

Quota as Empowerment

**The Use of Reserved Seats in Union Parishad as an Instrument
for Women's Political Empowerment in Bangladesh.**

Emma Frankl

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**The Research Program
on Gender Quotas**

Quotas
A KEY TO EQUALITY?

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Abstract

The aim of this master thesis is to study the implications of the use of reserved seats in Bangladesh in terms of women's political empowerment. The study focuses on two research questions. Firstly, how does the system of reserved seats in UP work in practice and what is the relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and women's capacity to act? The second question is about quota as a top-down strategy for women's political empowerment. If the implementation of reserved seats creates a vacuum that is filled with 'proxies' or 'token' women, what role can support from non governmental organizations (NGO) and capacity-building activities play in solving this problem?

According to my findings it is not possible to argue that quotas are 'good' or 'bad' regarding women's political empowerment – instead this must be seen in the context of the electoral system, the role of political parties, and the structure and functions of the local government. In Bangladesh the local government is lacking both resources as well as authority which constrain women's ability to act. This, in turn, put focus on the need for more decentralized governance. Another important conclusion is about the system of reserved seats that is used in Bangladesh. There is no discrepancy between the percentage of reserved seats and the number of women elected, and the practice of direct election seems to strengthening the legitimacy of the elected women.

There is also reason to believe that even though women are dependent on their families, some women have been able to use their new role in a more constructive way. There have also been changes in structural levels in terms of gender and it seems like the reserved seats have had consequences beyond political empowerment such as social empowerment. Here further empirical research is important in order to identify these. The study has however identified several problems in the process. The support from NGOs and capacity-building strategies seems to be important although this study shows that not all NGOs or not all capacity-building strategies are equal effective to increase the powerbase for the elected women. I argue that the critic against quota as undemocratic in Western debate is not equally relevant in countries where the differences between women and men are more obvious. This inequality helps to minimize the risk of stigmatization of the 'quoted' group and increase the legitimacy of the reform.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Quota fever

Today 95 per cent of all countries in the world have granted women the most fundamental democratic right, the right to vote and the right to stand for elections. The reality is, however, that the number of women that actually stand for election and becomes representatives is very small. Statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union show that the world average of women in National Parliaments is only 15.3%.

This under-representation of women in formal politics is now widely regarded as a problem and there is a growing support and acceptance for both enabling devices such as day-schools to encourage women candidates and for different types of quota systems¹ (Phillips, 1995:57). Many international bodies, like UN, EU, IPU, IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance) recommend and have projects on women and decision-making. At least 103 countries today have taken some kind of political steps, like quotas in order to increase the number of women in formal politics. While these measures first emerged in the 1950s in countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan there has been a rapid increase in the last decade and a majority of these steps have been taken since 1995 (Krook, 2003c:2-3).

Drude Dahlerup refers to what she calls a 'quota fever' that has hit the world. Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall argue that the Scandinavian countries and the 'incremental track', a bottom-top development with gradual increase in women's overall resources and changes in the perceptions of womanhood, has long been regarded as the model for countries around the world for increasing the number of women in formal politics. But according to them Scandinavia can no longer be a model since the impatience among women worldwide is growing. They want gender balanced political institutions now and not in 70 years from now. Instead they are arguing for the 'fast track'. This is more based on a top-bottom strategy where one implements quotas in countries where women only constitute a small minority in parliament (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003).

¹ More than 30 countries have introduced gender quotas for elections to national parliament by constitutional amendment or by electoral law. And in more than 50 countries the major political parties themselves demand that a certain minimum of the parties' candidates for election to national parliament must be women (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:2).

1.2 An instrument for political empowerment

One way to explain the low rate of women in formal politics is the presence of structural barriers that constrain the ability for women to run for election and become representatives. Factors like election systems, parties, level of development, gendered norms and cultural patterns are some that could be mentioned. The implementation of a quota then becomes an instrument to compensate for structural barriers like these.

During the last decade the three neighboring countries India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have introduced new quota systems at the local level for women – reserved seats with direct elections. The implementation of reserved seats in India (1994), Pakistan (2001) and Bangladesh (1997) has been regarded as a historical step, *not only* to increase the number of women in formal politics *but also* when it comes to political empowerment for women in the region. In India they have 33% reserved seats for women, in Pakistan 29%² and in Bangladesh 25% reserved seats, all directly elected. According to Vasanthi Raman “[t]he Seventy-Third Amendment has been considered historic and one of the most significant attempts at transforming the Indian polity in the direction of greater democratization and decentralization of powers. It has also been regarded as an important instrument for drawing in the vast sections of marginalized people in the task of self-government.”(Raman, 2002:24). And she continues: “According to many analysts, it has brought a critical mass of women to these institutions and holds forth tremendous potential.” (Raman, 2002:25). In the election 1994-1995 nearly one million women entered the political institution of local self-government in India (Raman, 2002). In Pakistan Socorro L. Reyes claims that “[t]he unprecedented number of women elected to district, tehsil and union councils in the recent elections [...] opened up not only an enormous political space but a strategic opportunity for women to make a difference in setting and implementing the agenda of local governments.” (Reyes, 2002:44). In the election to union councils in 2000-2001 36,000 women were elected (Reyes, 2002:43). In Bangladesh there have been two elections to Union Parishad (UP) (1997 and 2003) with the new law with reserved seats for women. Chowdhury argues that the direct election to local bodies in Bangladesh “has brought about a qualitative change in their role perception. On the whole they have claimed a space within the local bodies and have raised spirited calls to have their terms of reference

² The figure usually quoted is 33% quota in Pakistan but the actual percentage is 28.57, here rounded to 29% (Graff, 2003).

and spheres of activity defined.” (Chowdhury, 2002:55). In the first election that was held in 1997 under the new probation over 12,000 women were brought into the local government through direct election to UP, something that was repeated in the election 2003 according to statistics from the Bangladesh Election Committee.

But quota systems are problematic since some critics argue that they don't help! Instead of leading to political empowerment, they create 'proxies' or 'token' women – women without power. The idea is that a top-down implementation of quota with no mass mobilization of women for pressing for this demand creates a vacuum instead of a space for women. This vacuum is filled by 'proxies' – the housewives of the male politicians without any real power as there are not enough politically active women to fill the seats. These women have a lower political awareness and serve the patriarchal interest of the family. As such their participation in politics is in itself patriarchal participation (Nanivadekar, 2003).

1.3 Aim and research questions

With inspiration from the new quota systems in the neighboring countries Pakistan and India, the aim is to study the implications of the use of reserved seats in Bangladesh in terms of women's political empowerment.

To my help I'm going to use two research questions. The first question is about the system of reserved seats itself and how it works in practice and its implications for the women's capacity to act. Here I want to explore the electoral system that is used, the role of political parties and so on. The question is: how does the system of reserved seats in UP work in practice and what is the relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and women's capacity to act?

The second question is about quota as a top-down strategy for women's political empowerment. If the implementation of reserved seats creates a vacuum that is filled with 'proxies' or 'token' women, what role can support from NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) and capacity-building activities play in solving this problem?

1.4 Previous empirical research

Even though I have been limited to English literature, the empirical studies about the local government and women's political participation are few (Nathan, 1998). The most cited is:

Women representative at the union level as change agent of development by Qadir and Islam, 1987. It covered 66 Union Parishads and opinions were sought from 66 chairmen, 191 women members and 129 local people. The study of the findings revealed that nominated women came from the rural elite group.

And as the system with reserved seats with direct elections to UP is quite new this empirical research are even more limited. 1998 a study was done by World Food Programme in Bangladesh: *Elected Woman Members of UP. A Socio-Economic Study*. Here the general objective was to study to review the power bases of the elected women in UP and identify constraints of their effective involvement in UP. The study was conducted among 360 elected members and data were collected through both surveys and interviews. The study showed that the elected women had a better socio-economic status than the average rural women. 2003 a case study was done by Nazmunezza Mahtab, Professor at the Department of Public Administration and Head of the Women's Studies Department at the University of Dhaka. Information was gathered from 15 out of 30 women in the reserved seats in urban local levels, so called City Corporations. The focus here was the power bases of the elected women, their political agenda, participation and problems faced. The name of the study was: *Women in Urban Local Governance: A Bangladesh Case Study*.

Many studies have also been conducted by different NGOs that are active in training members of the local bodies, so called capacity-building. One major survey, sponsored by Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), was made in 2002 in order to review some of these training programs for elected members and their effectiveness. The data was based on interviews from structured questionnaires with 231 female UP members and discussions in focus groups. Qualitative data was collected through extensive surveys and qualitative data through in-depth interviews. This survey showed that the elected members had received a lot of training from different NGOs but also that they wanted more training (Democracy watch, 2002). There has also been smaller studies done by students like a study about the socio-economic status of the elected women in UP done by Emelie Anér and Elin Bjarnegård. Their results come from data from 78 interviews and showed that many of the women came from lower socio-economic levels of society (Anér and Bjarnegård, 2001).

The system of direct election has now been in practice for 6 years and there have been held two elections, the first one 1997 and the second was just finished when I came 2003. This, I think, makes it possible to move one step further in the research field. For example it is now possible to find two categories of women; re-elected women and women that did not stand for election again.

2 Theoretical framework

In her essay "*En blind liberalism*" (A blind liberalism) the Swedish author Nina Björk asks why do we tend to be more upset over the Taliban forbidding girls from going to school than over thousands of children who live their lives between the railway tracks at Howrah Station in Calcutta? The possibilities for both groups to get an education seem to be equally far away. According to Björk it is the idea of liberalism that has created this logic by putting the negative rights before positive ones. That is to say it is more important that nobody is stopping me from doing what I want than make it possible for me to do it (Björk, 2003).

I think this is a good introduction for a discussion on women and politics. In spite of the fact that almost all countries in the world have granted women the formal right to vote and stand for elections, the number of women in representative assemblies is still low. What about the real possibilities for women to actually be elected as representatives?

In this chapter I will argue that there are different types of structural barriers that constrain the ability for women to stand and be elected as representatives and that one way to overcome this is to implement quotas. I will then discuss possible problems and common objections against quotas, present some of the empirical research that has been done in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and offer an explanation of why they have come to such different views about quotas as an instrument of political empowerment. Apart from the differences among the countries and the systems they use, there seems to be a difference in the way they use the concept of empowerment. But before this I will start to discuss why the area of formal politics is an important one and the concept of representation.

2.1 Why care about formal politics?

What is politics and how should we define it? According to Susan Moller Okin the concept of politics relies very much on the assumption that public political concerns can be distinguished from private personal ones (Okin, 1998:116). Anne Phillips argue that this narrow concept of politics, here referred to as formal politics, is still very much 'malestream' where 'the political' still conjures up images of governments and elections and parties. The feminist critiques of this concept of politics have been characterized by the ideas that the

existing definitions are gender biased, this bias has legitimated women's lack of political power, and much of this process depends on a particular way of conceiving the public-private divide. Instead of regarding the lack of women in politics as a reflection of women's lack of interest for politics, the feminist ideas often illuminate the fact that the sexual division of labor makes it harder for women to enter the political domain. The public-private divide, used in political philosophy to refer to the relation between state and civil society, hides the fact that both state and civil society are differentiated from the deeper privacy of the domestic sphere. This distinction between public and private enables arguments about equality and or justice that do not apply to the relationship between wife and husband (Phillips (ed), 1998:2-7).

The challenge for feminists has been what strategy to use to change this fact. “[S]hould feminists simply refuse to engage with this dreary universe, or do we have to engage in order to transform?” (Phillips (ed), 1998:2). A politic of quota or reserved seats implies that the arena of formal politics is a possible way for women to make their voices heard. In the following passage I’m going to argue that formal politics is *one* important arena where women should be active.

2.1.1 Different feministic approaches to formal politics

Judith Squires maps out three important distinct approaches in feminist political thinking by using a typology of inclusion, reversal and displacement³ (Squires, 1999). Those pursuing a strategy of inclusion aim to include women in political forms from which they are currently excluded. Here you find what are often called liberal feminists. Those pursuing a strategy of reversal aim to reconfigure political structures as currently conceived such that it becomes more open to gender specificity. These feminists are often labeled radical, maternal or cultural feminists. According to Irene Diamond and Nancy Hartsock, “taking women's lives seriously would have far-reaching and profound consequences, and that the very concepts of what is political and what is public may be threatened by the inclusion of women's concerns in political life.”(Diamond and Hartsock, 1981:199). Those pursuing a strategy of displacement aim to destabilize the apparent opposition between the strategies of inclusion and reversal. They seek to deconstruct those discursive regimes that engender the subject (Squires, 1999:3). According to Pringle and Watson, feminists need to rethink the state.

³ This typology may be a bit simplistic and note - Squires herself does - that these three approaches rarely manifest their pure form in practice and are more to be seen as archetypes (Squires, 1999:4). Despite this they can fill the purpose of making it easier to understand the structure of political thinking behind the debate of representation and quota and to follow the influences of the different approaches throughout history.

They give two reasons for using a more poststructuralist approach when analyzing the state. First this will make it possible to respond more contextually and strategically to the shifting frameworks of power and resistance. And second it will give a fuller recognition of multiplicity and difference amongst women (Pringle and Watson, 1992:204). Instead of looking at the state as a coherent unity which simply reflects gender inequalities, one needs to see it “as a diverse set of discursive arenas which play a crucial role in organizing relations of power. Rather than abandoning the state as an analytic or political category, it is important to analyze the strategic possibilities available at one time.”(Pringle and Watson, 1992:220-221). The state is an historical product and not structurally given. The outcomes of different policies do not simply depend on the structures, but on discursive struggles which define and constitute the state and specific interests from one moment to the next (Pringle and Watson, 1992:213).

2.1.2 Towards formal politics

The historical development of feminism is often described as a movement from simpler to more complex beliefs. First as a notion of ‘filling the gaps’ to more conceptually challenging questions as the categories of analysis. But according to Phillips, the feminist thinking on politics has been characterized by a double movement towards both critique and recuperation (Phillips (ed), 1998:4). During the nineteenth century the feminist movement in Western liberal democracies focused on the right to vote and stand in elections. The feminist strategy was inclusion. But despite the fact that women were not formally excluded from the parliamentary political system anymore the interests and voices of women remained marginal to mainstream debates. Various strategies such as positive discrimination and the adoption of quotas were adopted for increasing the number of women in the legislature. However the slogan ‘the personal is political’ tried to challenge the orthodox definition of politics and a strategy of reversal was adopted. One of the ideas was that if we use the broader definition of politics it becomes evident that women have long been key political actors (Squires, 1999:195-197, Phillips (ed), 1998:3). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s many feminists argued that it was not meaningful to work within the existing political institutions and electoral politics. Instead, political work should be conducted within and by women's autonomous organizations which claimed to be open to all, non-hierarchical and informal. They didn't seek any collaboration with the government as they repudiated the idea that change could emerge from within formal arenas of political power. However, many women's groups were largely unrepresented which made many women feel excluded and

silenced. By the 1980s many feminists had become more concerned with the importance of increasing the numbers of women present within parties and legislature as well as in pursuing policies in the interests of women. According to Squires, the current feminist writing about women's political participation tries to be more responsive to, and integrated with, woman's informal political activities. The apparent dichotomy between formal and informal political activity has been displaced in favor of a reconsideration of the inter-relation between the two (Squires, 1999:198-200).

One must see the connection between the two sides in order to be able to understand or solve the problem. I agree with Squires when she states that this does not signify a “return to an unmodified liberalism, but a recognition of the importance of the representation of women in the institutional political arenas in which decisions are made, with implications for the routes into and the organization and conduct of those arenas.”(Squires, 1999:201)

2.2 The concept of representation

I have argued that the formal political arena is an important one where women should be active. But this debate also touches upon a more normative discussion about *why* it is important to raise the level of women in formal politics. There has been no clear unchanging conception of what it is we require our representatives to represent. Instead, it has been an object of political battle. What does it mean to be politically worthy of representation and who is to be deemed able to represent others (Pitkin, 1967, Squires, 1999:201)? With inspiration from Squires I'm going to ask two questions; what and how.

2.2.1 What and how?

The first question is: what is one representing? Here the answer can vary between beliefs, constituencies, interests or identities. Representation of beliefs generates a conception of ideological representation that involves collective representation via parties. Representation of constituencies generates a geographic representation where the representatives are to act accordingly to the opinions of the citizens from the areas that elected them. Representation of interests generates a conception of functional representation. The representatives are acting spokesmen for interest groups and social movements. Representation of identities generates a conception of social representation. The representatives are supposed to reflect the social composition of the electorate in terms of presence. The representatives can speak

and act for those groups because they share common experiences and therefore also hold common commitments and values (Squires, 1999:202-203).

The second question is: how does one represent it? Here one can distinguish between three types of answers. The first one is microcosm. The idea is that the representative shares some of the characteristics of a politically significant group. This can be for example age, sex, class and racial divisions. The idea is that the representatives should be a mirror of the nation. The second answer is symbolic representation. The representatives symbolize the identity or qualities of a group of people but does not necessary share the same experiences of the group. The third answer is principal-agent representation. This is when one person acts on behalf of one other, or when the agent acts in the principal's interests (Squires, 1999:203).

As I'm going to discuss below, the answers to these two questions are closely related to each other because the answer on the first question seems to have consequences for the second one. Quota for women in formal politics relies on the assumption that identities (experiences) matter - not only ideas (interests and ideology). Let us discuss this in more detail.

2.2.2 From ideas to presence

The conventional understanding of liberal democracy is that differences are regarded as primarily a matter of beliefs and interests and not identities. This is what Phillips calls a 'politics of ideas'. The shift from direct democracy to representative democracy has shifted the emphasis from who the politicians are to what they represent (Phillips, 1995:1, 4). According to Hannah Pitkin, representation means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them (Pitkin, 1967:209). An over-emphasis on who is present in the legislative assemblies draws attention from the more urgent question of what they actually do. This emphasis leads to a principal-agent representation. The representatives don't function as a mirror of the electorate but their constituency can demand that they do what they promised to do with help from the mechanism of accountability. Where such processes are successful, they reduce the autonomy of the individual representatives, logically this minimizes the importance of who these individuals are (Phillips, 1995:3-4).

According to Phillips these arguments are relevant but they can't deal with the fact that groups defined by their sex or gender feel that their absence from formal politics leaves them with a sense of exclusion from the political process (Phillips, 1995). Also Iris Marion Young is critical of the equal citizenship as it has not led to social justice and equality and proposes a differentiated citizenship (Young, 1990). Both Young and Phillips argue that

differences of identities rather than interests and ideologies should be in focus when it comes to representation. “In this major reframing of the problems of democratic equality, the separation between ‘who’ and ‘what’ is to be represented, and the subordination of the first to the second, is very much up for question. The politics of ideas is being challenged by an alternative politics of presence.” (Phillips 1995:5). This is what Squires calls representation of identities, so called social representation. Only women can ‘act for’ women in identifying ‘invisible’ problems affecting the life of large numbers of women (Diamond and Hartsock, 1981:198). This recognition of women's distinctive identities requires political representation of women as woman. The idea is that there is a ‘women's perspective’ which need more recognition. The basic reason is because women engage in politics differently; if they enter the arena of formal politics, this will have impact on the debate and moral framework underpinning politics. In order to do this, women have to represent themselves as one cannot delegate the task of representing identities in the same way as one can with interests (Squires, 1999:224-225).

According to Phillips however, it is very problematic to talk about a clearly demarcated ‘woman's interest’ which holds true for all woman in all classes and countries. “If interests are understood in terms of what women express as their priorities and goals, there is considerable disagreement among women” (Phillips (ed), 1998:234). If there is no clearly agreed and recognized ‘woman's interest’, does it really matter if the representatives are men? Phillips’ answer is yes. Her argument is that it is precisely because the interests are varied, unstable and in the process of formation that makes it difficult to separate what it is to be represented from whom is to do the representation (Phillips (ed), 1998:234-235). According to Phillips, policy decisions are not settled in advanced by party programs. Instead, problems and issues emerge all the time and as a representative one has to make interpretations and priorities all the time. The representatives have considerable autonomy and don’t always abide by pre-agreed policies and goals. This is also why it matters who those representatives are. Phillips notes that “political experience tells us that all male or mostly male assemblies will be poor judges of woman's interests and priorities and concerns” (Phillips (ed), 1998:235-236).

When difference is conceived in relation to experiences and identities of different groups it's difficult to meet demands of political inclusion without also including members of those groups. “Men may conceivably stand in for women when what is at issue is the representation of agreed policies or programs or ideals. But how can men legitimately stand in for women when what is at issue is the representation of women per se?”(Phillips,

1995:6). Here the microcosm model of representation would be preferable, where one shares some of the characteristics of the group like - in this case - the sex.

2.3 Structural barriers

The interesting thing about quota is that it can be seen as a discrimination and violation of the principle of fairness or as a compensation for structural barriers that prevent fair competition (Dahlerup, 2002:11). A discussion of human free will can contribute to one's understanding. Do people have a free will or is one's will subordinate to political, social or economic structures? Different positions regarding structure and agency reflects different ontology and epistemologies. That is to say, the nature of the social and political world and the nature of what constitutes a valid explanation of a political event (Hay, 1995:192). Methodological individualism focus on the individual. It is the individual that through his/her acts forms the structures that exists. According to J. W. N. Watkins, social objects are formed by individual attitudes and must therefore be explained individualistically (O'Neil, 1973:150). Individuals are not passive objects pushed around by social forces which act independently of them. Instead individuals are able to respond to their environment without being determined by it (Fay, 1996:48). If one has this view of power, the acts of individuals will clearly reveal both the relevant power plays and conflicts. The often quoted definition of power offered by Robert Dahl reads: *A* has power over *B* to the extent that he can get *B* to do something that *B* would not otherwise do (Lukes, 1974:11).

According to Dahl one cannot talk about power if there are no empirically observable conflicts. I'm of the opinion that this is a too simple view of what power is. Who forms our will, our interests? I think a more structuralistic onset can be valuable to solve some problems. Instead of focusing on the individual, like methodological individualism, the structuralists focus on the subordinated powers that create the acts of the individuals. Individuals are solely a function of their place in society or some broad system of meaning. People's identities are determined by their group membership because identity is produced by social and cultural forces. Individuals can only be understood by placing them in a social context (Fay, 1996:50). Individuals are not agents who have the capacity to act but rather social subjects that are created by the system they live in (Fay, 1996:51). Despite its weaknesses to explain change and the ability for the individual to act, William H. Sewell Jr. argues that one can't reject the concept as such, as it "denominates [...] something very

important about social relations: the tendency of patterns of relations to be reproduced, even when actors engaging in the relations are unaware of the patterns or do not desire their reproduction.” (Sewell, 1992:3). If we apply this to the discussion about women in representing assemblies the reason that the percentage of women is so low does not depend so much on women’s disinterest in politics, but on the actions the low percentages create within the structures we live in.

Although structures tend to reproduce themselves, this doesn't happen automatically (Sewell: 19). According to Pawson and Tilley, social regularities are embedded in a wide range of social processes within different layers of social reality, and individual choices are constrained or enabled by characteristics of the social context in which the individual is located. This makes it possible to use both agency and structure in the explanation (Blaike, 2000:112-113). Brian Fay argues that there is a complex connection and constant interplay between structure and action. Structures underwrite actions which sometimes reinforce and sometimes undermine the structures which authorize them (Fay, 1996:65). His conclusion is that the structures both enable and constrain us and that the ability to act depends on the place in the social order, education and so on (Fay, 1996:67).

2.3.1 Critics

If you use a more agency-oriented approach quotas become problematic. According to Maud Eduards the argument from liberals is that it is undemocratic, discriminatory, and violation of the principle of fairness. The argument is that all individuals should be treated equal and no one should be able to get advantages because of social background, sex or ethnicity background. Quota systems become undemocratic as they give advantages to groups because of factors such as sex (Eduards, 2002:48). According to Young however, it is not enough that the citizenship rights have been formally extended to all groups since many of them still find them treated as second-class citizens. Strict adherence to equal treatment when it comes to participation of everyone in political institutions tends to perpetuate disadvantages. Therefore special rights should be maintained that attend to group differences in order to undermine these disadvantages. She argues that the best way to realize the inclusion and participation of everyone in full citizenship is to replace the universal citizenship with a differentiated one. The idea is that this requires mechanisms for group representation. “The inclusion and participation for everyone in social and political institutions [...] sometimes requires the articulation of special rights that attend to group differences in order to undermine oppression and disadvantage.”(Young, 1990:114-115). According to Dahlerup,

quotas for women represent a shift from the notion of 'equal opportunity' to 'equality of result'. Even though there are no formal barriers to participation or competition there are informal or hidden ones that prevent women from participating in formal politics. Different types of quota systems then become a compensatory instrument to overcome these hidden barriers and to reach 'equality of result' (Dahlerup, 1998:95).

This argument is closely related to the risk of 'stigmatization' of the 'quoted' group. The idea is that in a quota system one will have a job or position because of one's sex and not because of competency or merit (Bacchi, 2004:132). Some individuals, like Afro-Americans in the United States, want to distance themselves from quota systems because they want to be judged on their own merits and because of its stigmatizing effects (Bacchi, 2004:135). Carol Bacchi argues however that this is a problem that follows from the understanding of affirmative action (like quotas) as 'preferential treatment' and not social justice. This understanding relies upon a view that the rules are fair, but that some members of groups targeted by these actions need special help to succeed (Bacchi, 2004:128). In the long run this undermines the legitimacy of the reform and reduces its impact by alienating those who are targeted (Bacchi, 2004:142). Both these arguments illuminate the importance of the perspective one has in discussing quota systems.

Another problem, pointed out by postmodernist feminists as Judith Butler (Butler, 1990) is that a politics of quota may achieve the opposite effect. By focusing on the groups one wishes to dissolve, one risks to strengthening the subject positions of men and women instead of dissolving them (Dahlerup, 2001:34). This phenomenon is often called the 'feministic dilemma'. According to Dahlerup however, one must make a distinction between aim and means. One must talk about what is wrong in order to change things; otherwise it makes women's agency impossible. Should one have said to the blacks living under apartheid in South Africa that they shouldn't talk so much about blacks against whites since they contributed to the construction of the category they wanted to avoid – 'blacks'? (Dahlerup, 2001:34).

2.4 Possible structural barriers

Regarding the low rate of women in representative assemblies around the world I think it is important to take into consideration both agency and structure. Most women have theoretically a possibility to stand for election but at the same time this possibility is

constrained by structures that constrain our real opportunities to act. Therefore quotas become a compensation for structural barriers that make it possible for fair competition. What kind of structural barriers are there for women that constrain their abilities to run for election and become representatives? There is of course no simple answer to this question as the obstacles vary with the political context in each country (Shvedova, 1998:39). Despite contextual variations there seems to be some things that have great importance for the recruitment of representatives. With the exception of the legal system – that specifies the criteria of eligibility for the candidates like age, nationality - Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski argue that the context of the political system in the country, like the party system, the electoral system and party organizations, plays an important role. Multiparty systems tend to have a higher proportion of women candidates than systems with few parties (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995:192).

It is well established that different electoral systems lead to different outcomes for the level of women's representation. Multimember district electoral systems tend to have a higher percentage of women legislators than single-member district systems. Therefore party list systems tend to be the most favorable for women (Matland & Studlar, 1996, Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). In the single member district system or 'first past the post' it is the candidate that gets more votes than each individual opponent that will win the election. In the multimember district electoral system all the political parties should be represented in proportion (IDEA, 1997:18).

There are a number of explanations for this. In proportional representation systems parties must present a 'balanced ticket' and include female candidates in order to appeal to a broad portion of the electorate. This is not possible in a single member district system since it is only one person elected. The party has to nominate one candidate who can appeal to a broad range of voters and they cannot afford to venture on a woman if they are considered to be an electoral risk (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995 and Matland & Studlar, 1996 and LeDuc, 1996:75). Furthermore, female candidates have to compete directly against men, and when nominating a woman, a party must explicitly deny the aspirations of a man from the same district (Matland, 1998:76).

According to Norris and Lovenduski, the role of political parties as gate-keepers is also an important issue. The key selectors may be grassroots party members or national party leaders depending on the centralization of the system. Different actors may influence different stages of the process such as nomination, ranking and so on. These decisions take place within the context of the formal party rules or informal norms and practices (Norris &

Lovenduski, 1995). Feminists have cast light on masculine norms that underpin common conceptions of 'merit' and the fact that this works as an allocation of quotas for men (Bacchi, 2004:132). The idea is that this systematically favors men in the election and nomination process within the political parties where 'male characteristics' are emphasized and often become criteria in selecting a candidate (Shvedova, 1998:24). Phillips, for example, argues that criteria like personality or character often favor those who are most like the people conducting a job interview: more starkly, they often favor men (Phillips, 1995:61).

It is also important to mention gendered norms, cultural patterns and pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men. Still, in many countries, women's primary roles are as mothers and housewives and not as politicians. In some developing countries men even tell their woman how to vote (Shvedova, 1998:33). According to Nadezhda Shvedova this also becomes a psychological barrier for women in that they lack confidence. "A certain culture of fear prevents women from contesting elections and from participating in political life." (Shvedova, 1998:34).

In an interesting article Richard E. Matland compares developed and developing countries and argues that the electoral system is not equally important in the developing countries as in the developed ones. According to Matland, a minimum of development level is needed before the form of the electoral system will have any effect on the representation of women; development is crucial when it comes to the level of women's representation (Matland, 1998). In third world countries socio-economic obstacles like poverty and unemployment, lack of financial resources, illiteracy and low level of education are common. In most countries women carry a disproportionate share of domestic work, which makes it difficult or impossible to be politically active. Matland argues that "[m]oving out of the house and into the workforce appears to have a consciousness-raising effect on women; they become politicized." (Shvedova, 1998:29).

2.5 Quota versus reserved seats

But the concept 'quota' is not one strategy but a term including many different compensational strategies and systems with different outcomes. To make things a little bit clearer it is important to make a distinction between legal quotas (supported by law or constitution) and party quotas (regulations in the party's own bylaws) (Dahlerup and

Freidenvall, 2003:6). There is also a difference between ‘quotas as reserved seats’ and ‘electoral quotas’ or ‘candidate quotas’. Reserved seats are a system that guarantees women a certain number of seats in the parliament or in the local government independent of the electoral result. The other two systems prescribe a certain percentage of women on the lists presented to the voters in the election (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:9).

It’s important to note that these different types of quotas tend to vary in the degree to which they actually increase the number of women in politics (Krook, 2003b). If you compare ‘quotas as reserved seats’ with ‘electoral quotas or ‘candidate quotas’ there seems to be a big difference in the results. One example is Brazil where only 8.6% of the members of parliament are women despite a 30% legal electoral quota. This is not the only case. (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003) The problem here is the lack of guidelines as to where female candidates must be placed on party or electoral lists. If they are put at the bottom of the list they are of course less likely to be elected (Krook, 2003b:3). Reserved seats however guarantee a certain percentage of women as the seats themselves only can be filled by women.

In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh seats are reserved for women by law or constitution. In the case of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh it is also important to make a further distinction between ‘reserved seats with indirect election’ and ‘reserved seats with direct election’. Systems with indirect elections have a certain number of seats that are reserved for women, but they are nominated and elected by, for example the directly elected representatives. In systems with direct election there are certain seats reserved for women to whom only women are allowed to contest. The former systems of reserved seats in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were filled with nominated and indirect elected women. In the new systems they are direct elected to the reserved seats.

2.6 Quota and political empowerment

2.6.1 A top-down strategy

The implementation of quota systems is often a top-down strategy in which women are given political positions from above. The new ‘quota fever’ Dahlerup is talking about is often not a result of national demand from women’s organizations in the countries but rather due to populist politics by governments to gain international or national political status. Dahlerup

and Freidenvall claim that a new international discourse on women in institutional politics is an important factor behind recent introduction of quotas all over the world (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:3). According to Krook, powerful international organizations like the UN and IPU have put women in decision-making positions on the international political agenda and established the norm of gender balance. This has been further developed by the Western European institutions and networks that have been involved in strategies for realizing this goal and, in the long run, changed the normative principles for how to change patterns of representation. The implementation of quotas in these countries has made it possible for them to achieve a particular status or approval for their regime in the international community. Krook also argue that there has been a transnational sharing where campaigners learn new reform tactics via information and exchange across borders (Krook, 2003c:5-11). In India Nanivadekar argues that the “the absence of a widespread debate and honest critique of the policy of reservation some crucial questions remain unanswered. What do we want to achieve from the reservation? Merely sizeable presence of women in present day politics, or an altogether new politics facilitating natural participation of all sections without any artificial arrangements like reservation?”(Nanivadekar, 2003). The problem here seems to be, according to Nanivadekar, that a top-down implementation of quotas with no mass mobilization of women pressing for this demand that it will create a vacuum instead of a space for women. This vacuum is filled by “proxies” – the housewives of the male politicians without any real power as there are not enough politically active women to fill the seats. These women have a lower political awareness and serve the patriarchal interest of the family and as such their participation in politics is in itself patriarchal participation (Nanivadekar, 2003). The same type of idea is presented by John Friedman who argues that political empowerment seem to require a prior process of social empowerment through which effective participation on politics becomes possible. For women, social empowerment can lead to release from household drudgeries which makes it easier for them to be politically active. It may also contribute to an increased sense of self-confidence which makes it easier for them to act outside cultural (patriarchal) or state-imposed laws (Friedman, 1992:34).

2.6.2 Critical mass

In this debate the size of the quoted group has become an important factor in avoiding this phenomenon. The term ‘critical mass’ is often used in quota discussions – both as a minimum and as a sufficient number of women in order to be able to make changes. The

idea is that a large minority can make a difference, even if still a minority. Today countries that have implemented some type of quota often use the percentage 25-30%.

The concept is borrowed from nuclear physics, where critical mass refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction. When it comes to the discussion about quotas it is by analogy said that with a 'critical mass' of women (30 percent) in politics, fundamental change will happen before they reach 50 percent in legislative assemblies (Dahlerup, 1988:275-276). These fundamental changes will occur in political behavior, institutions and public policy that will radically transform legislatures (Studlar and McAllister, 2002). The problem here, according to Dahlerup, is the idea of an 'automatic chain reaction' since human beings do not act automatically like particles (Dahlerup, 1988:296). And "[s]ince quotas themselves do not remove all of the other barriers to the full citizenship of women, the crucial question is whether quotas imposed because of international inspiration without mobilization among larger groups of women themselves can achieve the goal. Does a critical mass of women count in itself?" (Dahlerup, 2002:14). Studlar and McAllister are critical and argue that "[w]hat is required is not a critical mass of women, but a critical mass of feminists." (Studlar and McAllister, 2002). According to Nanivadekar the relationship between the women's movement and the elected is a crucial factor the evolution of a new politics as their attitudes towards prevalent power relations will play an important role in either reinforcing or altering these relations (Nanivadekar, 2003).

2.6.3 Capacity-building and support from NGOs

According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall the Scandinavian incremental track has led to the understanding that it takes power to empower women through quotas (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:2). The idea has been that the implementation of quotas in countries where there has been previous mobilization and integration of women in all parts of society has a better chance of succeeding than in countries without this precondition (Dahlerup, 2002:14). But the Scandinavian countries can no longer be model as women are not prepared to wait 70 years for things to happen! One way to overcome the problems of 'proxies' or 'token' women is, according to Dahlerup and Freidenvall massive capacity-building and support from women's organizations (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003). According to Zoë Oxaal and Sally Baden, development organizations and women's organizations can play an enabling and facilitating role in supporting women individually and as a group (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:5). Leadership training can, for example, help women develop skills useful not only in party politics but also in negotiations with different NGOs and development agencies. It can

also be useful in promoting the formation of new organizations. It can also help women monitor the implementation of laws, to identify allies, share information and so on (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:13). Nanivadekar also stresses the need for education and training in different subjects (Nanivadekar, 2003).

2.7 The experience so far

2.7.1 Bangladesh before the new regulation

According to Iben Nathan most empirical literature on local politics in rural Bangladesh has concluded that the local government as an institution mainly serves the interests of the rich and powerful elite and the poor tend to be viewed as manipulated, forced and violated by the local elites. The few existing studies on women's political participation tend to draw and even more discouraging picture (Nathan, 1998).

The quota system which was in use from the 1970s until 1996 in Bangladesh (at both national and local level) women were nominated and then elected indirectly. The system has been heavily criticized by researchers in Bangladesh, and according Najma Chowdhury, the reserved seats in the parliament reflected a paternalistic approach to women's representation. Instead of empowering women, the patriarchal political culture of society transformed these instruments to further marginalize women in the political sphere (Chowdhury, 1994a:98). She argued that the system of indirect election of the reserved seats in parliament only ensured that the party maintaining a numerical majority in the legislature would continue to control the seats. The nomination process also resulted in good relations to the ruling political elite being more important than local political support (Chowdhury, 1994a:98, Chowdhury, 2002:52). At the local level the nomination procedure gave rise to allegations of manipulation by the social elite as well as by the civil administration (Thörlind, 2003:62). Robert Thörlind tells us that “[d]uring my field observations in 1996 [before the new quota-system was adopted] these nominated women members were never present, nor were they mentioned at all by the male members when accounting for the Union Parishads members. They obviously did not have the same weight and social status as the male members as they were not directly elected” (Thörlind, 2003:137). In 1987 a big study was conducted by Qadir and Islam that revealed that the nominated women came from the rural elite and that they were quite inactive in their role as members. The most important factor in being nominated was kinship or social status (Chowdhury, 1994b:8-9).

2.7.2 India, Pakistan and Bangladesh under the new quota systems

The empirical research under the new quota systems in the area is limited since they have not been in function for such a long time. Most empirical research comes from India where the system has been in practice for the longest time. However the conclusions that are being drawn from the experiences in India are not unequivocal. For example Shirin M Rai argues that the system of reserved seats for women in India, with increasing representation on the basis of gender alone, is a strategy of recognition rather than redistribution, thus limiting its transformative potential. She argues that it is the issue of class is essential in the process of 'engendering development' and that any debate on the empowerment of women should focus on better life-chances for women rather than higher levels of political representation. According to Rai the Indian example shows that there is no simple correlation between the visibility of women in political institutions and empowerment of women in general. Empowerment cannot be disassociated from power relations within different socio-political systems (Rai, 2003). Similarly Pam Rajput argues that despite the quota system in India women continue to remain invisible and marginalized in decision-making bodies, and that they have not been able to challenge and break the boundaries of gender. According to Rajput, the process of empowerment is not only a matter of correcting an unjust and unrepresentative system; one must also address social issues of poverty, employment, health and a just social order (Rajput, 2003). Similarly Kamal Uddin Ahmed concludes that the new quota system to UP in Bangladesh has not enabled political empowerment for the Bangladeshi women, who remain considerably under-represented at local level politics. He concludes that any substantial increase in women's representation depends on mainstream changes within the major political parties, support from women's groups, NGOs and media. He also illuminates the removal of men's structural impediments and biases and attitudes based on gender roles (Ahmed, 2003). A case study about the urban local government, done by Nazmunezza Mahtab, reveals that the elected women were well educated and belonged to the upper social strata. Almost all women were involved in some sort of organization and were all aware of the problems in the local area, like lack of communications, sanitation and education. One big problem was that they were deprived of their responsibilities and financial allocations for development of their constituencies by the other general (male) members. Many of the women also faced problems like attitudes from society, the other male members of the City Corporation and their own family. Mahtab's conclusion is that, despite the fact that the quota system is major step towards women's empowerment to ensure

their participation, the discriminatory attitudes among the men in the City Corporations combined with the lack of appropriate facilities and responsibilities have virtually made the appreciable strategy baseless. In order to improve the status of women and empower them women need to be heard at all levels of planning and policy making process (Mahtab, 2003).

A quite opposite view is presented by Amita Agarwal. According to her the reserved seats in India is a major step towards empowering women and improving their lot. She states that the results have been 'wonderful' - this despite the fact that women still face many obstacles like lack of economic freedom, cultural socialization constraining women and corruption (Agarwal, 2003). Even Raman – although not quite as positive as Agarwal – sees the opportunities that have been given to the marginalized women. According to her, the major challenge is to continue the process and find a major strand which has the capacity to contribute to the overall democratization of Indian society (Raman, 2002:28-29). As noted above Socorro L. Reyes, argues that the quota system in Pakistan has opened up for political space and strategic opportunities to make a difference in setting and implementing the agenda of local government (Reyes, 2002). Irene Graff concludes that the implementation of a quota system in Pakistan is a big step in the right direction to fulfill the requirements to equal political participation between men and women although more empirical research in the field is necessary (Graff, 2003). Chowdhury argues that the direct election to local bodies in Bangladesh has brought about a qualitative change in their role perception and claimed a space within the local bodies (Chowdhury, 2002).

2.7.3 Why so different conclusions?

The interesting question here is why the opinions about the quota systems in the different countries vary so much?

First, I think that it is important to note that the context in which a quota system will be implemented varies. According to Krook, quotas appear in many different countries with different levels of social and economic development. They will be implemented within an already existing political context which will have consequences for the implementation (Krook, 2003a:5).

Second, I think it is important to note that the systems of reserved seats in India⁴, Pakistan⁵, and Bangladesh vary slightly from each other, which of course can have consequences for the result. For example in India there is a system of rotating wards with reserved seats for women. This is not the case in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Bangladesh the wards for the reserved seats for women are three times bigger than the 'general seats'. This is not the case in the other two countries. In Pakistan the union is not divided into different wards – as in India and Bangladesh – but serve as a single constituency for all the candidates (Bari, 2000).

Third I think that it might depend on that Rai, Rajput, Ahmed, Uddin and Mahtab have a more radical view of empowerment than Agarwal, Reyes, Graff and Chowdhury even if they all require changes in deeper structural levels like class, caste and gender. Let us discuss the concept of empowerment more in detail.

2.8 Empowerment

The term 'empowerment' is used in many different contexts. It is found for example in the fields of education, social work, psychology as well as in the work of feminist and development organizations. Because of its widespread use, the definitions of the term are many (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:1). According to John Friedman, the empowerment approach is fundamental to an alternative development strategy which places emphasis at both local level as autonomy in the decision-making of the community and direct democracy as well as

⁴ The Panchayati Raj system is a three tier system; Zila parishads (district level), panchayat samities (sub-district level) and gram panchayats (lowest level). A gram panchayat is meant to consist of 8-10 villages with a total of about 12,000-15,000 inhabitants. The number of members in gram panchayat is not fixed but varies from 5-30 members depending on the size of the population in the panchayat. The members are elected as candidates from a party list and serve a mandatory term of five years. The gram panchayat members elect the chairman among themselves (Thörlind, 2003:56). The system of reserved seats for women is rotating. This means that if you have a panchayat with nine villages and nine members, three of these villages have to vote for a female candidate. In the next election it is three other villages that have to do this. The same is true for the chairman where one also has reserved one third of the positions. There have been discussions about introducing the same type of legislation at the national level (the 84th Amendment Bill) but it has not yet passed (Raman, 2003:24-26).

⁵ In Pakistan in 1999 a military coup removed the civilian government, but as a part of a democratization process the military government adopted a plan in 2000 that guaranteed a 29% quota for women at the zila council (district level), tehsil council (sub-district level) and union councils (village level). The members to union council are elected directly but to tehsil and zila level the members are elected indirectly by an electoral college formed by the elected councilors at the union level. The union council consists of 8-10 villages and is composed of 21 members whereof six members are women. The elections to union council are non-party based and the union serves as one single constituency for all candidates. Elections to union council were held between 2000 and 2001. At the national level, the Senate and National Assemblies, 17% and 18% respectively of the seats are reserved for women. In the Provincial Assemblies 22% of the seats are reserved for women (Reyes, 2003:42-44).

changes at a deeper more structural level as global economic forces, structure of unequal wealth and so on (Friedman, 1992:vii).

According to Naila Kabeer one way of understanding empowerment is to see it in terms of ability to make choices. Empowerment is the “expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” (Kabeer, 2001:19). Strategic life choices are, according to her, choices that have greater significance than other’s in terms of their consequences for people’s lives such as choice of livelihood, where to live, whether to marry and with whom, number of children, freedom of movement and so on. These strategic life choices should be distinguished from other less consequential choices which may be important for the quality of life but do not constitute its defining parameters. Empowerment also entails a process of changes where people who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability (Kabeer, 2001:19).

According to Kabeer, there are three levels of empowerment: the immediate level (individual resources, agency and achievements), the intermediate level (institutional rules and resources) and the ‘deeper’ level (hidden, structural relations of class, caste and gender which shape the distribution of resources and power in a society and reproduce it over time). According to her ‘meaningful and sustainable empowerment’ must reflect changes at all these different ‘levels’ as changes in one level only is not enough (Kabeer, 2001:27).

2.8.1 Political empowerment

When the term is used in development activities it is often a generic term under which one can distinguish between economic empowerment through micro credit programs, empowerment through sexual and reproductive rights and health as well as empowerment through political participation (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:7). Friedman stresses the importance of political empowerment and argues that if an alternative development is to advocate the social empowerment of the poor, it must also advocate their political empowerment (Friedman, 1992:7).

When it comes to women’s political empowerment, it is often used as a way of describing the importance of the participation of women in formal politics. This includes work with women in government at national and local level, party politics as well as supporting women’s involvement in NGOs and women’s movement. There is a ranges of possible ways to increase women’s participation: reform of political parties; quotas or other forms of affirmative action; training to develop women’s skills and gender sensitivity; work with women’s sections of political parties; and the development of women’s political organizations (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:11-12). One important thing is that political

empowerment for women it is not just increasing the number of women in decision-making positions in formal political structures. According to Oxaal and Baden, quantitative measures of women's participation in politics need to be accompanied by measures to improve the quality of participation. These measures include for example awareness raising, training programs for female candidates, the cultivation of networks between women in local government and women in NGOs, provision of childcare and leadership training (Oxaal and Baden, 1997:11-13).

2.9 Definition of empowerment and research questions

The aim is to study the implications of the use of reserved seats in Bangladesh in terms of women's political empowerment. As a point of referens, I'd like to use Kabeer's definition of empowerment as the "expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them."(Kabeer, 2001:19). In order to be able to use this definition in my study, I have tried to find indicators of the phenomenon. This I have done by focusing on two things – the women's capacity to act, and changes at deeper structural levels like class and gender. The 'capacity to act' is the elected women and their own perception of what they have been able to do in UP. To understand changes at deeper structural levels I have been interested in discovering *what* they have done, who they are, who they represent and so on. The term political empowerment is used to distinguish it from for example economic empowerment and to note that my focus in this study is the system of reserved seats in UP.

To my help I'm going to use two research questions which also reflect the two areas of focus. The first question is about the system of reserved seats itself and how it works in practice and its implications for the women's capacity to act. Here I want to explore the electoral system that is used, the role of political parties and so on. The question is: how does the system of reserved seats in UP work in practice and what are the relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and women's capacity to act?

The second question is about quota systems a top-down strategy and women's political empowerment in terms of changes on the deeper levels. This has to be in focus when it comes to quotas. The question is: If the implementation of reserved seats creates a vacuum that is filled with 'proxies' or 'token' women, what role can support from NGOs and capacity-building activities play in order to solve this problem?

3 Method

3.1 Scope of the study

In order to fulfill the purpose of the study several limitations have been made, most depending on the time and resources available for the research. The scope of the study is limited to the local rural politics in Bangladesh and I have therefore excluded the national as well as the urban local arena. I have also chosen to focus on elected women to the reserves seats even though there are a few women elected to general seats as well as the post of chairman since these are open for both men and women. The role of administrative personal is also kept out of the discussion. In UP there is for example a secretary and other administrative personal appointed by the government and they are paid directly by the government. I have chosen not to cover the role or importance of the secretary even though this can be seen as a way for the government to 'control' the UP (Aminuzzaman, 2003). It is also important to note that corruption is a major problem in the domestic politics in Bangladesh. According to Transparency Internationals annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2002 Bangladesh were the 'most corrupted' country and 'qualified' to the lowest position on the list of compared countries (Global Corruption Report, 2003:156). In order to understand local governance in Bangladesh however, it is important to be aware of this.

The study only covers two small geographical areas in Bangladesh and based on qualitative data from interviews with a small number of women, NGOs and key-persons. Let me discuss these issues more in detail.

3.2 Material

The empirical material is based on both written and oral sources. The written sources are formal laws, books, research and evaluations, principally written and done by researchers from Bangladesh. But the limited empirical research in the field also made me dependent on studies from NGOs active in the field of public administration and capacity-building among women in UP. I have also used official statistics from for example the Election Commission Secretariat in Bangladesh. The oral sources I have used derive from the field study that I conducted in Bangladesh in April and May 2003 thanks to a so-called Minor Field Study

scholarship from Sida. This field work is mainly based on recorded semi-standardized interviews that I conducted in Dhaka and in three rural areas of Bangladesh. These interviews were of three different kinds: interviews with NGOs, with key informants and with women who were or had been members of the UP in the reserved seats.

3.3 The selection

3.3.1 NGOs

In Dhaka I interviewed six NGOs working with so-called capacity-building strategies towards elected women in UP. As Bangladesh has over 1000 NGOs it was not an easy task to know where to start. Luckily my first NGO-meeting was with Aroma Dutta at the Prip Trust; she became an invaluable help for me finding the right people to talk to. Apart from this, I tried to choose large NGOs that had work all over Bangladesh. These NGOs were Care, BNPS, Prip Trust, Khan Foundation, Mahila Parishad and Democracy watch. As a result of different problems – technical as well as personal - I was only able to use three of these interviews: viz. Care, BNPS and Prip Trust.⁶

The interview-guide had three sections of questions where I first wanted to gain some background information about the organization or institution, second what problem they have identified among the women in UP, and third, a description about their strategies and projects among the elected members in UP.⁷

3.3.2 Key informants

I also conducted interviews with some key informants with good insights in the area of study. These were Dr. Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman, Professor of Public Administration at the University of Dhaka, Dr. Zarina Rahman Khan, director of ARD, Inc., Dr. Tofail Ahmed, Professor at the Department of Public Administration at the University of Chittagong, Kushi Kabir, Executive Director of Nijera Kori, a national NGO working with social mobilization and Q. Md. Afsar Hossain Saqui, Director of Training at NILG (National Institution of Local Governance) which is the institution responsible for capacity-building offered by the government.⁸ I also had contact with Johan Norberg, first secretary at Sida in Bangladesh

⁶ See Appendix C and D

⁷ See Appendix A

⁸ See Appendix C and D

and Dr. Nazmunezza Mahtab, professor of Public Administration and head of the Women's Studies Department at the University of Dhaka to make sure that I had spoken to all the necessary people and organizations. All these interviews were made in English. These interviews were freer than the interviews with the NGOs and were based on themes more than questions.

3.3.3 Members of the UP

After some time in Dhaka I went to the rural area for about two weeks. First I went to Cox's Bazaar in the southeast of Bangladesh and made seven interviews in the surrounding area. Then I went to Bogora in the northwestern part of Bangladesh, where I conducted seven interviews. After that I went even further north to the area of Rangpou where I conducted the last three interviews.



Source: <http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bg.html>

Cox's Bazaar is a remote part of Bangladesh which is a subject to frequent flooding. The presence of NGOs is not so dense here as in Bogora and Rangpou, where the presence of different NGOs is high. Even though this is the case, my intention is not to compare these two areas with each other. In all three areas I tried to find three samples of women: those elected to the reserved seats in UP only in 1997, those elected in both 1997 and 2003 and those elected only in 2003. The three last interviews made in Rangpou were made because I

knew that these women were connected to an NGO called Nijera Kori which works with social mobilization of the landless people. I conducted a total of 17 interviews, also semi-standardized. To my chagrin I discovered too late that four of these interviews were not recorded, so the material I have from these four interviews consists of their socio-economic status and the notes I made during the interview. In some cases I interviewed all of the women in the same UP, sometimes not. In all, I interviewed women belonging to eight different UPs.⁹

3.3.3.1 *Kategorization of the women*

As noted above, the women I interviewed consisted of three different categories and I have used these ‘natural’ categories in order to analyze the answers from the women. These are:

Category A: Women elected only 1997 (4 women)

Category B: Women elected both 1997 and 2003 (7 women)

Category C: Women elected only 2003 (6 women)

The women in the categories A and B could give me information about the work in UP. They could tell me what they had done or not done, about the political environment and so on. I thought it was especially interesting to meet with the women who did not run for re-election, for the purpose of understanding the reason behind that decision, something the newly elected women in category C could not. In category C the women could give me interesting information about why they had decided to run for election, who they represented and what they wanted to do.

3.4 The interview guides

My interview guide for the women in UP composed of four sections.¹⁰ First, their background, a form I filled in together with the respondent. Here I asked about their socio-economic status, education and family status and if they owned land. Overall education and landownership are very important factors when it comes to the socio-economic status in Bangladesh, where higher levels of education and land ownership are associated with lower

⁹ These UPs were; Baro Moheshkhali, Gorakgata, P.M. Khali, Koroskor, Barogap, Chota Moheshkhali, Narhatta, Saidpur and Pairabond.

¹⁰ See Appendix A

probability of being poor (World Bank, 1999:13). Education has a strong impact in the urban areas while land mattered most in the rural areas (World Bank, 1999:29-30). The land is unevenly distributed among the people; the richest 10% of the landowners owns about 50% of the land and the poorest 10% of the landowners owns about 2%. About half of the people in the rural areas are landless (Länder i fickformat, 2002:29). When it comes to education, the system in Bangladesh is structured as follows; class 1-5 (free for both boys and girls), class 6-10 (class 6-8 free for girls) and class 11-12 (senior high school). According to statistics from World Development Indicators Database more than half of the students that enrolls in class one drops out before class five and the total illiteracy among adults, male and female from 15 years and above, is 60%. The percentage among women is 70%.

The second section was about the political environment and the women's capacity to act. Here I wanted to know how active they had been, problems they had faced, and what they had been able to achieve according to the women's own experiences. The third section was about the support they had received from family, NGOs and others. In the last section, I wanted to know more about the motives and interests - why or why not they contested to UP. The questions varied slightly depending on when they were elected and how many times.

In these three sections the facts are of course completely dependent on the answers from the respondents. If they told me that they had been able to build five roads I had to assume that they have been able to do this. The problem here is that it is maybe easier to talk about positive things like what you have done than of more negative things like failures. Another thing is that the experiences are personal and can be judged differently by different persons as they have different backgrounds. A problem categorized as a big one for one woman may be categorized as a small one for another woman and so on. I tried to solve this problem by asking them more exactly for example how many roads they had been able to do, how many days of training and so on. Apart from this it is, important to note that the main purpose of the interviews was not to find out about 'correct facts' but more the women's perception of their situation. What was their personal experience of their work in UP? Did they feel that they had been able to do anything? How did the other members react when they talked? Did they laugh or listen to them?

3.5 The imperfect interview situation

The interviews were made with interpreters as the respondents couldn't speak any English and I couldn't speak any Bengali. Before the interviews I told the interpreter about my study and brought the interview guide up to speed to make sure that he would understand all the questions and get an understanding of the aim of the study.

The interviews were conducted in several different situations. A very few interviews were made with only me, the interpreter and the respondent. Some of the interviews were made in the official building where the UP gathers and has its meetings, and some were held outside, near the home of the interviewed. Often the interviews were conducted outside among a lot of people: members of the family, people from the village (men, women and children) and even their goats!

Conducting those interviews was a big challenge for me. The technique of semi-standardized interviews was chosen because it allowed me to ask questions in a specific order and - at the same time - be open for new questions that developed during the course of the interview. Thus the respondent was able to develop her own thoughts and speak in more detail about the issues (Berg, 2001:70, Denscombe, 1998:113). This also made it possible for me to be sure that I got my questions answered. I found it also very valuable for me to meet with the women themselves and see the environment they work in. This gave me a better understanding of the conditions these women are working under.

To be able to use the technique properly, one must have to be aware of certain things that can affect upon one's results. This applies especially to personal identity factors like sex, age and ethnicity, but also includes practical things like the place where you conduct the interview. According to Martyn Denscombe "the researcher needs to try to find a location for the interview in which they will be not disturbed, which offers privacy, which has fairly good acoustics and which is reasonably quiet." (Denscombe, 1998:117, 120). For me this became very problematic. First the differences between me and the respondent's personal preferences were of course very significant. I tried to overcome this by showing a picture of my three children which I felt was a very effective way to make a contact. The next problem was the language and the use of an interpreter and its impact on the data. The use of foreign languages may mean that the interviewer, interpreter or respondent may misunderstand the questions and/or answers. Then there is the problem with the identity of the interpreter that I mentioned above. The five interpreters I used were all male, even though I tried to get female ones. In the rural areas this was very difficult. If I had realized this before I went to

the rural areas, I would have tried to get a female one in Dhaka and asked her to travel with me. Third, it was the different situations the interviews were conducted under. My preconceptions about 'the perfect interview situation' made me very frustrated until I realized that this is a utopian idea; interviews cannot be like an experiment as the interview situation always varies. I found it very difficult and problematic to ask people to leave, find a room where we could sit alone or, as in some cases, tell the husband or male relative to not fill in the answers. This would have been to offend them. My tactic for controlling that I had received the right data was to I reformulate the questions, ask them again later or kindly say that I *also* wanted to hear the respondent's opinion. Having said this, I still think it's important to openly show under what conditions the interviews were made and take this into consideration when the conclusions are drawn. I'm not able to decide the possible constraints this constituted for the respondents although I always felt I achieved a rapport with the respondent. I never received the impression that they hesitated when answering the questions. Most of the women were very eager and interested to tell about their experiences, good as well as bad.

4 Women in rural Bangladesh

In this chapter I shall describe the situation of women in Bangladesh with special focus on poor women in the rural areas.

4.1 Brief country profile

Bangladesh is a flat fertile delta about one third the size of Sweden. It is located in south Asia, in the Bay of Bengal and is the world's most densely populated country. According to data from World Food Program it is classified as 'a least developed country' and of the population of 140 million people, about 30 million are considered 'ultra poor'. These people suffer from chronic food shortages and severe malnutrition. Its inhabitants are also very vulnerable to catastrophes like floods and cyclones. About three fourths of the population lives in the rural areas although more people are moving in to the big cities like Dhaka (Sida, 2002:106-?)

As a state, Bangladesh is fairly young, created in 1971 (Ahmed, 1996:220). When Britain withdrew from the Indian subcontinent in 1947, two states were born: India and Pakistan, the latter consisting of the western areas of Punjab (West Pakistan) and the eastern areas of Bengal (East Pakistan) (Ahmed, 1996:95). The political tensions between West and East Pakistan culminated in 1971 with a civil war. In December the same year East Pakistan broke away from West Pakistan and became the independent state of Bangladesh (Ahmed, 1996:220). The 1972 Bangladeshi Constitution declared the state as a secular, democratic, unitary Peoples Republic of Bangladesh and a parliamentary democracy, based on a universal adult franchise was adopted (Ahmed, 1996:224). From 1975 to 1991 Bangladesh was under military rule. Today the country is once again a democracy.

Today the constitution of Bangladesh provides for formal political equality of men and women, and there is no legal barrier for women to vote or to contest (Chowdhury, 1994a:97). All citizens are equal before the law and the state shall not discriminate any citizen because of sex. In Article 28(2) it says specifically that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the state and public life. In article 9 it says that in the local government institutions special representation shall be given women (Mahtab, 2003:4).

The current government is led by Khaleda Zia who is the leader of Bangladesh National Party (BNP). In the 2001 election her party got 191 of the 300 seats in the national parliament. They are now ruling the county together with two Islamic parties (Jamaat-e-

Islami and Islami Oikyo Joite) and a secular party (Jatiya party). Together they hold 215 seats. The former ruling party Awami League lost and got only 62 mandates compared to 146 in the 1996 election (Länder i fickformat, 2002:18).

4.2 Watering the neighbor's tree

At the national level in both India, Pakistan and Bangladesh there have been and are women that have strong political positions: Indira Gandhi (former Prime Minister of India and leader of the Congress party, assassinated 1984), Benazir Bhutto (leader of the Pakistan People's Party and former Prime Minister of Pakistan), Sheikh Hasina Wajed (leader of the opposition party Awami League in Bangladesh) and Khaleda Zia (leader of Bangladesh National Party and Prime Minister of Bangladesh). According to Chowdhury, this is a paradox in a patriarchal culture and can best be explained by their kinship linkages to male authority. Blood and inheritance has legitimated their leadership. Women at both local and national levels have only played a marginal role in formal politics (Chowdhury, 1994a:97, 100). According to Kabeer, Bangladesh belongs to a belt of 'classic patriarchy' which stretches from northern Africa across the Middle East to the northern plains of the Indian sub-continent. The reasons behind its denomination are the social structures in the belt characterized by the institutionalization of extremely restrictive codes and behavior for women. They stand in contrast to societies of South India and much of Southeast Asia whose institutions and practices permit a more egalitarian system of gender relations (Kabeer, 1988:95).

The status of women in Bangladesh is low; this is manifested in many ways. Gender disaggregated key human development indicators show that women in Bangladesh, including adolescent girls and the girl child, are significantly worse off than men in practically every aspect of life. Bangladesh has been ranked 140th in the world in terms of a gender related index based on gender gaps in literacy, education, health care, asset ownership and income. For example the literacy rate for men is 50.6 percent contrasted to 41.5 percent for women (Sida, 2002:14, 17). The cumulative discrimination against women in the allocation of household resources appears to underlie these differences of mortality (Kabeer, 1988:103). Bangladesh is one of the few countries in the world where there are fewer women than men (100 women to every 105.8 men) and in which women have lower life expectancy than men (57.6 years for women and 58.1 years for men) (Sida, 2002:17).

The systematic devaluation of women can be traced to the organization of the family, kinship and marriage, to inheritance patterns, to gender segregation and to the ideologies surrounding these practices. To illustrate this, one can look at the rules of descent in Bangladesh which are organized along patrilineal lines. This means that descent and property are reckoned through the male's offspring. One implication that flow from this practice is that a daughter is likely to be regarded as a burden by her own family as she has to be supported during her least productive years and kept under constant watch so that she can be handed over to her husband with her chastity intact. Raising a daughter is like 'watering the neighbor's tree; you take all the trouble to nurture the plant, but the fruit goes to someone else'. Another implication is that women are cut off from their potential support. Once married, they are expected to move to the husband's household and assume responsibility for domestic chores. The only position of authority open for most women is the position of mother-in-law (Kabeer, 1988:100-102). When they finally reach that position, the mothers-in-law have a tendency to argue that 'because I have suffered, you shall not escape' (Forsslund, 1995:19).

4.3 Purdah

At the heart of this system of social arrangements is the institution of *purdah* or female seclusion which defines and limits the personal and economic autonomy and social power of women (Kabeer, 1988:102). The word *purdah* literally means curtain or veil, and is used to segregate females from males and minimize the interaction of women and men outside the immediate family. The strict following of *purdah* keeps the women within the home and, if she goes out she must be dressed in a *burkha*, a garment covering the body from top to toe with hole for the eyes only (Forsslund, 1995:18). The female voice should not reach male ears outside the household, and she must therefore speak in a low voice. This is done by creating different sexually segregated spheres and confining women into the private sphere of the home (Kabeer, 1988:101). *Purdah* is practiced all over Bangladesh, but it varies in different regions of the country due to the level of religious orthodoxy, as well as social and economic status (Forsslund, 1995:18).

The work that women perform within the household is twofold. Firstly, women are responsible for reproduction of the household labor force. In addition to the usual domestic tasks of preparing, cooking and serving meals and cleaning the house, women also collect

fuel (like firewood and cow dung), carry water for domestic use and look after the kitchen garden, livestock and poultry. Secondly, they contribute to the value of the market commodities by participation in agricultural production as well as in household-based small-scale industry. In both activities the *purdah* restrictions prevent women from attending the market. This has the consequence that all sale of household produce has to be mediated by men, who thus control the proceeds of the women's labor (Kabeer, 1988:102).

It's important to note that the possibilities available for women vary across the different classes, between rich and poor (White, 1992:23). Wealthy households for example have access to hired female labor (Kabeer, 1988:104). High class women want to have education and the ability to move in the society (Chowdhury, 1994a:94). At the same time, the poorest, the landless people, cannot afford the expenses involved in observing strict *purdah*, for example the prohibition against working outside the house. Poverty has made it unavoidable to adapt different forms of female mobility. In the seventies, programs started in order to care for women, e.g., Food for Work Programs with paddy husking and road maintenance work, because the women could not longer rely only on the husband's income to the family (Forsslund, 1995:19). These Bangladeshi women, the rural poor, are on the lowest rung of life's ladder (Hashmi, 2000:96).

4.4 Rise of violent acts against women

According to Taj ul-Islam Hashmi, there has been a rise in the number of violent acts against poor rural women in the post-independent period despite the fact that Bangladeshi women have achieved more rights and privileges during this period (Hashmi, 2000:3, 5). In the 1990s there has been a sudden rise of the dispersion of *fatwas* against women by *mullahs* (Imam or Muslim cleric) in *shalish* for violating *Sharia law* and Islamic codes of conduct.

Shalish, or village court, is a pre-colonial traditional institution of conflict resolution through mediation which passes informal judgments seeking compromise solutions on the village level. These can be disputes over property, family, marriage, divorce or inheritance matters. They can also punish men and women for violating the moral or religious code and honor of the village community. In the 1970s the government regulated the jurisdictions and activities of the *shalish* courts to handle minor civil matters and petty criminal offences. The *shalish* cannot pass any sentence of fine or imprisonment but may order the guilty person to pay a compensating amount of money (not exceeding 5000 taka) to the aggrieved person.

A *shalish* is apparently established when a problem arises, and allows for a quick and inexpensive solution. The punishment for moral offenders can be to be beaten up with shoes or asked to hold their ears in public in the *shalish* or, in extreme cases, ostracized by the villagers. The persons sitting in *shalish* are influential village elders, local mullahs and members of the UP. Women are generally excluded from sitting in *shalish* and women plaintiffs must be presented by their male relatives. Some of the judgments in *shalish* against women have been public stoning, ostracism or even in extreme cases drinking urine. These recent convictions and sentences of women in violation of *Sharia law* have no legal sanction or authority of the government (Hashmi, 2000: chapter 4).

The sentences in *Shalish* for violating *Sharia law* or Islamic codes of conduct should be seen in light of the fact that Bangladesh has gone through a process of Islamization since the second half of the 1970s. It started in 1975 under the military regime of Ziaur Rahman (1975-81) who replaced ‘secularism’ in the constitution with the ‘Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions’. This was further accentuated under the second military regime of General Ershad (1981-1990), who in 1988 proclaimed Islam as state religion (Hashmi, 2000:190). Today Bangladesh is the third largest Muslim country in the worlds with almost 90% Muslims.

According to Deniz Kandiyoti however, it’s problematic to explain the subordination of Muslim women solely with reference to Islamic ideology or practice. Instead, one must make an adequate analysis of the position of women in Muslim societies, grounded in a detailed examination of the political projects of contemporary states and their historical transformations (Kandiyoti, 1991:2). According to Kabeer, the ‘patriarchal belt’ encompasses both Muslim and non-Muslim societies, and therefore Islam can only be partially implicated when explaining the extreme forms of female subordination (Kabeer, 1988:95).

According to Hashmi, it's important to note that there is a differentiating between the teachings of the Quran and the *hadis* (interpretations of the scripture) literature and opinions of Muslim jurists and scholar’s vis-à-vis women's rights and status in Islam. The practice of seclusion and polygamy, for example, don't have any support in the Quran even though it's said to be as per ‘Quran instructions’. What Hashmi illuminates is the difference between local cultural practices justified in religious terms and the laws and probations that are prescribed in the Quran. Her conclusion is that it is the man-made law and pre-Islamic customs and traditions, not Islamic teachings, that are responsible for the promotion of misogyny and subjection of women in Muslim societies, Bangladesh included. The origins

of this discrimination may be traced to historical patriarchal traditions and norms of society which pre-date Islam rather than the short period of Illumination noted above (Hashmi, 2000:5-8), Kabeer, 1988:96-97).

4.4.1 Competition over resources

To explain the rise of violent acts against women, Hashmi is of the opinion that one must understand the importance of patriarchy structures, globalization and the advent of market economy as important factors (Hashmi, 2000:2). The competition for the meager resources among poor villagers has increased as conflicts have emerged between the traditional and newly-emerging elites in rural society over the control of these resources. (Hashmi, 2000:100). Both 'Islamists' and 'secular' Bangladeshi Muslims legitimize the subjection and deprivation of women in the name of Islam as it is a useful tool safeguarding their vested interests (Hashmi, 2000:91, 209).

According to Kabeer the old forms of family organization in the rural areas have gradually been eroded as a result of impoverishment and loss of landed assets. The massive population growth has made land a scare resource and landlessness has meant that both women and men have lost the basis of their productive role within household-based economies with different implications for men and women. According to Kabeer, the undermining of the productive role of women may underlie the recent emergence of a system of dowry in Bangladesh the last 20-30 years. In this new practice, the groom and his family become the main beneficiaries, in contrast to the Muslim custom of *mahr*¹¹, observed in the past. Under this new system, men no longer face any penalties at divorce and marrying more than once is often a good way to acquire wealth. Poor and landless women are facing higher rates of divorce than ever before with an increasing number of female-headed households as a result (Kabeer, 1988:106).

4.4.2 Social changes

The economic stress and pressure is forcing women from all classes, not only the poor, to seek employment (Kabeer, 1988:105). This has meant that they are forced into more public arenas of society. Since the early eighties, a new form of urban employment has become available for women with the export oriented garment industry. Today the biggest export

¹¹ With the custom of *mahr*, the bride, and sometimes her family would receive gifts for personal use from her husband's family. These gifts could be claimed in cash by the wife if she was divorced without reason and could act as a deterrent to divorce. The bride brought a dowry consisting of items such as household utensils but these remained her property (Kabeer, 1988:106).

product is clothes and the clothing industry constitutes 70% of the total export (Länder i fickformat, 2002:26). The work force is composed mainly of young, unmarried girls from the rural areas and today the industries employ more than a million women (Hashmi, 2000:171, Kabeer, 1988:107). I saw them in dozens all over Dhaka when I was there - sari-dressed girls coming from the factories late at night. The effects for the women working in the garment industry are both positive and negative. On one hand, these industries have made women's participation in wage employment possible; something that can change the values held by the workers and their families regarding women's role and position (Hashmi, 2000:173). According to Kabeer this has created "a first-generation of female industrial work-force in a society where *purdah* had existed as an almost impenetrable barrier to the flow of female labourer into the public sphere."(Hashmi, 2000:173). On the other hand, they have been exploited as cheap laborers with no right to organize unions to demand better wages and working conditions. The women are underpaid and work under deplorable working conditions. The average salary is 1000 taka per month,¹² which is below the minimum a woman needs to sustain herself and her family (Hashmi, 2000:171).

¹² According to Hashmi, the average salary was around 650 Taka, but I have updated the figure and changed it to 1000 Taka. See for example: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/international/july-dec03/garment_9-16.html

5 The system of reserved seats in Union Parishad

As noted before there are many different types of quotas which tend to vary in the degree to which they actually increase the number of women (Krook, 2003b). These systems also appear within an already existing political context which will have consequences for the implementation (Krook, 2003a:5). In this chapter I shall describe the local government in general and the system of reserved seats in UP in particular. I'm also going to analyze the relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and its implications for the women's capacity to act. Here I want to explore the electoral system that is used, the role of political parties and so on. The question is: how does the system of reserved seats in UP work in practice and what is the relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and women's capacity to act?

To be able to analyze the material I shall use the categorizations that I described in the chapter about method. These are as follows:

Category A: Women elected only in 1997 (4 women)

Category B: Women elected in both 1997 and 2003 (7 women)

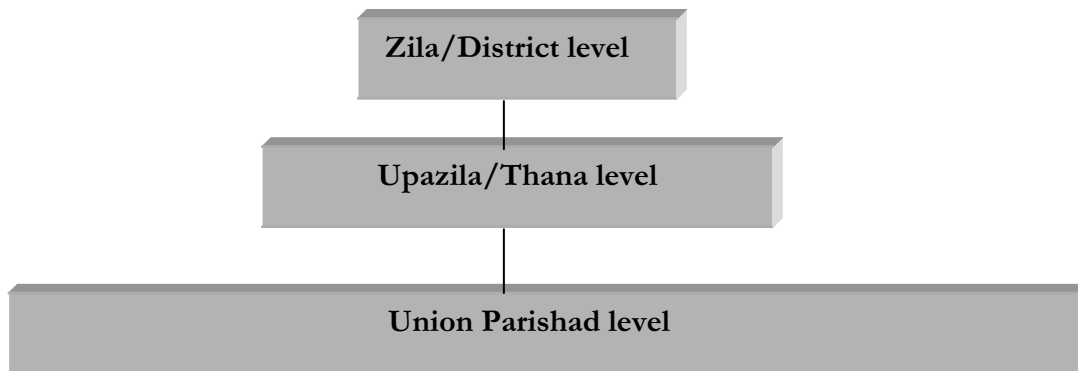
Category C: Women elected only in 2003 (6 women)

5.1 Structure and functions of Union Parishad

5.1.1 From the British era to the current system

Even though local government institutions have existed in India as far back as ancient times, the roots of their contemporary forms date from the colonial period (Nathan, 1998:86). When the Indian subcontinent was incorporated into the British Empire in 1858, it also became a part of the British colonial administration. It was under the British rule the local government at union level was first introduced under the Bengal Village Panchayat Act in 1870 (Ahmed, 1995:82, Chowdhury, 1994b:6). According to Nathan, the changing central governments have attached much importance to local governmental reforms (Nathan, 1998:136). Tasneem Siddiqui argues that each government in Bangladesh wanted to establish its own form of local government. Therefore the different levels of elected bodies have been fairly unstable (Siddiqui, 2002:5). Today Bangladeshi local government is

structured in three tiers: 64 districts, 464 Upazilas/Thanas and 4476 Union Parishads (UP) (Jahan, 2000:115, Nathan, 1998:111, Statistic from Bangladesh Election Commission).



According to Thörlind it was Ershad that undertook the most ambitious effort to decentralize with a three-tier Upazila system, quite similar to the Panchayati Raj in India (Thörlind, 2003:61-62). According to Siddiqui, Ershad - who took power through a military coup - used decentralization as a legitimizing ideology (Siddiqui, 2002:3). This system was in function between 1982-1991, but was partly abolished when Khaleda Zia (leader of BNP) was elected. One of the things she did was to replace the elected level Upazila Parishad with Thana, which is an old administrative concept from the police station area (Thörlind, 2003:62). When the Awami League came into power 1996, Upazila Parishad was again declared as an administrative unit and its constitution was passed by the parliament in 1998. In the 2000 Upazila Parishad act and the Zila Parishad act were passed which make both bodies elected. The members of Upazila Parishad will be elected through direct elections and Zila through indirect elections. Until now no elections have been held on these levels (Siddiqui, 2002:5). Today it is only to UP there have been continuous elections¹³ (Thörlind, 2003:62). The last election to UP was held in 2003.

5.1.2 Structure and functions of Union Parishad

The number of members in UP is fixed and does not depend on the size of the population in the union as does the system of Panchayat Raj in India. A union consists of 5-15 villages

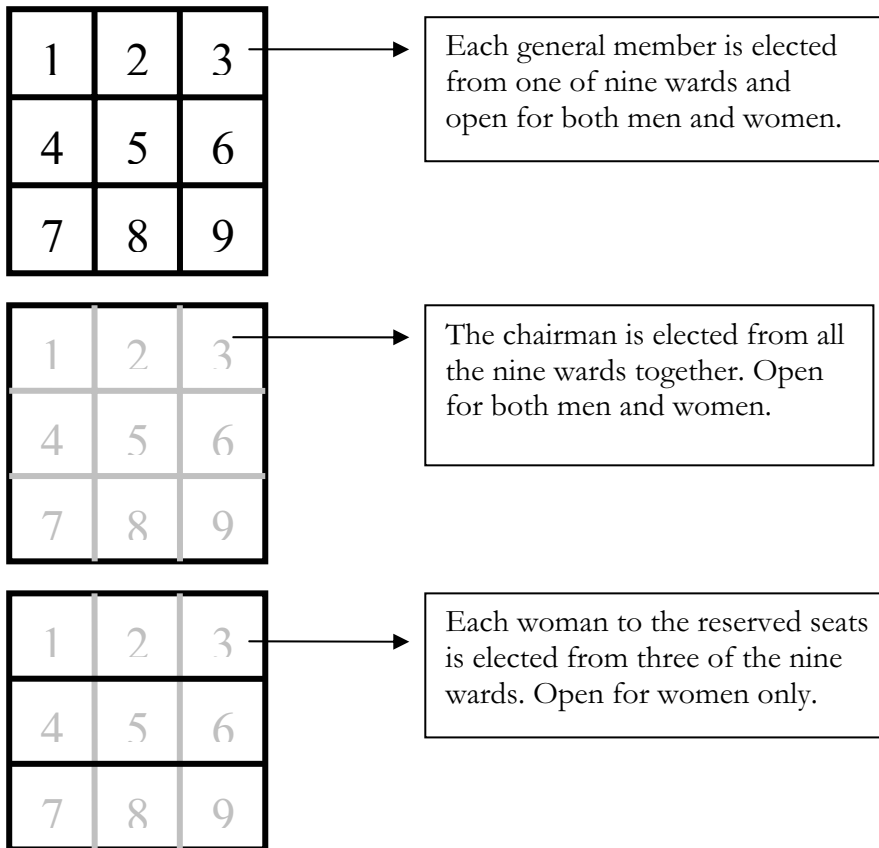
¹³ Below UP there is something called Gram Parishad at the village level. To this level there have never been any elections even if they have been planned.. There is also an urban local system of governance for the six big cities in Bangladesh. These are called City Corporations. Below the City Corporations there are 90 Porshavas which can be compared to the rural UPs. The Pourshavas have the same system with three reserved seats for women (Mahtab, 2003:5). The three hill districts of Banderban, Rangarnati and Khagrachhiari have a special type of local government with three Zila Parishads, UPs and headmen at the village level (Siddiqui, 2000:13).

with an average combined population of 24,500 (Nathan, 1998:110, Thörlind, 2003:61-62). UP consists of one chairperson, nine general members and three women members in reserved seats, for a total of 13 persons. This means that the percentage of women will be at least 23%. All the positions, including the chairman, are directly elected in non-party based elections (Siddiqui, 2002). The electoral system used is a majority-system, a so-called 'first past the post' system where contests are held in single-member districts and the winner is the candidate with the most votes.

The chairman is elected from the whole UP; this office is open for both men and women to contest. The nine general members are directly elected from each of the union's nine wards; these positions are open to both men and women. The women in the reserved seats don't have any special ward of their own but are elected from three of the general wards (Aminuzzaman, 2003). In these wards (open for women only) women candidates contest against each other but are elected by votes from both men and women. According to the Bangladesh Election Commission, chairmen or member candidates (both general and reserved seats) have to fill in a nomination paper to the local administrative officer TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer) and pay 2000 taka respectively 750 taka.¹⁴

¹⁴ 1 Taka = ca 0,13 SEK (May 2004)

Union Parishad



UP is mainly responsible for economic, social and community development. That is the implementation of development schemes in the field of agriculture, forestry, fisheries, education, health, irrigation and flood protection, family planning, protection and maintenance of infrastructure, motivating people to use latrines, the registration of births, marriages, deaths and so on. They are also supposed to maintain law and order (Aminuzzaman, 2003:3-4, Natan, 1998:109). The World Food Programme also works through UP and distributes wheat through VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards (World Food Programme, 1999).

The work in UP is financed through the Annual Development Program (ADP) allocated through the Upazila. According to the information I received during my interviews, the UP gets approximately 250 000 -300 000 taka per year from the government. The funding is based on size of the population, geographical area and level of poverty. Apart from the funding from the government, the UP is supposed to collect their own revenues through taxes, leasing fees and so on (Aminuzzaman, 2003:5, Natan, 1998:109).

5.2 Nomination

One important thing is the nomination procedure in the election. Who decides or encourages the women who run for election?

5.2.1 Informally party connections

As noted above, the elections to UP are technically non-party based. Despite this, there are informal connections to national parties and the election often mirrors the support for the ruling party and the opposition. According to Ahmed, the political parties control and decide who will represent the party in the elections – even at the local level. By doing so they play an important role shaping women’s representation in formal politics. A strong connection to a party is one of the basic requirements for nomination as a candidate (Ahmed, 2003). According to Tofail, one of my key-informants, one can also ‘buy’ the support from a political party if one offers the right amount of money. According to him, the parties don’t offer any money to support the election campaign; rather, one can pay money to be nominated!

According to Ahmed, none of the two major political parties – Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Awami League (AL) - has been truly interested in increasing the number of women in their own parties. By nominating few women candidates they have worked as an efficient gate-keeper to the general seats (Ahmed, 2003). According to official statistics from Bangladesh Election Commission, 110 women were elected to the general seats in the 1997 election and only 91 in the 2003 election.

According to Tofail, the small number of women in the parties also has consequences for the reserved seats. One of the problems is that they don’t gain much experience of insider politics which makes them less influential in the system than male counterparts. They lack leadership experience and become quiet and shy when they enter the UP. This is of course also a consequence of gendered norms and cultural patterns and the pre-determined social roles assigned to women and men. Only one of the 17 women I interviewed told me that she was active in a political party although I don’t know if she meant that she was a member herself. She belonged to category C. According to my interviews with the NGOs and key persons, politicians have a bad reputation in Bangladesh and politics are seen as dirty work – nothing for honorable women.

Although the women themselves are not active in any political party, their relatives may be. In my interview sample, six women out of 17 – representing all three categories –

had some male relative (husband, brother, father) who was/is politically active. And even if they did not tell me that they represented any particular party their relatives' connection must not be underestimated, something that I will discuss in the next chapter.

5.2.2 NGO-nominated women

It is not only political parties that nominates but also NGOs. Of the women I interviewed, three told me that they had been nominated and encouraged by their NGO (Nijera Kori) to stand for election. Two belonged to the category B and one to category C. These women had also received help during the election campaign from other members of the organization. According to Hashmi, the link between women involved in NGOs and running for election at the local level seems to be weak and does not go beyond nominating some women as candidates in the local council elections. In the elections to UP in 1997 only 10 per cent of the elected members (both men and women) were NGO-organized. Out of 700 elected women however, the number was a little bit higher, around 38 per cent. Hashmi argues that NGOs have had little influence on voters to vote for or against any candidate or party despite all the positive words about their success (Hashmi, 2000:141). Contrary to Hashmi, I think this number of NGO-active women must be considered quite high. Kirsten Westergaard is also more positive to the connection between NGOs and their role for women's involvement in local politics. In her research about different empowerment strategies among NGOs she found that in most of the organizations' members had decided to get their own candidate elected to UP (Westergaard, 1994:27). The point I think Hashmi wants to make is that even if the women are members in an NGO this does not automatically ensure them support from the organization. In my three categories, eleven of the women were active in some NGO, but – as noted above – it was only three of these women who told me that they had been supported by their organization to run for election. A major survey by Democracy watch sponsored by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) revealed that – by interviewing 231 members of UP – only 1.3 % were motivated to run for election by the local NGO she belonged to (Democracy watch, 2002).

Here I think it is important to distinguish between different NGOs. Organizationally their approaches are similarly built up around group formation at the village level with weekly meetings. Most developmental NGOs pursue a dual strategy, one involving credit provision, the other involving conscientization and empowerment. Some are against credit and service delivery programs (for example Nijera Kori), as they believe such programs increase the dependence of the poor. Instead they stress conscientization and empowerment

through social – and political – mobilization of organized groups of poor people (Westergaard, 1994:5). In my interview with Kushi Kabir, the director of Nijera Kori, it was obvious that they worked consciously with the nomination of their members to the elections in UP. They felt it was important for their members to have representatives in the union to represent and work for the poor and landless people. The women who told me that they had been supported by their NGO were all members of Nijera Kori. Not all NGOs have this as a strategy for their members.

5.2.3 Encouraged by the village people or by the family

In the survey by Democracy watch, over 65% of the women noted that they were encouraged by the community members to run for election while 30% noted that they were encourage by their respective family members like husband and so on (Democracy watch, 2002). This was confirmed by my interviews. In all three categories I found women who told me that the people in the village had asked them to run for election. This can also be seen as some kind of nomination of course where people in the village promise to vote for them if they contest. Often they mentioned that they were well-educated, which people considered an important criterion for getting things done.

Four of the elected women told me that it was their family who had encouraged them to run for election; two of them from category A and two from category B. One woman told me that her husband told her to run for election, another that it was family tradition to be an elected member of the UP. Even if it was only these four women who specifically told me that it was their family who had encouraged them, all the women I talked to told me that they were supported by their family in their decision to run for election.

5.2.4 To fill in the nomination papers

To be able to stand for election, one must submit a nomination paper to the local administrative officer (TNO) and – as noted above – pay an amount of 750 taka. No women in any of the categories mentioned that this had been any problem for them, but according to one of my key-persons, the TNO sometimes causes problems for the women that want to run for election. For example there have been cases where the TNO have told the women incorrectly that they are only allowed to run for the reserved seats and not given them the nomination papers for the general seats. Some have refused to accept their application since they have not been able to show any proof of their age – which is not uncommon in the poor rural areas.

5.3 Election campaign

The fee one has to pay to be nominated as a candidate in a ward was not mentioned as a problem by any of the women in the three categories or by any of the NGOs or key persons I talked to. Despite this, I think it is interesting to compare the amount of money requested (750 taka to be nominated to a general or reserved seat) with the average salary for a woman in the garment industry of around 1000 taka per month. Even the campaign itself seems to cost a lot of money and time.

5.3.1 Expensive election campaigns

To my surprise four of the women had spent 100 000 taka or more on their election campaign. These women came from all of the categories. In the category B one woman told me that she had to arrange a big party for the whole village in order to be re-elected, a party that had cost 100 000 taka! On average the women I interviewed had spent almost 50 000 taka on their election campaigns.¹⁵ One of the interviews with a woman in category A reflected the importance of money. She told me that she was offered 100 000 taka from her opponent to not run for re-election as she planned. She refused to accept this offer, got nominated and spent 5000 taka on her election campaign. Unfortunately she was defeated by her opponent who spent over 250 000 taka in her campaign. According to her, she was not able to be re-elected because of her limited financial resources. It was only three women: two in category B and one in category C, who had been able to lower the election cost. These women were all members of Nijera Kori. During the campaign the members of the NGO had helped them and talked to people in the ward and asked them to vote for 'their' candidate. This made the campaigning less time-consuming for the candidate. For many women it was not only a question of money but also of security. Due to the practice of *pardah* many men insult and harass women that move around in the villages. It is especially dangerous for a woman to be out during the evenings when it is dark. To have election meetings in the evenings was very problematic for many women. For the Nijera Kori members this was not a problem since they got help from other members when traveling. This made it possible to hold the cost of their campaign to around 10 000 taka.

¹⁵ Here I have exact information from 12 of the women. Some of the other women only told me that they had spent 'a lot of money' or something like that.

5.4 Authority of Union Parishad

Even though the UP is a very old institution and the only elected level of local government in Bangladesh, it seems to be a weak institution since all important decisions are made at the national level. According to Thörlind, UP play a minor role when it comes to development planning of the union (Thörlind, 2003:62). One of the problems is that UP do not have the proper authority to make important decisions regarding their union. According to Aminuzzaman, the responsibilities of the UP go beyond the legal, managerial and financial capacity of the body. They don't have any authority to take any substantive or policy decisions without the approval of the controlling authority. Instead the work is directed by laws and regulations from the government. Apart from this, all the work in UP is supposed to be conducted through 12 standing committees¹⁶ which are often not functioning (Aminuzzaman, 2003:4-5). These problems were also illuminated by the NGOs and the key informants that I talked to.

According to Aminuzzaman, the central government control on the local government pervades all aspects of its functioning and decision-making. For example, the ADP prescribes that 60% of the finances amount must go to projects about communication and transportation, 20% to agriculture and irrigation, 10% to education and 10% to physical infrastructure. The heavy focus on infrastructure makes it difficult to make any meaningful investment in other areas (Aminuzzaman, 2003). This was also reflected in my interviews. When I asked the women *what* they had done, all of them (in categories A and B) told me that they had been able to build roads, bridges, culverts and so on. No one mentioned that they had done anything for health clinics or schools in the union for example.

5.5 Resources of Union Parishad

UP also have limited financial resources. The money that comes from the government is not sufficient for the union to fulfill all its responsibilities. The union's ability to collect its own revenues through taxes is limited since the people in the rural areas are very poor (Aminuzzaman, 2003). As far as I understood the current situation the possibilities for the UP to collect their own revenues is becoming further constricted since more and more of the

¹⁶ The standing committees are: 1) finance and establishment, 2) education, 3) agriculture and other development work, 4) social welfare and community centers, 5) cottage industries and other co-operatives, 6) women and child welfare, 7) fisheries and livestock, 8) tree plantation, 9) union public work, 10) mass education, 11) health and family planning, 12) audit and accounts (Aminuzzaman, 2003).

financial resources now go first to the Upazila/Thana level which are supposed to distribute the money to the unions in the area.¹⁷

None of the women in categories A and B told me that it was a problem that the union *as such* had too little money. For a majority of women in both categories it had been a problem for them to get their share of the resources that are distributed by the UP and the different development funds which all work is supposed to go through. To get money for projects the UP send a list of project proposals to the Upazila/Thana level for approval (Aminuzzaman, 2003). It is in this process that the women have problems in getting their projects on the list for approval. According to Aminuzzaman, there is no practice of publishing budgets and so on. Instead the chairman often selects projects with limited involvement of the members (Aminuzzaman, 2003). There is apparently no law that all of the members of the union have to be present to make decisions like these. Instead some of the women told me that they were sometimes not informed about meetings which dealt with large amounts of money.

Another problem related to this is the division of the different wards in the union. As illustrated above the union is divided into nine wards and a member elected as a general member has to look after one ward. But the women elected to the reserved seats have three wards to cover which means that their wards are three times larger than those of the general members. A majority of the women in the categories A and B were of the opinion that since the ward of the reserved seats are three times bigger than the wards of the general seats this should be reflected in the shares of the development funds. That is, the women should be given three times the money compared to a member from a general seat.

The struggle and competition over resources between general members and women in the reserved seats does not appear to be logic since the wards of the general seats and the wards of the reserved seats are overlapping each other and they could cooperate. According to the impression I got from my interviews, there is no cooperation between the members from the general seats and the women from the reserved seats that cover their wards. Instead they are competing over the resources that are given in the UP to be able to have their name on the projects that are approved. The problem with resources has to be understood in the light of how a project that is done through the UP is looked on by the village people and the role of the members. As far as I have understood this, a road for example, is very much connected to the person who built it and not to the union. Apart from this, many people come

¹⁷ For example they are not allowed to collecting leasing fees (from market places) as before. This has become the duty of the administrative personal at the Upazila/Thana level.

to the member's private houses to ask for help. To be a successful member one must be able to do things and help people. While none of the NGOs I talked to mentioned this as a problem, a majority of the key persons highlighted this issue. Even if the women manage to get the same amount of money as the members of the general seats they have a three times larger ward to cover. In category A this was a big issue and two of the women told me that this was one of the reasons why they did not run for re-election. They told me that a lot of poor people had come to their house asking for help; when the member couldn't help them, they became disappointed and angry.

According to my interview with Tofail, in order to solve this financial problem with the limited resources of the UP, many elected members pay from their own pockets to fulfill their commitments to their voters. The male members will be benefited in other ways which make this behavior logical. Many women do not get anything from their membership. One of the women in category A told me that she was not able to benefit from her membership in UP and that it had been a catastrophe. She was crying during the interview. All family members had put a lot of money in the election campaign in the conviction that they would all be benefited by her new role. But as she couldn't do anything (it only cost a lot of money) her family, who had been supportive before, became angry and disappointed at her. She had become a burden to her family.

5.6 A 'chairman-dominated' institution

According to Aminuzzaman, the powers of the UP are predominantly vested in the chairman, who is authorized to exercise such powers by himself/herself or through other persons authorized by him (Aminuzzaman, 2003). A majority of the NGOs and key-informants that I talked to also illuminated the problem that the UP has a centralized power structure where it is the chairman makes the decisions. In my interview with Tofail, he argued that the system of electing the chairman directly from the whole ward and not from the elected members has created a structural problem in UP where the chairman dominates and holds the key to everything. Instead of answering to the members, the chairman cooperates with the government officials and works with the members he likes – while others are ignored. To avoid this Tofail preferred the Panchayat Raj system where the chairman is elected by and from the elected members. Then the chairman would be answerable to the members in the UP and forced to cooperate with them.

The problem with the UP as a ‘chairman-dominated’ institution was reflected in my interviews and had consequences for the elected women and their capacity to act. Of the women in category A, two had very bad experiences with the chairman who did not want to cooperate with them. They were ignored and insulted during the meetings – if they were informed at all that there was a meeting. They had not been able to accomplish anything in the UP. The other two in the category had very good relations to the chairman and had been able to pass projects like building roads and so on. In category B five of these women told me that they had been supported by the chairman and that he had listened to them, honored them and so on. The other two, who told me that they had *not* been supported by the chairman, had instead a strong support from NGOs that put pressure on the chairman to listen to them.

This problem with a ‘chairman-dominated’ structure is closely related to another problem that was pointed out by all NGOs and key informants I talked to - the lack of clear demarcation of what the roles and responsibilities of the members in UP have. According to Siddiqui the UP charter only highlights the duties and functions of the chairperson. This creates a scope for not sharing functions, power and resources with female members (Siddiqui, 2002). The study done by the World Food Programme mentioned earlier pointed out that many women were not members of any standing committee. If they were, they were mainly given responsibility for social welfare (World Food Programme, 1999). According to one of my key-persons, Zarina Rahman Khan, there have been changes due to pressure from a network of elected members to the reserved seats. After the 1997 election the government specified that 1/3 of the chairs in the different standing committees had to be filled with women and that 30% of all the resources that are distributed through the union have to be given to the women. When I talked to Saqui at NILG he also admitted that this has been a problem. As a result the government, a few months before the latest election, presented a new circular where the roles and responsibilities for the different members were defined.

5.7 Male attitudes

In Bangladesh the practice of *purdah* - the segregation of females and males - limits the interaction between women and men outside the immediate family. Most women are not used to being active and participating in the public sphere, and lack of confidence which is of course important for the work in UP. This was a problem mentioned by almost all of the

NGOs and key-informants. Many of them also mentioned that many villagers, both men and women, think it is difficult to accept a woman as a representative as this is not the traditional role of a woman.

The study by the World Food Programme showed that female members perceived a lack of co-operation from the male members and that there was a communication gap between them. Male members have a tendency to oppose whatever female members propose even if they are the best ideas! Many of the male members argued that the women members could not plan, participate or perform their duties properly as the female members can't influence the decisions. Most male members also argued that the elected women should deal with women's issues like violence against women, dowry and divorce and discouraged them to participate in other development works. This was also reflected in the work in the standing committees (World Food Programme, 1999).

When I asked whether the female members had been able to participate in the meetings, whether they had been able to speak and so on, almost all of the women in categories A and B told me that they have had some problems even if a majority had participated in all the meetings. The women in categories A and B that had not been supported by the chairman had experienced the greatest problems. They had not been informed about the meetings, the male members had ignored them when they tried to speak or made noises so nobody could hear them during the meetings. Even the women who felt they were supported by the chairman complained about other male members' attitudes towards them. This was manifested in many ways, for example by lack of respect and honor, laughter and so on. Some women also told me that the chairman and male members had been angry when they demanded money for development projects.

5.8 Increasing the number of women?

As mentioned earlier the concept 'quota' is not one strategy but a term for many different compensational strategies and systems like 'quotas as reserved seats' and 'electoral quotas' or 'candidate quotas' which have different outcomes when it comes to increasing the number of women. Reserved seats are a system that guarantees women a certain number of seats in the parliament or in the local government regardless of the electoral result. The other two systems prescribe a certain percentage of women on the lists presented to the voters in the election (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003:9, Krook, 2003b).

According to official statistics from the Bangladesh Election Commission, the number of reserved seats is the same as the number of elected women. The system with reserved seats with direct election in Bangladesh doesn't not seem to have the same implementation problems other systems have. Of course this is not a guarantee that the seats will be filled, as women must stand for election. In some conservative areas of Pakistan the reserved seats for women have not been filled (Reyes, 2002). In Bangladesh this has not been a problem.

The new system with direct election instead of indirect election to the reserved seats is also important. As noted before, the former system with indirect election was criticized by researchers in Bangladesh. The women were not active and did not receive the same respect as the directly elected members (Chowdhury, 1994a, Chowdhury, 1994b, Thörlind, 2003). The new system with direct election has changed this, as was confirmed by the NGOs and key-persons I talked to. The women have invested a lot of effort and money to be elected and they won't accept being passive members in the UP as the nominated women before them had been. This was also mentioned by many of the women in all the categories who said that they feel they have a lot of support behind them as they have been elected by the people in their ward.

5.9 Women's capacity to act

I have now described the system of reserved seats in UP and the work in the union in practice. The relation between the system of reserved seats in UP and women's capacity to act seems to be dependent on a lot of factors.

One of these things is the gendered norms and the practice of *purdah*. Women lack political experience and become uncertain in public life. Politics are considered to be a 'male' thing and not for women. In the villages people have problems accepting that a woman can be a representative. The gendered norms also have an influence on women's abilities to act in UP as some elected male members don't want to accept and cooperate with women.

The election-system, with expensive election campaigns, also makes women dependent on support from their families. This may also restrict the elected women's ability to make their own decisions in UP. At the same time the reserved seats have created a platform for radical NGOs like Nijera Kori to raise their voices and work for their members.

Even though the size of the ward is bigger (which make it more time consuming and more expensive than an election in the general seats) the competition is not equal to the general seats. Many of the women I talked said that it was easier to be elected from the reserved seats than from the general seats since they don't have to compete with the men.

When it comes to the authority and resources of UP this seems to have an impact on the ability for *both* the members in the general seats (often men) and the members in the reserved seats. The central government control has consequences for what type of project they can develop and all the members are dependent on their relation to the chairman. But when it comes to the lack of resources women seem to be more vulnerable than the male members. The problem is that the chairman and the male members, compared to most of the women, have an income of their own and access to the family's income. A guess is that they can thus fulfill their commitments to their voters more easily than the women members - even if the funds of the union are small – and then become influential in society.

One of the basic conditions for women to act in UP is of course that they are present in UP. The system with reserved seats in Bangladesh has the advantage that there is no discrepancy between the percentage of reserved seats and the number of women elected. When I asked the women if they had problems to combine their work in UP with their duties in the household nobody told me this was a problem. They had all got help from their mother-in-law. It is also clear that the system of reserved seats with direct election, compared with the earlier system with nomination and indirect election has increased the legitimacy of the elected women as well as their own aspirations to do something; the women that had worked very hard to be elected had no intention to sit quietly in the meetings in the UP.

6 Women's empowerment

In this chapter I shall discuss the consequences of implementation of reserved seats to UP as a top-down strategy for women's political empowerment in terms of changes in deeper, structural levels. According to Nanivadekar's vacuum theory, a top-down implementation of quotas with no mass mobilization of women for pressing for this demand creates a vacuum instead of a space for women. This vacuum is filled by 'proxies' – the powerless housewives of male politicians as there are not enough politically active women to fill the seats. These women have a lower political awareness and serve the patriarchal interests of the family. As such their participation in politics is in itself patriarchal participation (Nanivadekar, 2003). But these problems can be overcome by massive capacity-building and support from different NGOs and women's organizations that support women both individually and as a group (Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2003, Oxaal and Baden, 1997:5, Nanivadekar, 2003).

So who are the elected women? What have they done and what are their concerns and priorities? What role do support from NGOs and capacity-building activities play in enabling elected women to make changes at deeper structural levels? The question is: If the implementation of reserved seats creates a vacuum that is filled with 'proxies' or 'token' women, what role can support from NGOs and capacity-building activities play in order to solve this problem?

6.1 The new regulation of reserved seats

6.1.1 The history of quotas

Since independence, Bangladesh has used different types of quota systems for women in elected assemblies, national as well as local. On the national level they had a system of system with nomination and indirect election. The Parliament comprised of 300 general seats (open for both men and women) plus 15 seats reserved for women. Members elected to the general seats constituted the electoral college for the reserved seats. In 1978 the number of reserved seats was increased to 30 and the period of the reserved seats extended from ten to fifteen years. When the constitutional provision lapsed in 1987 it was re-incorporated with a new amendment in 1990. This provision lapsed in 2001 and was not followed by any new amendment. In the 2001 election to the parliament there were no reserved seats for women (Chowdhury, 2002:50-51).

In 1976 a system was introduced at local levels with two reserved seats for women to UP. They were nominated and indirectly elected by the members of UP. Ershad extended the number of reserved seats to three but didn't change the system of indirect election.(Siddiqui, 2002) When Khaleda Zia came to power 1991 she extended the direct election in UP to apply even for the women in the reserved seats¹⁸ (Thörlind, 2003:62). The first elections to UP were held in 1997 and the second and latest one was held in 2003. And even though there haven't been any elections to Upazila Parishad and Zila Parishad they both ensure the participation of women through reserved seats (Siddiqui, 2002).

6.1.2 A top-down project

Thörlind draws the conclusion that the Bangladeshi system with reserved seats used in the 70's was only a response to donor pressure but had no effect on women's political influence as they were nominated and indirectly elected by the male members of UP (Thörlind, 2003:137). According to Malin Arvidsson, as much as 80-100% of Bangladesh's national budget for development is financed by external funding, which has led to little room for independent actions and policy-making by the government itself. Political actions, like the reserved seats, have been used in order to strengthen the position of the ruling party rather than contributing to gender equality (Arvidsson, 2003:134). Another part of the explanation is offered by Siddiqui who argues that the wish of every government to leave its mark on the local government has led to a process where they have accommodated women's demands for political representation. This was also the reason behind the new system of reserved seats for women with direct election to UP (Siddiqui, 2002).

I have no intention of presenting the 'real' reasons behind the implementation of reserved seats with direct elections, but I think that many things indicate that it was neither a result of a mass mobilization of women who demanded the new regulation nor a desire to promote gender equity. One example is the lack of clear demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of the members in UP in general and the women in the reserved seats in particular, problems mentioned in chapter 5. Instead it appears more probable that the two mechanisms of change Krook is suggesting - international pressure from the UN and other international donors and transnational sharing in the form of inspiration from the system with reserved seats in India - have been important factors (Krook, 2003c).

¹⁸ UP Ordinance 1983 as amended by the Act No.20 of 1993, section 3 (Chowdhury, 2003: note 10).

6.2 Socio-economic status of the elected women

Who are the elected women? In Bangladesh, where a large majority has the same religion, ethnicity and language, the socio-economic status is an important factor. As mentioned earlier education and landownership are very important factors when it comes to the socio-economic status in Bangladesh, where higher levels of educations and land ownership are associated with lower probability of being poor (World Bank, 1999:13). What is the socio-economic status of the elected women to the reserved seats?

According to the study done by the World Food Programme, the majority of the women were married (85%), and were between 30-38 years of age (43%). Even though a majority of the elected women were housewives, most of them had at least a secondary education (86%). Most of the elected women came from landowning families and 53% owned more than five acres of land – a substantial amount in a country where half of the rural people are landless. According to the World Food Programme, female members are more educated and wealthier than the average rural woman. It also showed that the husbands of the elected woman had higher levels of education than the women themselves. This is important since the socio-economic status of the husband is considered to be an important determinant of his level of support, guidance and help in his wife's performance as a member and also as a basis of her power (World Food Programme, 1999). The information from the women I interviewed confirms this picture to a certain degree.¹⁹ Most of them have a secondary education and are landowners even if the women I interviewed owned much smaller areas. As mentioned in chapter five the election system (with campaigning, big wards and so on) demands a lot of money. This can be one reason for the socio-economic profile of the elected women. At the same time the women I interviewed were not big landowners. Only one of the women I talked to owned six acres which was well over the average of the other women I talked to. In addition, the studies done by Democracy watch (Democracy watch, 2002) and Anér and Bjarnegård (Anér and Bjarnegård, 2001) showed that the elected women came from a lower socio-economic level. One possible explanation for the contradictory interpretations is that data was gathered from different areas of Bangladesh. That some areas are wealthier than others is clearly reflected in the data. Even if the level is not so high as the study of the World Food Programme indicates, it is still clear that the elected women belong to a higher socio-economic status than the average rural woman – even if they do not belong to the richest elite in the village.

¹⁹ See Appendix B

There were no special differences between the women in the different categories. Instead the women with the lowest socio-economic background had connections to different NGOs and, as mentioned in chapter five about nomination, some of them were also encouraged and supported by them in their bid for election.

The study by the World Food Programme also showed that both the elected member and her family were very active in the village, where they were known for considerable social involvement even before the election. Such involvement included for example membership of school, madrasa (a religious school for boys), college committees (44%), political parties (25%) and NGOs (8%). This was also something I found among the women I talked to. Most of the women were active in some NGO, had some connections to a political party or both. It was only two of the women (both in category C) I talked to who told me that they had no such connection.

6.3 Other priorities and concerns?

Phillips argues, that male or mostly male assemblies are poor judges of women's interests, priority and concerns because policy decisions are not settled in advanced by party programs. Instead problems emerge all the time and as a representative one has to make priorities and interpretations all the time. This is why it matters who the representative is and why one cannot separate what is to be represented from who is to do the representation (Phillips, 1998). At the same time it is problematic to talk about clearly demarcated 'woman's interests' which hold true for all women in all classes and countries. Socio-economic status of the women indicates that the elected women belong to a more educated, wealthier and influential family than the average rural woman. This leads us to an interesting question about the concerns and priorities of the elected women in UP. Does a critical mass of women count in itself or only a critical mass of feminists?

6.3.1 Who do you represent?

When I asked the women in all categories who they represented in the UP most of the women told me that they represented the poor people of their ward. Some women also told me that they, apart from this, also represented their husband and family. Only one woman, belonging to category A, told me that she only represented her husband and relatives.

6.3.2 Knowledge about local problems

In the study by the World Food Programme the elected women were well aware of their local problems such as erosion of roads, absence of communication, lack of women's education, divorce, polygamy, violence against women, dowry and so on (World Food Program, 1998). This was also my impression of the women I met. Most of the women mentioned problems such as lack of education, lack of water and sanitation facilities, problems with dowry and early marriages even though my perception was that the knowledge was higher in category B than category A and C.

6.3.3 What have you done?

When I asked the women I interviewed *if* they had been able to do anything it was only two of the women (both in category A) that told me they had not been able to do anything and they had not participated in the meetings in UP. They were very unhappy and told me that they could not get any support (from the family or from the village people) to run for re-election. These women both had party connections, but no support from any NGO nor had they received any training during their term. All the other women in categories A and B had been very active in UP and gone to all the meetings in UP. They told me that they had been able to do things like roads, culverts, bridges and distributed VGF (Vulnerable Groups Feeding) cards. 62% of the women in the study by the World Food Programme claimed that they had implemented some reconstruction of roads, bridges and so on. The second most important activity was distribution of wheat through VGF cards. The roads, the women I talked to had done, were small roads in the villages used by rickshaws. Even though roads like these are important for women the heavy focus on infrastructure seems to be related to regulations from the government that prescribe how financial resources are supposed to be used. In my interviews it was quite clear that there was a discrepancy between what they had done and both their knowledge about local problems and what they wanted to do about these problems. Some of the women told me that they for example tried to improve the situation for divorced women and widows, wanted to establish a college in the village, provide furniture and water facilities to the primary school, attend to the lack of water and sanitation facilities, work against the practice of dowry and early marriage and so on. At the same time there were differences between the women; two of the women in particular distinguish themselves.

One of the women in category A told me that she had been able to do a lot of things. She was supported by the chairman who belonged to the same party as her husband. Apart

from roads and so on she told me that she had given furniture to a madrasa (a religious school for boys) and dismissed a legitimate complaint to the police against her uncle, who had insulted a poor landless woman! That she was depending on her husband's political activity was obvious since the reason why she did not run for re-election was because the newly elected chairman was from another party and would not be supportive of her.

In category B one woman told me that she had managed to get a member of Parliament to pass a road project to build a bigger road to their private house! Even though her husband was not politically active they belonged to a higher socio-economic group than the other women I met. Even though she herself was active in a NGO it was quite obvious that her husband had a lot of influence over her. One example was that she did not attend the meetings alone, but used to be accompanied by her husband. During the interview her husband was very active and filled in the answers for her and sometimes told her what to say.

6.4 The role of NGOs and capacity-building strategies

In the study by the World Food Programme, the male members argued that the elected female members were dominated by their men in their decisions. Some female members invited their husbands to the UP meetings to help them in decision-making or changed their earlier decisions because their husbands wanted otherwise. The two women above are examples of this phenomenon. Women who are dependent on their husband or family when making decisions have consequences for their political empowerment. What role can support from NGOs and capacity-building strategies play in order to solve this problem?

6.4.1 Support from NGOs

Bangladesh is one of the most NGO-dense countries in the world; today there are over a thousand local and foreign NGOs in Bangladesh. Many of these development NGOs have, since the 70's, taken an interest in women's rights and have close links to the grassroots level in rural areas through projects such as schools, different types of training or capacity-building, clinics, micro-credits and so on - often with the aim of empowering women (Hashmi, 2000:141). As noted before, organizationally their approaches are similar, built up around group formation at the village level where they have weekly and monthly meetings.

Most of them also pursue a dual strategy, one involving credit provision, the other involving conscientization and empowerment.

According to Westergaard, the NGOs have generally been successful in mobilizing rural women in different income-oriented activities by providing credit and job opportunities. This has created a substantial growth in the self-esteem among rural women who traditionally have held an inferior position and passive role in the community. “Women walk freely outside their homesteads, and even outside their own villages. They no longer hesitate to engage in economic activities which expose them to strangers, and their increased self-esteem has improved their position within the family. Group strength and solidarity within the women’s groups have also resulted in a number of marriages arranged without dowry.” (Westergaard, 1994:26). In my categories many of the women had some connections to different NGOs even though it was only three of them who told me that they were nominated and encouraged by their NGO to run for election. Maybe the decision to run for election was a result of the increased self-esteem Westergaard is talking about even though direct support from the NGO is lacking

It is also worth noting that the three women that were encouraged by their NGO to run for election also belonged to the lowest socio-economic status of the women I talked to. The support from a NGO can be important for women from lower socio-economic groups to be able to be elected to the reserved seats.

According to Westergaard, most of the NGOs also managed to put pressure on the UPs to pass programs benefiting their group members. In many areas of Bangladesh where the poor have become politically mobilized, NGOs have become a local power factor to be reckoned with. One indication of this is the many middle class candidates who sought the alliances of the poor groups. Since the large political parties do not have a meaningful agenda for the rural poor, NGOs have worked as an alternative to the political parties to uplift the poor in Bangladesh (Westergaard, 1994:27-28). In my interviews the women in category B who were nominated by their NGO also received a lot of support from them during their work in UP. This was also the main reason why they had been able to accomplish anything at all since the chairman did not support them at all. They told me that members of the NGO had put pressure on the chairman and forced him to cooperate with them.

The three NGO-nominated women were also very political compared to the other women I met and focused on issues related to rights for the poor landless people in general as well as those of women. When I asked the women who they represented, the NGO-

nominated women told me that they represented their group members – the poor and landless people. They were very conscious of problems like lack of water, dowry, and lack of security for women, early marriages and so on.

6.4.2 Received training

The study by the World Food Programme showed that the general knowledge among the elected women about the roles and responsibilities in UP was small and that there is a real need for training among them. There are now many NGOs working with this (World Food Programme, 1999). According to Aminuzzaman, the present capacity of the Government of Bangladesh to train and develop the members of UP through NILG is limited, a reason why the NGOs have been used in order to complement the limited resources of NILG (Aminuzzaman, 2003).

A majority (70%) of the elected women to the reserved seats have received some training related to their membership (World Food Programme, 1999). The study done by Democracy watch showed that 50% of the female members had been trained by three or more NGOs (Democracy watch, 2002:36). This was also the case among the women I talked to, and it was not unusual that one woman had been given training by three or four different NGOs. In category B the women had generally received 20 or more days of training. The number of days of training was a little bit lower in category A where two of the women had not received any training at all. In category C almost no one had received any training.

6.4.3 Different strategies

The ‘capacity-building’ strategies vary among the different NGOs, but the study made by Democracy watch showed that almost all NGOs have focused on the elected members and provided training about the ‘roles and responsibilities’ of the union members and the UP ordinance. Many NGOs also provided training on activities like how to conduct a *shalish* and ‘women and human rights’. Lowest priority got technical aspects like resource and office management (Democracy watch, 2002:24).

Almost all the women in all categories (even in category C) told me that training was very important in order to function as member in UP as they had no earlier experience of the work. Many of them also wanted more training. This was also the finding among the women in the study by the World Food Programme; they needed more training, especially on the functions and responsibilities of UP (World Food Programme, 1999). One woman in category B told me that before the training the other members laughed at her and insulted her

during the meetings in UP. They told her that ‘you are a woman and therefore you are not able to do anything’, but after the training they changed their attitudes towards her and she was able to implement some development projects and be active in *shalish*.

Apart from the content in the training there are differences among the NGOs as to how they deliver the training and to whom. Big NGOs like the Khan Foundation gather hundreds of women and provide them a few days of training in Dhaka. Others, like the Prip Trust and the BNPS work through local women’s organizations and provide a training module which the local NGOs use. A third NGO, Care, tries to work with the whole village - not only the elected members of UP – developing the area. While the Khan Foundation, the Prip Trust and BNPS have focused only on female members, Care has involved both male and female members in their training.

Many of the NGOs and key-persons argued that the strategy of big NGOs like Khan is not an effective one as the women need more support than a few days of training in Dhaka. Among the women I interviewed it was quite obvious that the most effective training was the training that was provided by Care who worked with the whole village. These women had strong support from local leaders in the village and also cooperated with the male members in the UP as both groups were included in the work of Care. These women were also more aware of problems related to the low status of women. For example one of these women told me that she tried to improve the conditions for widows and divorced women as the conditions for these women are particularly bad.

As mentioned before, many NGOs have the strategy of only focusing on women. Two of the key persons mentioned that some training programs are not effective since they don’t include male members. Men also need training in broad gender issues as the women need to be accepted by the male members and the chairman. This was also a conclusion of the survey by Democracy watch, who argued that only training for female members will not bring any substantive change in the roles and functions of the female members as one must also change the male members’ (including the chairman) attitudes (Democracy watch, 2002). One of the NGOs told me that this had been a problem and that they now provided training for both male and female members.

As noted above, the number of days of training was a little bit lower in category A where two of the women had not received any training at all. These two women had not been able to do anything either. Even if this was not the only reason for their failure, it is worth noting this. In category C, where almost none had received any training, the women were

more uncertain in their new role. They also told me that they needed and waited for training so that they would be able to start their work in UP.

6.5 'I can move everywhere'

When I asked what their new role as an elected member in UP had meant to them (personal development), two of the women in category A, that had not been able to do anything, said that it had been a bad experience. One of them cried and was very sad as she had become a burden to her family. The other women in all categories were positive and told me that it had been a good experience. According to their statements, their new role in UP had given them a better position both in the village and in their family.

Many of the women mentioned that they now are able to speak and to raise their voices publicly. Before their membership this was not possible for them. Now people in the UP and in the village listen to them and they are also able to communicate with high officials like TNO (Thana Nirbahi Officer). They also told me that they were able to move more freely without permission from their husband, something that was very important. In this sense the election process has also been an important factor. One of the key-persons I talked to told me that she had been out in some of the villages before the election and she was overwhelmed by all the women in groups she saw in the villages, moving from house to house, and from village to village campaigning.

The work in the union has also developed a lot of new knowledge about UP, how to prepare a budget, how to pass and implement public works like roads and so on. All of the women in category B also mentioned their new role in *shalish*. As mentioned before *shalish* has been closed for women but the new regulation with reserved seats for women has opened up this traditional village court for women. *Shalish* was only mentioned by one of the key informants and NGOs I talked to. The women however, were very proud over the fact that they were to be able to conduct a *shalish*, judge and implement the judges – a judgment that is supported and sanctioned by the whole UP. Their new role as members of UP have also made them well known in the village and given them a larger social network than before. Many women come to their houses when they want help to solve disputes and quarrels. One woman told me that she and her husband together had been able to solve a dispute between two people in the village. Another woman told me that she heard that there were problems between a son and his mother – the son was beating the mother. The UP woman told him to

stop but he did not listened to her. Then she sent for the police who sentence him to jail for 25 days. After that he was very gentle and polite to his mother.

One woman told me that her work was previously concentrated on the family level as a housewife. Now she can talk with confidence to different people in a meeting and with high officials, something that was unthinkable before her membership. Her social status has changed and people are honoring her.

6.6 To make changes at deeper structural levels

The woman in the reserved seats seems to have higher socio-economic status and belongs to a more influential family than the average rural woman. As mentioned in the chapter 5, this can depend on the election system where you have to pay your own election campaign. There are also indications that the elected women depend on the opinions of their families when they making decisions in UP. According to my findings, the support from NGOs and capacity-building strategies to overcome this problem seems to be important. First, the NGOs seem to be important for the women and their self-esteem, something that can encourage them to run for election. Second, support from some NGOs can help women from lower socio-economic levels to be elected. The support from NGOs also seems to be important in the work in UP if the elected women lack support from the chairman. Here the importance of capacity-building is also crucial. In order to make the women less dependent on their families, I think it is necessary to make distinctions between different strategies. According to my findings, the most effective training was distributed locally and involved the whole union (both men and women) and the people in the village.

When it comes to the concerns and priorities among the elected women who had been able to do things, I found a discrepancy between what they wanted to do and what they had been able to do. Most of the projects that were implemented were some kind of roads or culverts despite the fact that most of them mentioned other priorities like school, water and so on. Focus on development projects related to infrastructure seems to depend on regulations from the government that prescribes how the financial resources are supposed to be used. In Bangladesh, the practice of *pardah* has created different sexually segregated spheres for men and women. This make it relevant to argue that there may be some priorities and concerns that women share like education, water, violence against women, dowry, mobility, legal rights and so on despite the socio-economic differences. Here the new role for

women in *shalish* is important. Issues handled in *shalish* can be disputes over property, family, marriage, divorce or inheritance matters but also violation of moral or religious codes and honor of the village community. Even though I was not able to visit any *shalish* or know what kind of judgments the women had passed, I think it is very interesting that women now conduct court and pass judgments in *shalish* as the issues handled in this institution often affect the lives of women in a very distinct way. Maybe this is an opportunity for women to change deeper structural relations. Here the NGOs and the training also seemed to have importance. The women active in Nijera Kori were very conscious about political issues like power relations in the village and so on, and the women who had received training seemed to be more self-esteem and confident than those who had not received any training. At the same time the training or the NGO involvement was not a guarantee that the elected women had other priorities and concerns as some of the women also seemed to be very dependent and influenced by their relatives.

It was also clear that their new role had changed a majority of the women's social status - both in their family and in the village. They could talk publicly, people listened to them, they could move more freely and so on. As elected members in UP, their social empowerment had increased.

7 Conclusions

I have used the case study as a strategy for my inquiry. This, I think, has made it possible for me to get a deeper understanding of the process at work and go beyond 'the results' and try to understand why 'these results' (Denscombe, 1998:31). This strategy however, has its weaknesses, especially the question of whether the conclusions drawn from the study can be used for more than just this case and the women that I have met. Can I say something about all the women in Bangladesh that are in the reserved seats or even claim it to be true for other countries using the same type of system? King, Keohane and Verba claim that "[g]ood social science attempts to go beyond [these] particulars to more general knowledge." (King, Keohane, Verba, 1994:35). I think it is difficult to draw any general conclusions out of my study. The sample, even if it is carefully selected, is still too small and too vulnerable to natural differences. Despite this, I think it is 'good social science' as one can see the study as a theory-generating study were one may find some possibly new and interesting explanations worthy of further investigation (Esaiasson, Gilliam, Oscarsson, Wägerud, 2003:41). Here I will discuss the some of these interesting findings.

It is worth noting that the criticism raised by liberals and postmodern feminist that quota systems are undemocratic or a feministic dilemma were never directed against the system of reserved seats by the NGOs or key-persons I interviewed. Even if they saw a lot of problems with the system of reserved seats they were not against reserved seats as such. Instead they saw it as a necessary instrument to overcome barriers that prevent women from running for election and being elected. The criticism of quota systems seems to be relevant and very much alive in the quota debate today in countries like Sweden. However, this may not be equally relevant when discussing quotas in third world countries. In countries where there is a relatively high level of equality and the goal is to be treated as equals the idea of quota seems to be very unpleasant. But in countries where the differences between women and men are more obvious it may not be such a big issue. Everyone knows that they are not being treated as equals. This maybe also helps to minimize the risk of 'stigmatization' of the 'quoted' group Bacchi is warning against and increase the legitimacy of the reform (Bacchi, 2004). Another important factor seems to be that the women are directly elected by the people and not nominated as before. The elected women are respected by the people in their ward and feel legitimate as representatives of the people who have elected them. One major problem with a lot of quota systems has been that they do not increase the actual number of women. The system of reserved seats in Bangladesh does not seem to have this problem of

implementation as a majority of the reserved seats have been filled by elected women. Apart from this, the practice of direct election seems to strengthening the legitimacy of the elected women. I think this is a very important finding.

Is it possible to empower women through a top-down strategy like reserved seats? Is it possible for women, lacking social empowerment, to use this new political role in a more qualitative way? Or do they merely become 'proxies' in the hands of their male relatives? What is their capacity to act and are they able to change more structural relations like class and gender? According to my findings there is reason to believe that even though women are dependent on their families some women have been able to use their new role in a more constructive way. There have also been changes in structural levels like gender. The problems however, are many. Here NGOs and capacity-building seems to play an important role as well as the need for a more decentralized governance in Bangladesh!

I think it is very important to consider the importance of the context. It is not possible to argue that quotas are 'good' or 'bad' regarding women's political empowerment – instead this must be seen in the light of electoral system, the role of political parties, the structure and functions of the local government and so on. I want to argue that the capacity for women to act in the UP is partly depending on the electoral system where one needs a lot of money to be elected. This makes the women dependent on money from their families which after the election are interested to influence the political decisions. The elected women are also dependent on the chairman and his/her attitude or/and interests as his position in the UP is very strong. It is also difficult for the women to fulfill their commitments to the voters as they have a larger ward to cover. The elected women's capacity to act is further constrained by lack of resources and authority of the UP as such. But these problems are of course not only limited to the elected women but also a problem for the elected men in the UP. Maybe the practice of *pardah* however, makes the women more vulnerable to these structural problems.

The women in the different categories A, B and C did not have so many things in common that I hoped. The choice of the categorization can therefore be questioned. Despite this I think the categories are relevant. The four women in category A can be used as examples of three different reasons they could not be re-elected; lack of support from chairman, family, NGO:s and training; dependency on the husbands political support and; lack of money. In category B all of the women had been successful in their first term which made it possible for them to run again. Most of them also seemed to have the economic resources to be elected again and they were supported by the chairman. The two women not

having the economic resources or the support from the chairman got their supported from members in their NGO who also helped them in their campaigning as well as in their work in UP. Only one of the women in this category seemed to be very dependent on her husband who was an influential man in the area. Of the women in category C, three of them had spent a lot of money on their election campaign and three belonged to a lower social-economic group. One of these women told me that she was supported by an NGO in the election campaign which had made the cost for the campaign low.

The role of support from NGOs and capacity-building strategies seems to be a possible way to overcome many of the problems women are facing although my study showed that not all NGOs or not all capacity-building strategies are equal effective to increase the powerbase for the elected women. For example it looks like the reserved seats have created a space for radical NGOs like Nijera Kori to raise the voice for poor and landless people in UP as they are able to mobilize their members to vote and support their candidate despite the lack of money. These women have their powerbase among the members in the NGO and they are not so dependent on their husband, chairman or male attitudes. The members of the NGO put pressure on the members in UP to cooperate with 'their' candidate. But not all NGOs have this strategy. When it comes to capacity-building the strategy to focus on women only seems to be relevant since most women lack political experiences and knowledge about UP. At the same time women need to interact and cooperate with male members in UP as well as other (often male) authorities outside UP which makes it necessary to also train them on gender issues. It is also important to note that the effectiveness of the support from NGOs and training through different capacity-building strategies are constrained by the lack of recourses and authority in UP. This is why one also needs to focus on UP as such.

As there is reason to believe that it is problematic to talk about women's interest the socio-economic status of the women is also important. The elected women seem to belong to a higher socio-economic group than the average rural women. What role does gender identity play when it comes to priorities and concerns? Are there any differences between men and women? Even though I was not able to compare things that had been done by male and female members it was clear that there was a discrepancy between what the elected women had done and what they wanted to do. Even if women had other priorities it was difficult for them to implement these as the UP itself did not have the proper resources or authority. At the same time elected women have been active in *shalish* were they have been able to judge in matters concerning divorce, dowry, violence against women and so on. Even

if it seems to be difficult for the women to make other priorities in UP, *shalish* may be an arena for women to articulate other priorities and concerns. This can be seen as an important side-effect of the implementation of the reserved seats in UP. One interesting thought is that the unclear roles and responsibilities of the members of UP in general – and the women in the reserved seats in particular - have created a space for the women in the reserved seats in *shalish*.

Another important finding is the changes in the elected women's social status in their families and in the village. It appears that the use of reserved seats has also contributed to a process of changing *pardah*. The system of election campaigning has pushed the women to go outside their house; they have been able to speak publicly and talk to high official about problems they want to solve. Their new role in *shalish* has made them known in their village and people come to their house to ask their advice. It looks like the reserved seats have had consequences beyond political empowerment such as social empowerment. There is reason to believe that the use of reserved seats with direct election has led to changes at structural levels like gender, and I think it would be a mistake to not see these changes and opportunities that have occurred. Of course the implementation cannot solve all problems related to women's lack of social and economic power. It is still important to see reserved seats as one of many strategies that must be implemented in order to achieve meaningful and sustainable empowerment for women. As Graff points out “quota systems must not become a pretext to avoid further changes, because there are still many inequalities men and women.” (Graff, 2003).

Having said this, I also think Nanivadekar is correct when she argue that one needs a critical debate about reserved seats as an instrument for political empowerment. In Bangladesh articulated problems regarding the implementation of reserved seats have led to changed policies or regulations such as more specified roles and responsibilities - for example regulations about the number of women in the standing committees and the new circulation from the government that specifies the roles and responsibilities of the elected members. According to one of my key-informants the problems related to the new system with reserved seats have put focus on problems regarding UP as such which have led to new national discussion about the need of a more decentralized government. This is why further research is important and necessary in order to improve the system with reserved seats in UP.

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Appendix A

Interview guide to women elected to UP in the election in 2003

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Name
- 1.2 Age
- 1.3 Level of education
- 1.4 Do you own land?
- 1.5 Are you married?
- 1.6 If married; what is the background of your husband?
- 1.7 Do you have children? If so; age and number.
- 1.8 Is anyone political active in your family?

2. MOTIVES AND INTERSTS

- 2.1. Were you political active before you got elected to UP? If so; how? (member of organisation, party and so on)
- 2.2. Did you get any money for your campaign? If so; from who?
- 2.3. Do you have connections to any organisation, party and so on that supports you? If so; what kind of support?
- 2.4. Why did you contested to UP?
- 2.5. Did you have any contacts with any organisation working with capacity-building or women in UP before you run for election? If so; which organisation? What kind of contacts?
- 2.6. Was this contacts important when you decided if you where going to run for election? If yes; how? If no; what other important elements were there?
- 2.7. If you got support from anyone (family, husband, organisation, party and so on) which one the most important when to decide to run for election? If many things can you order them from the most important to the least important.

3. ENDING QUESTIONS

- 3.1. Do you want to add anything to this interview?
- 3.2. Do you want to be anonymous?

Interview guide for women elected to UP only in the election in 1997 and in both 1997 and 2003.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Name
- 1.2. Age
- 1.3. Level of education
- 1.4. Do you own land?
- 1.5. Are you married?
- 1.6. If married; what is the background of your husband?
- 1.7. Do you have children? If so; age and number.
- 1.8. Is anyone political active in your family?

2. POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

- 2.1. Were you political active before you got elected to UP?
- 2.2 Have you attend all meetings in UP during your term? If not; Why?
- 2.3. Have you attend all the meetings alone or did you have a male family member accompanied you?
- 2.4. Have you ever felt forced or threatened to agree to a decision? If yes; from who? Can you give me an example?
- 2.5. If you compare to the male politicians in UP; how active have you been during the meeting?
- 2.6. Have you been able to talk and discuss things you wanted to discuss in UP? If not; Why?
- 2.7. How have the male members of UP reacted when you have been talking? (Listen, respect, understand, ignore, laugh, anger)

3. SUPPORT

- 3.1. Did anyone helped you with child care during the meetings in UP?
- 3.2. Did anyone help you with other practical things like laundry, cooking and so on? If so, from who?

- 3.3. Did you get money for transportation and food costs or did you have to pay this by your self? If so; Was this a problem for you?
- 3.4. Did you feel you have support from anyone to be a member of UP? (Husband, male politicians, NGOs, government)
- 3.5. Did you get any training before or during your time as a member of UP? If so; from who?
- 3.6. If there have been support and training; Was this support, help or/and training important for you in order to work as a politician?
- 3.7 Was there any support, help or/and training that was more important than other? If so; what?

4. MOTIVES AND INTERESTS

- 4.1 Why did you contest for UP 1997?
- 4.2 If contested to the reserved seats; Do you think you would have run for election even if there hadn't been any reserved seats?
- 4.3 Who do you represent in the ward?
- 4.4 What kind of questions have you raised during your time?
The women that run for election again 2003;
- 4.5.1.1 Why did you run for election again 2003?
- 4.5.1.2 Why did you run for election in the reserved (or general) seats?
- 4.5.1.3 What do you think about the system of reserved seats? Opportunities? Limitations?
- 4.5.1.4 What kind of questions are you going to raise during this period?
To the women that didn't run for election 2003;
- 4.5.2.1 Why didn't you run for election 2003?
- 4.5.2.2 What do you think about the system of reserved seats? Opportunities? Limitations?

5. ENDING QUESTIONS

- 5.1. Do you want to add anything to this interview?
- 5.2. Do you want to be anonymous?

Interview guide to organisations working with capacity-building among women in UP

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Name of the organisation
- 1.2. Type of organisation. (NGO, governmental and so on.)
- 1.3. How do you financing your work? (Founds, taxes and so on?)
- 1.4. How big is your organisation? (Staff members, budget, projects and so on.)
- 1.5. Ideology, the idea and history behind the organisation? (When did it started and so on.)
- 1.6. How long have your organisation been working with capacity-building among women in UP?

2. PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

- 2.1. What kind of problems have your organisation identified among the women in UP regarding their ability to work as a politician?
- 2.2. How have you identified these problems? (Have your organisations contact with UP members, done research and so on.)
- 2.3. Among these problems, do you think there is one, or two that are more important to work with?
- 2.4. If not mentioned above; Do you think the social status of the elected women and their connections to grassroots-organisations are important? If so; do you work to promote this? If so; How?

3. STRATEGIES/PROJECTS

- 3.1. Can you describe your capacity-building work regarding UP.
- 3.2. How long have your organisation worked with these strategies/projects?
- 3.3. Have you changed strategies or goals during the time you have been working with capacity-building. If so; when and why?
- 3.4. How do you 'measure' the impact of your work?
- 3.4. Do you think that your organisation and your work has improved the situation for the women in UP and for the women that want to work in UP? If yes; to what extent. If not; why?
- 3.5. Do you think that your organisation and your work have improved the situation for all women to run for election.
- 3.6. How well do you think these strategies/projects are the answer to the problems you identified before under question 2.1.?

3.7. Do you work with or without support from other with power in the villages? (Like village elders, mullas and so on?)

ENDING QUESTIONS

4.1. Do you want to add anything to this interview?

Appendix B

Category	Elected	Age	Education	Land (acre)	Profession	Married	Children
A	1997	33	class 8	0,4	housewife	yes	5
A	1997	26	class 12	2,0	housewife	yes	2
A	1997	45	class 9	0,5	housewife	widow	5
A	1997, tried 2003 but failed	35	class 12	0,2	housewife	yes	2
B	1997 and 2003	48	class 9	6	housewife	yes	4+8
B	1997 and 2003	30	class 9	2,5	housewife	yes	3
B	1997 and 2003	30	class 9	0,57	housewife	yes	1
B	1997 and 2003	30	class 10	1,2	housewife	yes	2
B	1997 and 2003	35	class 5	0,99	housewife	widow	8
B	1997 and 2003	45	class 5	landless	housewife	yes	5
B	1997 and 2003	35	class 10	0,5	housewife	yes	2
C	2003	25	class 10	1,2	housewife	yes	2
C	2003	35	class 8	2,4	housewife	yes	6
C	2003	25	class 10	2,9	housewife	yes	1
C	2003	35	class 5	landless	housewife	yes	3
C	2003, tried 1997 but failed	45	class 10	0,5	housewife	yes	4
C	2003	35	class 8	0,5	housewife	yes	3

Category	Elected	Husbands profession	Is anyone political active?	Active in any NGO?	Training?
A	1997	businessman	Yes. Husbands brother active in AL	No	No
A	1997	businessman	Yes. Husband active in AL	No	<20 days
A	1997	(husband dead)	Yes. Her son is party active	No	<12 days
A	1997, tried 2003 but failed	teacher	No	Yes	1 day
B	1997 and 2003	Farmer	No	Yes	18 days
B	1997 and 2003	businessman	No	Yes	<13 days
B	1997 and 2003	shopkeeper	No	Yes	27 days
B	1997 and 2003	businessman	Yes. Husband active in BNP	Yes	<29 days
B	1997 and 2003	(husband dead)	No	no information	<9 days
B	1997 and 2003	day laborer	No	Yes	<32 days
B	1997 and 2003	Doctor	Yes. Husband active in BNP	Yes	<25 days
C	2003	service holder in the government	No	No	3 days
C	2003	businessman	No	No	no answer
C	2003	businessman	Yes. Husband active in BNP	No. Active in BNP	No
C	2003	day laborer	No	no information	no answer
C	2003, tried 1997 but failed	Doctor	Yes. Son active in BNP	no information	4 days
C	2003	shopkeeper	No	Yes	10 days

Appendix C

BNPS - Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha

E-mail address: bnps@bangla.net

BNPS is a national women's organization that has been working with social, political and economic empowerment of women since 1986. Strategies used in order to achieve this are capacity-building, awareness raising activities and grass-rot mobilization. Today BNPS has over 14 000 members and have over the years reached out to more than 80 000 members.

CARE Bangladesh

E-mail address: anwar@caredfo.dhaka.net

CARE Bangladesh is a part of CARE International and has operated in Bangladesh since 1955. It is an independent humanitarian organization, focusing on poverty. CARE run projects in agriculture and natural resources development, institutional strengthening, health, family planning and improving rural infrastructure. The annual programming budget in Bangladesh is over 21 million and the British Governments Department for International Development (DFID) is the dominant fonder. One of the projects is the BUILD Project (Building Union Infrastructure for Local Development). The main objective is to improve food and livelihood security of the rural poor through improvements of roads and capacity-building of local government institutions, particularly UP. BUILD has been helping UPs to plan and manage resources with community participation as well as good governance. This has been done through training on responsibilities and finance, awareness of governance and democracy, advocacy and networking and research. The capacity-building activities are being carried out in 153 UPs. A total of 1989 elected representatives and almost 46 000 community members are involved in this project. 40% of these are women. The BUILD Project is funded by USAID and the Government of Bangladesh. It started 1999 and will continue until 2004.

Nijera Kori

E-mail address: nkshrimp@agni.comp

Nijera Kori, founded 1974, translates as 'we do it ourselves' and is an organization targeting poor people through self-helping groups. Nijera Kori has almost 200 000 members, both men and women. They are active in different parts of Bangladesh, for example in the western part of Bangladesh, north of Dhaka and in the area of Chittagong. The aim is primarily to raise the consciousness of landless women and men about their legal rights and enable them to find their own solutions to their problems and to struggle for social justice. This is done through training, group discussions and theater. The role of Nijera Kori is to encourage the landless to form groups for self-help. One important strategy is that instead of giving micro credit to strengthen the grassroots which they regard as an anti-development mentality unable to alleviate poverty, they prefer to give moral and social support.

PRIP Trust

E-mail address: prip@prip.org

PRIP Trust is a capacity-building organization in Bangladesh, founded 1989 as a project of Pact USA. It works to facilitate the growth of the human and institutional potential of development actors in civil society, government and the business sectors. Prip Trust do not have projects of their own but support small NGOs at the grassroots' level with capacity-building to facilitate implementation of projects. This will include competency training as well as technical assistance and training projects in project implementation skills.

Recently the Delegation of the European Commission to Bangladesh signed a contract worth 2,564,000 euro (approx US \$3,094,482) with PRIP Trust for the implementation of the project Small Initiative by Local Innovative NGOs (SMILING) Project. The SMILING Project aims at enhancing the capacity of small locally based NGOs involved in the implementation of small-scale initiatives at grassroots level in the areas of health, education, water supply, sanitation and environmental protection. The Project will target small NGOs in 90 Upazilas in 11 districts in the country.

Khan Foundation

E-mail address: khanfoundation@bd.drik.net

Khan Foundation started 1988 with the objective to strengthen and sustain democracy at both local and national level. The strategy is to promote a democratic culture in the country and to improve the living conditions of the countries disadvantaged groups, in particular women, children and the poor, through launching of effective social and economic development programs. The focus of the major programs of Khan Foundation is on capacity-building and local government. These projects are focused on the elected women members of the UPs which are trained and educated on their rights and responsibilities in workshops. The aim of the project is to

ensure their effective participation in local government and development. In the basic training Khan Foundation aim to annually reach 5000 members. In the follow-up in-depth training they aim to reach 3000 elected women.

Coast Trust

E-mail address: coastst@citechco.net

Coast Trust, previously known as Bhola Project of Action Aid Bangladesh, came into being in 1997. It was registered under the Trust Act 1882 in 1997. The working area of the PO covers 337 villages of 64 unions in 9 Upazilas/Thanas under Bhola and Cox's Bazar districts. Coast Trust is mainly working with micro-credit.

ARD Inc. Bangladesh

E-mail address: zrk@citech-bd.com

ARD, Inc. was founded in 1977 in USA and is the implementer of the USAID/Bangladesh-funded Bangladesh Local Government Initiative (LGI) The overall purpose of the project is to promote and strengthen a nationwide constituency for strong and democratic local government in Bangladesh. The project will stimulate a public debate on local government policy reform and help interested stakeholders to work together to bring about specific local government policy changes.

Appendix D

Interviews with key persons

Name	Date
Dr. Tofail Ahmed	14/4 2003
Q. Md Afshar Hussain Saqui (NILG)	17/5 2003
Dr. Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman	20/4 2003
Dr.Zarina Raman Khan (ARD Inc.)	23/4 2003
Kushi Kabir (Nijera Kori)	26/4 2003

Interviews with NGOs

Prip Trust (Aroma Dutta)	15/4 2003
Care Bangladesh (Hare Krishna Das)	21/4 2003
BNPS (Rokeya Kabir)	22/4 2003

Quotas – a Key to Equality?

An International Comparison of the Use of Electoral Quotas to obtain Equal Political Citizenship for Women.

A research program supported by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet).

This project is the first worldwide comparative analysis of the discursive controversies around quotas and of the actual implementation of various quota systems. Under this program we will study 1) the debates in various countries around the world, 2) the decision-making processes that led to the introduction of quotas, 3) the implementation of various types of legal quota systems or party quotas systems in different political systems and 4) the consequences of quotas, the intended as well as the unintended. Under what conditions do quota systems contribute to the stated goal, equal political citizenship for women and men? When do quotas contribute to women's empowerment?

Quotas represent a change in public equality policy, from “equal opportunities” to “equality of results”. But quotas also touches upon fundamental questions in democratic theory (e.g. social representation versus representation of ideas) and in feminist theory (e.g. the construction of women as a political category).

This program will also look at the influence of international organizations. Conceptual, we focus on the processes of "translation", e.g. how the women's movements in individual countries transform and make use of the new international discourse on quotas in their own national political process.

Research on quotas so far has tended to concentrate on the often vehement debates and on the actual decisions-making process. This program will widen the perspective, and also study the troublesome implementation of quotas and the effects of various forms of quota provisions. From single country studies we know, that the introduction of for instance a requirement of a minimum of 30% of women (or "each gender") on the electoral lists does not automatically lead to women getting 30% of the seats. Thus by comparing the use of various forms of quotas provisions in different electoral systems as well as possible sanctions for non-compliance, this project will illuminate when quota systems lead to a substantial increase in women's representation and when such decisions remain symbolic.

The project co-operates with International IDEA. The web site, www.quotaproject.org is a result of the co-operation between IDEA and this program.

The Quota Research Team at the Department of Political Science.

Address: Stockholm University, S-10691 Stockholm, Sweden. Fax +46 8152529.

Home page: www.statsvet.su.se/quotas

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Emma Frankl, M.Sc., emma.frankl@telia.com (Bangladesh)

International research network

For the purpose of cross-national comparison, this program has formed a network of international scholars who have conducted single country studies about the introduction of quotas. Together with International IDEA, the program also works to encourage new research on quotas around the world, especially in 3.world countries with newly introduced quota systems.

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