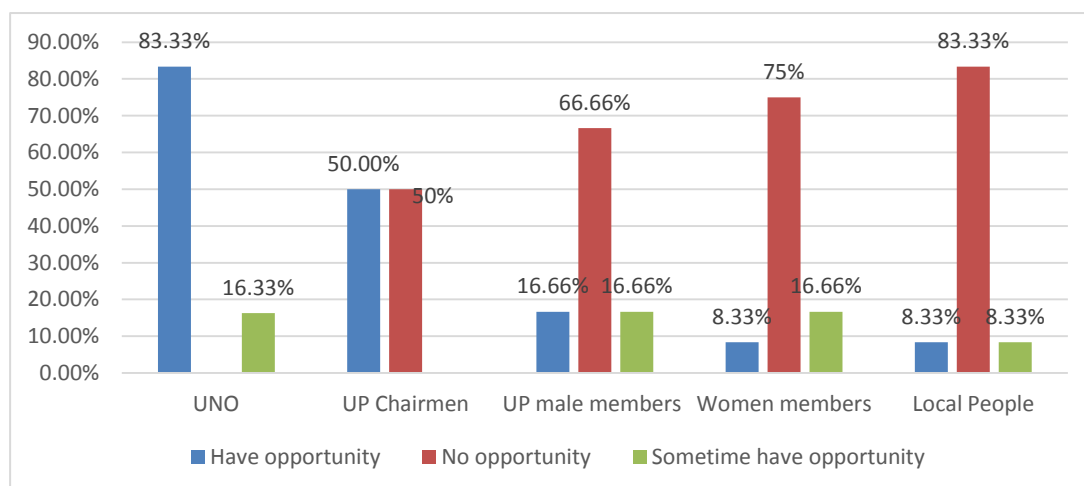


However, the elected representatives are accountable to mass people. They face it on different occasions. For example, the UP holds open budget meeting. Anyone can the UP personnel about their activities in the open forum. The UP is supposed to hold Ward Shova where mass people can ask the UP personnel about their activities. Mass people can also criticize about the activities of UP personnel in the open forum. These all are official statement. However, the study reveals (figure-10) that there is limited opportunity to ask the UP personnel about their activities. Most of the local people do not show such dare to criticize the UP personnel about their activities. For their dissatisfaction, they wait for the next election. Then, the mass people who were not satisfied with the activities of the UP personnel go against them through ballot. However, the mass people observe that this opportunity is shrinking day by day as the election is now manipulated in the country.

Although there is opportunity to bring the UP personnel under accountable through questions and answer at the different times, there is

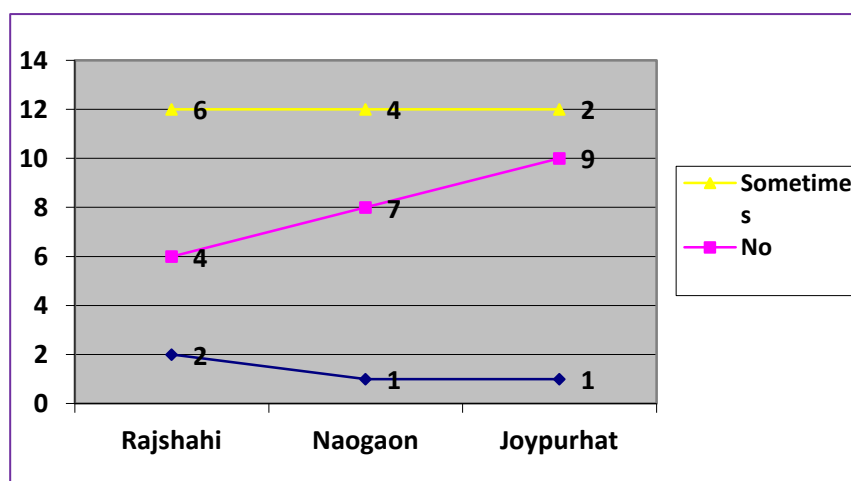
no opportunity to bring the UNOs under accountable by the mass people. However, the UNOs claim that their door is open for mass people. Anybody can visit their office anytime. There is no need to take prior appointment to meet UNOs.

Figure 8: UNO are asked about different tasks at local level by local people



But the figure-11 reveals that there is limited opportunity to bring UNOs under accountable to mass people in the country. Most the respondents except the UNOs observe that visiting the UNO office is not a part of accountability. Rather, it may be said that accessibility of mass people to the government offices has increased than earlier time.

Figure 9: Role of women members in ensuring accountability in terms of providing different services of UP



The elected women representatives were asked how do they ensure accountability in terms of providing different services at the UP? However, their responses were mixed. Different types of services such as birth registration certificate, death certificate, citizen certificate, trade license, etc. are provided by the UP. They said these are very routine

work. These services are provided regularly and the UP secretary is responsible to do so. The women members were also asked that whether they had ever monitored or not about these services. The major portion of the respondents replied 'No'. Some respondents replied that they monitor 'sometime.' But it is happened when people asked about their services. Few respondents replied 'Yes', they monitor regularly. The above figure-22 shows the statistics about it. It indicates that the women members of the UP do not play due role to ensure accountability at the local level. But the women respondents while talking franking after formal interview acknowledge that they do not care about of it. It is the responsibility of the secretary and chairman is responsible to sign the documents.

After presenting the survey data, it is revealed that UNOs have the more opportunities than the women representatives to contribute to ensure good governance at the local level in the country. But it is not happened properly.

However, the study also collected qualitative data through KII and FGD. The gist of the KIIs has been presented in the following sub-sections.

Upazila Nirbahi Officers (UNOs)

Six UNOs were brought under interview in this study. It is already revealed that the UNOs can play a vital role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country. When talking to researchers, two of the UNOs asserted that it is very possible to visit UPs once in a month and they do it. One of the UNOs has said that he has fixed a 'day' of every month to visit the UPs. One of the KIIs asserts that:

It is a part of my official duty. If I visit and participate in different activities of the UPs, mentality of irregularities, if posed someone, will be removed, bringing transparency in activities. It will also ensure accountability and rule of law. (Interviewee # 3)

Some other KIIs asserted that although they have no fixed 'day', they visit the UPs on different occasions. Some KIIs said despite intention they could not manage time to visit the UPs regularly due to pressure of other official business. Almost all the UNO assert that they participate at the open budget meeting of the UP. However, one of the UNOs states that:

We attend at the open budget meeting of the UPs. It is a mandatory provision of the UPs to hold open budget meeting. All UP personnel and mass people have the option to raise their voices here. They can put any query to us. Mass people also can ask us about the irregularities, if any, at the meeting. They can suggest at the meeting. It is a participatory matter between the mass people and the

elected representatives about the socio-economic development issues to be done locally. (Interviewee # 5)

However, in terms of role of the elected women members from reserved seat, most of the UNOs observe that the women representatives are not aware of their roles and rights at the UPs. As a result, they cannot play their proper role to ensure good governance at the local level. Some of the KIIs also observe that most of the women representatives are poorly literate. Some women representatives just can sign their name only, one of the KIIs claimed.

One of the KIIs observes that:

In many cases, well educated women from a good family (upper class) do not show interest to participate in the election. Consequently, poorly educated (comparatively from lower class family) women appear in the election. Again, in some cases, women in the absence of her husband or father (due to death or jailed) appear in the election. In some other cases, some male local politicians push their women or daughters in the election for political ground. As a result, women representatives elected from the reserved seats cannot play their due role for lack of education and lack of awareness about their right. So, they generally cannot contribute to ensure good governance at the local level in the country. On the other hand, those who come from political ground, they are found not sincere about administrative issues/governance practice. They are busy with their motivated tasks (Interviewee # 2).

Moreover, there are no specific roles/responsibilities for the women representatives elected from reserved seat at the UP level. Further, the UPs are not still women friendly. Under such a condition, how can they play their role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country? One of the KIIs asked. However, another KII observes that:

Playing due role and participation of women in election at the UP level is not the same matter in the context of Bangladesh. There are a number of factors that need to be taken into consideration. So, 'miles to go' to play due role to ensure good governance by the women representatives elected from the reserved seats at the local level in the country. (Interviewee # 6)

Another KII states that woman in politics is ensured at the local through the Union Parishad Act. It is political achievement. From the perspective of governance, still there is at the very initial stage of women's role in

ensuring good governance at the local level in the country. However, he observes that:

'Act has paved the way for women to participate in election, more specifically 'allocated quota' for women for political empowerment, in particular, and it is just a literary achievement. But, practically most of women representatives have retain neither capabilities nor qualities to play their due to role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country. (Interviewee # 1)

UP chairmen

Six UP chairmen were interviewed as the KII for this study. The UP chairmen are considered as the chief executive of UP at the local level. The UP chairmen are elected directly through voting by the local voters. They enjoy some legal authority to perform activities and run administrative functions at the local level in the country.

However, almost all the UP chairmen state that they are not well aware academically about good governance. But they have been provided training on different issues, including good governance. They focus that good governance reduce corruption. About participation of different stakeholders in the UPs, all the chairmen claim that everything is done through participation of all related stakeholders. They said ward sova is held with the participation of UP personnel (female and general members) and mass people. Mass people can put their problems and make suggestions at the meeting. They also can raise their voice about different issues related to UP. One of the UP chairmen asserts that:

Ward sova is one of the important mechanisms at the local level for people's participation. Mass people can participate voluntarily at the meeting. At the meeting they can place their problems and also put suggestions to address the problems. (Interviewee # 1)

About effectiveness of participation, another UP chairman asserts that:

Ward shove was once very effective tool to get proposals for projects, suggestions to be implemented, solved problems of local level. Now, it has become an ornamental, most of the chairmen asserted. Local people have now become passive and non-interested to participate ward shova meeting. Because, Union Parishad could not materialize people's demands which have been provided previous year. It is very true that due to limitations in terms of budget allocation, rules of business to perform local

activities, they could not implement many projects suggested by the local people at the ward shova. So, local people have become demotivated in participating such meetings of the UPs. (Interviewee #3)

Participation can ensure accountability, transparency and rule of law. So, it is very important in functioning administrative activities. It is also important for the governance process. At the UP level, open budget system is another important mechanism for participation of different stakeholders at the local level in the country. However, one the KIIs states that:

People's participation at the open budget meeting was also very interesting event. People gathered to know their UP's budget. They tried to know that their suggested projects (suggested at the ward shova) had been included in the UP's budget. Now, people have also become demotivated in participating at the open budget meeting. (Interviewee #4)

About the role of women representatives elected from the reserved seat, all the top personnel of the UPs claimed that they (women) played their proper roles at all activities at the UPs. Due rules are maintained for women representatives at the UPs. The women members are the advisers of the ward shova. One-third of the standing committees are formed, heading the women members at the UP level. They raise their voice at all activities. They are also given importance in some cases over male members of the UPs, some the KIIs claimed. The UP top personnel observe that the women members are very active in different activities at the UPs. So, they play their due role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country, some of the KIIs observe.

On the other hand, the top UP personnel observe that UNOs can play vital role to ensure good governance at the local level and they are, in most cases, playing this role. For example, UNO visits the UPs, inspect different activities/projects, verify different documents, and ask for following government rules that ensure participation of different stakeholders, accountability and rule of law in performing their activities at the local level. It also ensures accountability at the local level governance process, the UP personnel observe.

One of the KIIs states that:

Our UNO sir visits my UP once a month. I know that our UNO also visits other UPs under his jurisdiction regularly. Visits by UNO make our activities transparent and

accountable and also ensure to follow rules of the governing process. (Interviewee # 5)

Therefore, it is revealed that, according UP chairmen, practice of good governance is maintained at the local level in the country. But it also reveals that they face non-participation phenomenon by the mass people in the participatory activities at the local level in the country.

Women members

What types of role does the elected women representative play in ensuring participation in decision-making or to ensure good governance at the local level? The researchers asked the women members elected from the reserved seat of the UPs. The interviewees shared their experiences in performing their activities at the UPs.

Most of the women members claim that they have limited scope to make influence over different decision-making issues at the UPs. They said they could not make any role over inclusion of members, if needed, for any committee. In most cases, chairmen and male members played the dominating role in this regard.

One of the KIIs asserts that:

I requested to include a name in a SSNP from my side. But it is not included. Rather, I was told I have no ward. The general member will take the issue. (Interviewee # 5)

On the other hand, there are some formal issues where there is no special role to play. For example, participation of UNO in the open budget meeting is a formal issue. Formation of standing committees is also another formal issue where there is no special role to play. But there is scope to raise voice to name expert member for any committee formed for special purposes. In this regard, they have limited scope to play proper role, most of the women members asserted.

One of the KIIs states that:

Although they lead some standing committees but they have limited scope to exercise their due roles, in terms of decision-making, inclusion of members of different sub-committees, inclusion of names of beneficiaries of different social safety net programmes. They preside over different meetings empowered by rules. But almost all the committees are male dominated. So, it is happened accordingly. (Interviewee # 7)

Women representatives are the advisers of the ward sova committee. It is ensured by the UP Act. It is also practiced officially. But practically

proper practice of the role of advisers is not maintained. One KII asserts that:

I am the adviser of the ward sova committee. But I have no specific role in the meeting. I participate in the meeting. If I do not participate in the meeting, I will be criticized at the parishad meeting and I will be cornered. I will be ignored at the parishad. So, considering the consequences, I present there. If I do not want to stay full time, I participate for a while for making it as presence. Now there is a provision of 'meeting photo' of ward sova. Therefore, despite ornamental, I participate at the meeting. (Interviewee # 8)

Three of the women members assert that when chairmen need support of women members for maintaining official rules, chairmen, in most cases, ask his 'favourite' women members to raise voice in support of them (chairmen). They said that:

In some cases, if it needs to utter a name by the women members, the chairman informs his favorite female member to do so. Consequently, it is maintained official rules and it is recorded in the proceedings. Therefore, it can be claimed that everything is done by rules. But it is done with partiality. As the women members elected from the reserved seat they have no specific responsibilities like their counter parts (male members). So, they maintain good official relationship with chairmen so that they are not ignored at the UPs. (Interviewee # 4, 7 & 9)

However, some of the women members claim that they play their due role to ensure good governance at the local level though they have limited knowledge about good governance. They said they try their level best to maintain official rules in performing different activities at the UPs.

Therefore, it is revealed that women representatives elected from the reserved seats has limited scope to exercise their due role that would contribute to ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

Academics and local government experts

The researchers also interviewed some academics and local government experts to understand the role of UNOs and women representatives elected from the reserved seats at the UPs in terms of ensuring good governance at the local level in the country. Whether the UNOs are playing due role or not to ensure good governance at the local level, in replying to this query, the academics explain the theoretical background about the role of UNOs at the field administration in the country. They observe that UNOs have the legal authority to ensure good governance at

the local level. They can exercise their legal authority properly that can ensure good governance at the local level. However, one of the academics observes that:

UNOs are the chief executive officer at the local level in the country. They have the authority to maintain good governance strictly at the local level in the country. He/she can do it in different ways. Monitoring can be one of the ways. Participation in the UP governing process may be another way to contribute and ensure good governance at the local level in the country. If he/she participates, accountability can be ensured and transparency can also be ensured, in addition to maintaining the rule of law at the functioning process at the local level in the country. (Interviewee # 1)

Another academic asserts that:

UNOs are not accountable to the elected representatives let alone mass people. They follow their higher authority's instruction. They do not bother good governance at the local level. But they do practice rules. They do not want to go beyond rules. However, the academic further observes that if rules are maintained, good governance can be ensured at the local level in the country. (Interviewee # 2)

From the academic point of view, one of the academics asserts that:

If UNOs wish, it is possible to ensure good governance at the local level in the country. It is theoretically right. But, practically it is very difficult in the context of Bangladesh. Because, in many cases, people do not want to follow or obey rules. They always want decisions in favour of them. (interviewee # 3)

About women's role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country, all the academics observe that women have a limited scope to do so. Because, it is observed that most of the women members elected from the reserved seats belong to comparatively the lower class or less well-off family. So, they are socially lag behind of forefront situation. All the academics further observe that:

In most cases, women from the well-off family or political background family do not content in the reserved seats. They contest in the general seats. It is the general phenomenon that the women representatives elected from the reserved seats are remained comparatively in vulnerable position than that of their counter parts, the

members elected from the general wards in the union parishads. So, they can hardly play their role to contribute to and ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

On the other hand, the local government experts and the development activists observe that maintaining rules is not difficult if it is done honestly. But the current culture practiced in the country at all levels is not smooth. Deviation of rules or violation of rules has become a normal phenomenon at all level in the country. So, it is also happened at the local level in the country.

They also observe that:

Except few, UNOs cannot play and exercise their due role owing to different reasons such as political influence. They further explain that UNOs are not elected by the people. So, they are not accountable to people. They are lenient to system and loyal to their higher authority. Now, UNOs are overwhelmed with different types of activities at the upazila administration and they cannot concentrate their mind properly in ensuring good governance at the local level.

The local government experts further observe that:

UNOs have enormous authority to exercise legal authority that can ensure good governance at the local level in the country. But they (UNOs) cannot do it properly due to various problems such as political pressure, local dynamics, lack of environment and so on.

About the role of women representatives elected from the reserved seats to contribute to ensure good governance at the local level in the country, the local government experts and the development activists observe that women's political participation and contribution to maintain good governance is not similar in the context of Bangladesh. They keenly observe that:

In Bangladesh, women are still socially kept in the backbench. Many initiatives, including enactment of laws, have been undertaken by the successive governments to bring them from back bench to front bench. It is fine and most of the cases it is very strong evidence in the paper. But the reality is that the position of women is still in the back bench, especially in the political administration. So, they cannot play their due to role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

Another reason for not upholding the good governance practice at the local level by the women representatives, they find that in most cases the women representatives are not highly or well educated. So, it is one of the barriers for the women representatives.

On the other hand, two focus group discussion sessions were conducted for this study. One for the UP personnel and the another for the mass people.

FGD session with the UP personnel

While talking to UP personnel at the FGD session, they said that ward shova is very important way for local people's participation at the UP activities. Through this process, they (local people) are empowered and get chance to share their opinions and local problems that are considered very important to take decision at the UP 'parishad' meeting. The local problems are taken into account during 'project identification and project preparation'. The process was very effective for the first three/four years. But it has become burden for them (UP members). They argued that they are now under 'question' by the local people that why they would hold meetings without implementing the previous commitments or projects.

The UP personnel observe that:

Ward shova has lost its effectiveness. They cannot now ask or request to the local people to share their opinions/ suggestions or even problems at the ward sova. Even, local people cannot show their interest to participate at the ward sova meetings. Because, UPs have no enough resources or power to solve the problems or the issues raised by the local people at the ward sova. Consequently, they cannot fulfill the demands of mass people. As a result, people have lost their 'eagerness' to participate at the ward shova.

The UP personnel further observe that:

The activities of UP are very transparent. The UP personnel are accountable to mass people. The mass people can ask anything at the ward sova and open budget meetings. There is a citizen charter displayed in front of the parishad complex. Everything is open to all. All information is uploaded on the website. There is no hide and seek of the UP activities.

FGD session with mass people

When asked about the role of UNOs to ensure good governance at the local level, the participants describe that UNOs are the highest authority at the upazila level in the country. They can do anything they wish. They

enjoy legal authority. All offices are under his/her jurisdiction. Nobody can deny him/her order. So, UNOs can ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

On the other hand, about the role of women representatives elected from the reserved seats to ensure good governance at the local level, the participants observe that it is very difficult for them to ensure good governance at the UP level. They also observe that all decisions come from the chairman. One of the participants' asserts that:

I visited a UP for my personal matter. I met a woman member and describe my issue to her. After hearing my issue, she told me she cannot do anything for me without the consent of chairman. Although it was possible for her to do it. From this point of view, the participant observes that women representatives have a limited role to contribute and to ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

The other participants also shared their experiences at the session and they assert that the present context is not favourable for women representatives. Chairmen is nominated by the mainstream political parties with national party symbol. Consequently, they exercise party power in all activities. They do everything from the view of party interest. Therefore, governance and good governance is not a matter of concern for them in functioning the administrative activities of the UPs.

Major Findings

Based on the data presented in the earlier chapter, the following section points out the major findings as bullet points.

- The UNOs have the authority to participate in UP activities in terms of monitoring and supervising the UP activities.
- They have the authority to make UP personnel accountable for their activities.
- They are not accountable to the people's elected representatives at the local level.
- They are not accountable to mass people for their activities.
- They have the authority to suspend UP personnel if found and proved irregularities.
- They have the authority to ensure transparency in providing different services to mass people.
- They have the authority to ensure rule of law in the UP activities.

Role of UNO

- They do not visit the UPs as part of their official purposes. They visit when they are instructed by their higher authority.
- The UNOs are found as controlling authority over the UP activities at the local level.
- Women representatives mostly come from the less educated family.
- They are less aware of their rights.
- There is no specific role for women representatives elected from the reserved seats at the UPs.
- Despite adviser, women members have nothing to play role at the ward shova meeting expect participation.

Conclusion and recommendations

Local governments antagonize rising public expectations regarding the delivery of services. Despite many initiatives to strengthen the local government institutions in the country, local governments still face various challenges in the exercise of their service delivery to mass people. Therefore, it needs to ensure good governance at the UP level. And, UNOs can play vital role to ensure good governance at the local level. The women representatives elected from the reserve seats can also play important role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country if they are provided proper training and make aware of the issue. Moreover, they should also be entrusted with specific job responsibilities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, some major recommendations are stated below. However, the recommendation part is divided into two heads as in the following:

Recommendations in the part of UNO

- The UNOs should visit the UPs at least once a month. It would make the UP activities transparent. Mass people will be hopeful for getting different services properly from the UPs.
- Regular visit to UPs by the UNOs will ensure the participation of different stakeholders in the activities at the UP levels in the country.
- Regular visit to UPs by the UNOs will ensure accountability in the activities of the UPs.
- Regular visit to UPs by the UNOs will ensure to follow rule of law at the UP's activities in the country.

- Regular visit to UPs by the UNOs will make more aware about different issues among the women representatives.
- Involvement of women representatives at the different committees and meetings should be increased by the UNOs. It would make more empowered of the women representatives at the local level in the country.

Recommendations in the part of women representatives elected from the reserved seat

- Social awareness should be enhanced to participate more educated women in the election.
- Influential political party patronization should be minimized to come forward general women in election at the local level in the country.
- Specific job responsibilities should be ensured for the women representatives elected from the reserved seat at the UPs.
- More training programmes should be organized for the women representatives to make aware of their rights and responsibilities at the UP levels in the country.

More awareness programmes related to different rules and regulations should be organized for the women representatives so that they can play role to ensure good governance at the local level in the country.

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