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Women's Participation in Union Parishads and its Influence on Administrative Performance in Rural Bangladesh

Md. Abdullah Al Mamun

Ministry of Public Administration, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Abstract

Women inclusion in local governance was emerging as a key instrument for fostering inclusive, accountable and effective rural administration in Bangladesh; however the role of women participation on Union Parishad administrative performance was not adequately assessed. The study was to assess women's participation in Union Parishad decision-making, political and administrative empowerment, community and development activities, institutional support, and find out how women perceive the influence in administrative performance. A cross-sectional quantitative research design has been used on 400 respondents including Union Parishad representatives, officials, community members, citizens and others. Data were collected by a structured questionnaire based on five-point Likert scale and analyzed with SPSS as through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and correlation and regression methods. Results showed that the level of community and development participation had been quite high (M = 3.85), while political and administrative empowerment (M = 3.73) and decision-making participation (M = 3.72) were moderate high. Institutional support was rated somewhat favorably (M=3.66), while overall administrative performance had remained average. The perceived effect of women representation on administrative performance was also moderate (M = 3.04) more towards the accountability, decision making, transparency and inclusive development among other areas. The study found there was a positive role of women in local governance, but it was restricted and less effective due to insufficient power; an absence of necessary information and training; and inadequate institutional arrangements. This was why strengthening substantive participation and institutional capacity had been proposed as prerequisites for improved Union Parishad administrative performance.

Keywords: *Women's Participation; Union Parishads; Local Governance; Administrative Performance; Women's Empowerment; Rural Bangladesh*

1. Introduction

Local government facilitates inclusive development, provides basic public services in response to localized community needs, and advancements of democratic governance at the local levels (Cheema, 2020). Union Parishads are the lowest level of local government in rural Bangladesh and they maintain a close relationship with citizens as they remain engaged in facilitating public goods delivery, constructing local infrastructure, implementing social safety-net programs, resolving disputes between parties (including family-oriented matters), community development projects and various administrative tasks (Djafar et al., 2025). Thus, for Union Parishads to work well, institutional resources and administrative capacity are not the only preconditions; they also require a realistic scope for action for diverse groups at the local level in decision-making (Kgobe et al., 2023). In that prospect, women involvement in Local Administration was created as a critical area for open and accountable governance. Women's involvement in local government can bring neglected and unrepresented issues and perspectives to the table, thus resulting in more representative decision-making (Islam, 2025). Women elected representatives are likely to give more attention to issues such as women, girls and children, the vulnerable or marginalized households and any area that touches on social welfare such as health, education and sanitation and community safety (Piatnychuk et al., 2025). Particiaption ibid also enhances service facilitate communication between regional sites and peoples with citizenship participation elevation age (Rijal, 2023). Yet, there is no guarantee that simply having women in local government will lead to meaningful participation. Women representatives may face many institutional, social, political and cultural barriers that hinder their ability to

influence decisions, serve on committees, receive administrative information, communicate with officials and this makes it impossible for them to exercise their authority (Sarkar et al., 2022). Hence, studying participation as more than just formal inclusion offers the best possibility of determining the influence of such an approach upon local administrative success (Ardiputra et al., 2025).

Building on this background, the current study aimed at investigating the impact of women representation in Union Parishads on bureaucratic efficiency in rural Bangladesh. In particular, this research evaluated the inputs of women participation in decision making, empowerment of women politically and administratively, their involvement in community and development work and their institutional support for participation pertaining to impact on administrative performance of Union Parishads. The research aimed to contribute empirical evidence to the literature on gender inclusive local governance that may help policymakers, local government authorities and development practitioners improve administrative effectiveness at the grass-roots level by strengthening women's meaningful participation.

2. Literature Review

Women in political institutions increase the range of issues considered in public decision-making and enhance representation of groups whose interests tend to receive less adequate advocacy through traditional male-dominated political structures (Dhakal & Thapa, 2024). Thus, more women in a legislature does not guarantee that women's participation will be effective unless they have opportunities, power, information and an institutional infrastructure with which to affect decision making (Bishu, 2022). Because local government institutions work in close proximity to citizens and deal directly with issues affecting the welfare of households and communities, women's participation could be especially important at the local level (Hlongwane, 2026). Women representatives possess insights gained from experiences at the community level, and thus may be more likely to prioritize areas such as maternal and child health, education, sanitation, social protection through safety nets, community safety or the needs of vulnerable households (Yeleliere et al., 2023). In the context of local government, this idea can be understood as women representatives having a voice to access information, define community priorities and communicating with officials, being able to participate in committees and influence administrative decision-making (Ricciardelli, 2022). Prior research suggests that women often are never provided with the institutional authority to act on their formal responsibilities. Hence, training and capacity-building may be significant in bolstering the administrative efficiency of women representatives (Sasidhar et al., 2024). Access to information related to budgets, state development programs, and regulations and administrative procedures can also help them participate more effectively. Hence, political and administrative empowerment will improve the quality and efficiency of the women input on Union Parishad governance (Meena & Gupta, 2026).

The involvement of women is therefore dependent for more inclusive development planning and identification of the problems (Ali & Kamraju, 2023). Rural Bangladesh, where equality and access to local institutions affects how citizens relate to their representatives. While capacity is an important part of women's pathways to becoming representatives, meaningful participation must also be understood in light of the institutional environment (Rahman & Tasnim, 2023). Supportive institutional environments can empower women representatives to utilize their formal positions more strategically and impact administrative decisions (Akahome & Oputa, 2026). Administrative performance describes a public institution-client base relationship dealing with capacities to reach responsibility efficiently and effectively, responsively, and transparently (Cardoso et al., 2022). Performance in local government may be measured by the quality and accessibility of public services, operational efficiency, responsiveness to citizens, transparency and accountability nature (community involvement), completion of development activities, capacity to solve local problems (Xia & Saha, 2025).

Union Parishads perform a key role in delivering services and implementing local development initiatives. Institutional capacity, financial resources, leaders and citizens engaging with one another, political dynamics and the quality of elected representation can all affect their performance (Sarkar et al., 2022). Gender-inclusive representation here may be an institutional one of the conditions that can us about positive influence administrative performance (Bentaleb, 2026). Women representatives might also contribute to better administrative performance through their influence on development planning, community monitoring, service delivery, or advocacy for marginalized groups (Latif et al., 2026). But these potential benefits hinge on the degree to which women representatives have actual power. However, if women participate merely symbolically this may be a watery half-cup in terms of its expected impact on administrative performance (Karim et al., 2025). It is this distinction which lends a crucial justification to measuring participation in multiple dimensions instead of merely through the measure of number of women elected. The limited empirical research that examines women's representation in the

political sphere has generally produced evidence that women and men prioritize different issues though the size and direction of these effects vary by institutional and social context (Setiabudi et al., 2026).

Also, in rural Bangladesh there is a unique dynamic between institutional and sociocultural elements where even though formal mechanisms exist for the representation of women, informal rules still hinder their agency and engagement. As a result, they require quantitative evidence of whether and to what extent women's effective participation is conducive to improved administrative outputs. This paper fills this gap by empirically testing the link between women's participation across multiple dimensions and administrative performance of Union Parishads in rural Bangladesh.

- To evaluate women's decision making involvement at Union Parishads level in rural Bangladesh.
- To explore the impact of women's empowerment in politics and administration on administrative performance of Union Parishad.
- To assess the contribution of women's participation in community and local development activities to administrative performance.
- To explore the significance of institutional support in bolstering women's effective participation within Union Parishads.
- To measure the relationship of women's participation as a whole with the administrative performance of Union Parishads.
- To determine the dimensions of women participation that have a substantial making Administrative performance in rural Union Parishads.

3. Methods and Methodology

This quantitative cross-sectional study aimed to measure how women's involvement in the Union Parishads was related to administrative performance at the rural level in Bangladesh. The questionnaire consisted of dichotomized; nominal and ordinal scaled items based on a five-point Likert scale, administered to Union Parishad stakeholders: namely the elected representatives (UP Chairmen and Members), UP officials, local citizens/community members and service recipients. The study determined the sample size using Cochran's formula for infinite population:

Where n = sample size, Z = standard normal variety for 95% confidence level (1.96), p = estimated proportion of the population with the attribute being measured (p was presumed to be 0.5 since no prior information needed to be used) and E is margin of error (0.05) (Cochran, 1942). On the basis of these parameters, a sample size of 384 respondents was calculated as minimum. In order to make the results more reliable and cover for non-response, 400 questionnaires were distributed by purposive sampling. The structured questionnaire was administered to the selected respondents, which consists of demographic characteristics, decision making (women participation), political and administrative empowerment (political and administrative participation), community development activities, institutional support and administrative performance. Data were coded and analyzed by SPSS applying descriptive statistics, Reliability analysis (Cronbach's alpha), Pearson correlation and multiple regression to find the associations between study variables and how different dimensions of women's participation influenced Union Parishad administrative performance.

4. Result and Discussion

This section provides the empirical findings and their discussion on women inclusion in Union Parishads and how it impacts administrative performance in rural Bangladesh. The output includes the demographic characteristics of the respondents, descriptive statistics, reliability and correlation analyses and finally the results for regression. The results are discussed against the study objectives and some existing literature in order to explain how women participation, empowerment among women, community involvement, women's work through Union Parishad administration and institutional support enhance representation on effective governance.

4.1 Demographic Information

The study consisted of 400 respondents. Demographic features suggested that the respondents encompassed a wide spectrum of gender, age, educational background, occupational background, residence type. This diversity is important as the article explores perceptions of women participation as well as administration performance by some stakeholders.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	223	55.8
	Female	177	44.3
Age	18–25 years	43	10.8
	26–35 years	124	31.0
	36–45 years	110	27.5
	46–55 years	79	19.8
	Above 55 years	44	11.0
Education	No formal education	9	2.3
	Primary	46	11.5
	Secondary	103	25.8
	Higher Secondary	115	28.8
	Graduate	89	22.3
	Postgraduate	38	9.5
Occupation	Farmer	103	25.8
	Business	77	19.3
	Service	72	18.0
	Homemaker	85	21.3
	Student	18	4.5
	Other	45	11.3
Monthly Household Income (BDT)	Below 15,000	102	25.5
	15,001–25,000	109	27.3
	25,001–40,000	124	31.0
	40,001–60,000	46	11.5
	Above 60,000	19	4.8
Respondent Type	Union Parishad elected representative	51	12.8
	Union Parishad employee	52	13.0
	Local community member	92	23.0
	Citizen recipient	169	42.3
	Other stakeholder	36	9.0
Length of Union Parishad Involvement	Less than 1 year	42	10.5
	1–3 years	111	27.8
	4–6 years	94	23.5
	7–10 years	85	21.3
	More than 10 years	68	17.0
Interaction with Women Representatives	Yes	330	82.5
	No	70	17.5

The gender distribution was 55.8% were male and 44.3% were female, showing that both genders are represented quite evenly therefore reducing bias on the responses to questions that could be affected by gender. The study was particularly relevant to these issues as a large proportion of the respondents were female, and women tend to have valuable insights on the participation and effectiveness of women representatives in Union Parishads. Similarly, the inclusion of male respondents broadened the scope of the study to reflect more on community and institutional perceptions of female participation in local governance. In respect to age, the most respondents were in the 26–35 years range (31.0%) followed by 36–45 years (27.5%) and 46–55 years (19.8%). 10.8% of the participants were aged between 18–25 years, and 11.0% higher than 55y [12]. Therefore, the respondents were likely being within adults of working age and social model adulthood in age and therefore less likely to be totally naïve about local administration or community affairs. The educational grade have suggested a twinkling rungs sat of education. Out of these, the highest were those who completed higher secondary education (28.8%), followed by secondary education (25.8%) and then graduation (22.3%). An additional 9.5% had postgraduate qualifications, while 11.5% had primary education and just 2.3% no formal education. This distribution indicates that a large number of the respondents had at least basic education which may have aided them to analyze and assess the items on local government, women participation, and administrative performance. The distribution of occupation was as follows: farmers 25.8%, homemakers 21.3%, and business person's 19.3% and service holders 18.0%. Students made up 4.5% and 11.3% were classified under Other Occupation categories. The notable proportion of farmers and homemakers aligned with the study's rural setting, through featuring two demographic groups who are intimately linked with community- and household-level issues.

The distribution of monthly household income revealed that, the more common (40.7%) category was BDT 25,001–40,000 with a mean household income of BDT 32,401 + 10,284 [13]. Respondents earning BDT 15,001–25,000 (27.3%) followed closely by respondents who earned below BDT 15,000 (25.5%). A mere 11.5% had

income in the range of BDT 40,001–60,000 and about 4.8% were in the range above BDT 60,000. This distribution thus mirrored a primarily lower and middle income populace of rural respondents, which was appropriate for measuring perceived administrative capabilities and public service experiences. In terms of respondent by type, citizens/service recipients were the largest group (42.3%) followed by local community members (23.0%). The figures of officials/employees from Union Parishad, elected representatives and other stakeholders were 13.0%, 12.8% and 9.0% respectively. This was helpful as the study integrated both institutional and community-level perspectives. Specifically, this study used a high proportion of citizens and community members so that performance could be evaluated from the perspective of those who interact with Union Parishad services. The period of time being involved with Union Parishads or the opportunity for interactive contact confirmed that respondents were familiarity from local government. The leading cohort consisted of 1–3 years of participation or contact (27.8%) followed by cohorts with 4–6 years (23.5%) and 7–10 years (21.3%). Respondents with greater than 10 years of contact represented 17.0% compared to those who had less than one year (10.5%). In total, 89.5% had one or more years of involvement or contact indicating that the majority of respondents had ample time to form knowledgeable opinions about women as voters and Union Parishad administrators.

Lastly, 82.5% said yes, they have experience of interacting with women Union Parishad representatives while 17.5% said no since the latter can give respondents first-hand insight into their participation and accessibility, as well as whether they help in decision-making and community affairs, this was especially relevant for this study (Cardoso et al., 2022). In general, the sample is diverse and appropriate sample had sufficient exposure to Union Parishad activities hence making it a valid basis for exploring the relationship between women participation and administrative performance.

4.2 Women's Participation in Decision-Making

The presence of women in decision-making was measured using eight statements pertaining to the involvement of women representatives in Union Parishad meetings, their chances to voice opinions with counterpart men, influence on decisions, participation in development planning and public service-related decisions as well as resource allocation. Response options consisted of a five-point Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Data given in the next section indicate that women representatives were perceived as moderate to high level in participation in decision making at Union Parishad level.

Table 2: Women's Participation in Decision-Making

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
Women representatives actively participate in Union Parishad decision-making.	18 (4.5)	35 (8.8)	64 (16.0)	176 (44.0)	107 (26.8)	3.80	1.04
Women representatives are given adequate opportunities to express their opinions.	20 (5.0)	42 (10.5)	70 (17.5)	170 (42.5)	98 (24.5)	3.71	1.06
Women representatives participate actively in Union Parishad meetings.	17 (4.3)	37 (9.3)	61 (15.3)	179 (44.8)	106 (26.5)	3.80	1.04
Women representatives have meaningful influence on important Union Parishad decisions.	24 (6.0)	46 (11.5)	76 (19.0)	163 (40.8)	91 (22.8)	3.63	1.10
Suggestions made by women representatives are seriously considered by other members.	22 (5.5)	43 (10.8)	73 (18.3)	171 (42.8)	91 (22.8)	3.66	1.08
Women representatives participate in discussions concerning local development projects.	16 (4.0)	34 (8.5)	59 (14.8)	181 (45.3)	110 (27.5)	3.84	1.03

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
Women representatives are involved in decisions concerning allocation of local resources.	27 (6.8)	51 (12.8)	82 (20.5)	157 (39.3)	83 (20.8)	3.55	1.12
Women representatives participate in decisions related to public service delivery.	19 (4.8)	39 (9.8)	67 (16.8)	177 (44.3)	98 (24.5)	3.74	1.05
Overall Women's Participation in Decision-Making	—	—	—	—	—	**3.72**	**0.89**

Results showed a mean score of 3.72 (SD = 0.89) for women taking part in decision-making, suggesting that respondents viewed them in a positive light overall. This indicates that the woman representatives were not just empty vessels in Union Parishads but were participants in decision making to a significant degree. Participation in discussions regarding local level development projects had the highest mean score mean = 3.84 (SD = 1.03). This statement was agreed to or strongly agreed upon by approximately 72.8% of respondents. This suggests that women representatives were relatively engaged with local development discussions. Though 63.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, this indicator fared slightly worse than participation in meetings and for development discussions primarily around mutual contract clarity. This could suggest that women representatives were generally more successful in being part of the discussion than exercising substantive influence over big decisions. Hence, such a pattern illustrates the difference between formal participation and real power of decision. The mean score for women deciding how local resources will be allocated was lowest overall: 3.55 (SD = 1.12). However, 60.0% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement: it was the poorest performing indicator within the construct. The ability to allocate resources is both a political and functional term generally believed to indicate more power, agency and gravitas over development priorities; therefore it is possible that women representatives influenced resource allocation decisions less than discussions of meetings (and other general conversations), which aligns with the result of their lower score.

In general, the results show women's participation in Union Parishad decision-making was positively correlated but not strong all around. Women representatives seemed to be more engaged in meetings and development discussions, as well as public service-related issues while their role on major decisions and resources allocation was relatively weaker (Hlongwane, 2026). An important conclusion of this finding is for rural local governance; the increase in women's formal representation should be matched with mechanisms that strengthen their agency to make decisions, share information, participate on committees and exercise power over development resources. As a result, meaningful participation can help ensure the Union Parishad administration is more inclusive, responsive and representative.

4.3 Women's Political and Administrative Empowerment

Political and administrative empowerment of women was measured using eight indicators that evaluated the level of authority, potential to influence decision making, confidence in dealing with officials, access to critical information, ability to dialogue with officials on important issues in communities, participation in committees both formal and informal as well advocacy efforts for others. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Results revealed that women representatives were predominantly viewed as moderately to very empower in their political and administrative roles.

Table 3: Women's Political and Administrative Empowerment

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
Women representatives have sufficient authority to perform their Union Parishad responsibilities.	21 (5.3)	40 (10.0)	70 (17.5)	174 (43.5)	95 (23.8)	3.71	1.07
Women representatives can independently raise issues concerning local communities.	17 (4.3)	34 (8.5)	62 (15.5)	184 (46.0)	103 (25.8)	3.81	1.03

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
Women representatives can influence the formulation of local development priorities.	23 (5.8)	44 (11.0)	74 (18.5)	170 (42.5)	89 (22.3)	3.65	1.09
Women representatives are able to communicate effectively with Union Parishad officials.	18 (4.5)	37 (9.3)	61 (15.3)	181 (45.3)	103 (25.8)	3.79	1.05
Women representatives have adequate access to information required for decision-making.	26 (6.5)	47 (11.8)	79 (19.8)	165 (41.3)	83 (20.8)	3.58	1.11
Women representatives are confident in performing their administrative responsibilities.	16 (4.0)	35 (8.8)	63 (15.8)	183 (45.8)	103 (25.8)	3.80	1.04
Women representatives can advocate effectively for women's and vulnerable groups' needs.	14 (3.5)	31 (7.8)	57 (14.3)	186 (46.5)	112 (28.0)	3.88	1.02
Women representatives have adequate opportunities to participate in Union Parishad committees.	24 (6.0)	43 (10.8)	75 (18.8)	169 (42.3)	89 (22.3)	3.64	1.10
Overall Women's Political and Administrative Empowerment	—	—	—	—	—	**3.73**	**0.90**

As depicted by the Table 3, the combined mean score was found to be 3.73 with SD (0.90), thus respondents scored more from the scale that measures women representatives perceived political and administrative empowerment at improved level. The average for the eight indicators ranged from 3.58 to 3.88 suggesting that respondents were generally in agreement that women representatives had the capacity and opportunity to carry out their function. That said, differences among the individual indicators also indicated that empowerment was not equally robust across all administrative dimensions. "Women representatives can advocate effectively for women's and vulnerable groups' needs" had the highest mean score (mean = 3.88; SD = 1.02) of all statements in favoring women and vulnerable group's needs. Which includes 74.5% of the respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The finding indicated that women representatives were viewed as especially suited to recognize and convey the needs of their gender group and vulnerable communities. Local representatives hold a unique institutional position which they could use to bring some oft-ignored social concerns into local administration debates. Women representatives' capacity to raise issues independently from the local community scored a relatively high mean of 3.81 (SD = 1.03), with 71.8% of respondents indicating they agree or strongly agreed. The finding suggested that women representatives were fairly good at spotting problems and conveying them to the authorities. This independence is part of political empowerment because it allows representatives to escape from passive participation, where they only listen to actors and interact with them when required, moving into a role at the center of debates concerning the local governance agenda.

Mean and standard deviation of various indicators for women representatives confidence in their administrative responsibilities was 3.80 (SD = 1.04), and their ability to communicate with Union Parishad officials mean 3.79 (SD = 1.05). Both statements received the highest agree or strongly agree responses of over 70%. The findings indicate that women representatives were generally equipped with self-assurance in mobilizing themselves for their assigned work and could improve communication with Union Parishads' administrative staff. The mean for the sufficient authority to perform Union Parishad responsibilities indicator was 3.71 (SD = 1.07). The survey revealed that 67.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that there was enough power to women representatives. Although overall the response was favorable, a moderate to high fraction of neutral and negative responses suggested that some women representatives might continue to be hampered in their ability to perform their formal role. That matters because administrative scrutiny does not necessarily equate to formal electoral representation. Ability to influence the development priorities of the local area was 3.65 (SD = 1.09). Participation in Committees is critical, as the majority of what a local government does is planned, reviewed and closely monitored through committees. Thus, enhancing the access and active participation of women in committees could help bolster their administrative power. Access to information needs in decision-making resulted in the lowest mean score of 3.58 (SD=1.11). This was the weakest performing indicator but still saw an agreement/strongly

agree rate of 62.0%. Information on administration is often restricted and does not fully reach women representatives, particularly when they have to opt for discussions of a more technical nature, assess different development proposals, monitor resource utilization or take decisions. Information access, therefore it seems to be one of the critical area for empowerment of women in administration.

In general, the results indicated that women representatives performed their roles reasonably well regarding political and administrative empowerment especially in advocacy on behalf of marginalized groups, sensitivity to community issues, contact with officials and displayed confidence in their duties. Yet much lower scores for access to information, influence on development priorities and participation in committees suggested round some of the key institutional barriers likely remained intact. Intensifying training, assuring ready access to administrative and financial information, increasing female participation on committees and offering more decision-making authority in development planning might make women's formal representation into real political and administrative empowerment (Latif et al., 2026). This can empower women that could possibly make the Union Parishad administration more responsive, inclusive and effective.

4.4 Women's Participation in Community and Development Activities

Women's participation in community and development activities refers to the activity of women representatives by selecting community need definition, development planning, project monitoring, and communication approach for communication of community problem solving. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree). The findings showed that women representatives met the general perceptions of being highly participatory in community and development activities.

Table 4: Women's Participation in Community and Development Activities

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
Women representatives actively participate in identifying local community needs.	15 (3.8)	31 (7.8)	56 (14.0)	187 (46.8)	111 (27.8)	3.87	1.00
Women representatives contribute to the planning of local development programs.	17 (4.3)	34 (8.5)	64 (16.0)	181 (45.3)	104 (26.0)	3.80	1.03
Women representatives participate in monitoring Union Parishad development activities.	19 (4.8)	39 (9.8)	70 (17.5)	178 (44.5)	98 (24.5)	3.73	1.07
Women representatives communicate community problems to the Union Parishad.	13 (3.3)	29 (7.3)	53 (13.3)	189 (47.3)	116 (29.0)	3.95	0.99
Women representatives help ensure that local development projects address community needs.	18 (4.5)	35 (8.8)	62 (15.5)	184 (46.0)	101 (25.3)	3.79	1.04
Women representatives encourage community members to participate in local development activities.	16 (4.0)	33 (8.3)	59 (14.8)	186 (46.5)	106 (26.5)	3.83	1.02
Women representatives pay attention to the needs of women, children, elderly people, and vulnerable groups.	12 (3.0)	25 (6.3)	48 (12.0)	187 (46.8)	128 (32.0)	3.99	0.99
Women representatives contribute to resolving community-level problems.	15 (3.8)	30 (7.5)	57 (14.3)	185 (46.3)	113 (28.3)	3.88	1.01
Overall Women's Participation in Community and Development Activities	—	—	—	—	—	**3.85**	**0.87**

Findings in Table 4 show the overall mean score of women involvement in community and development activities was 3.85 (SD =.087) which indicates a smooth, high level of women participation. The average scores for all eight indicators were above 3.70 and indicated that respondents perceived their women representatives to be engaged with the issues facing their communities and local development processes. It suggests that women participated not just in Union Parishad meetings but also in activities that were closely related to the functions of the development or services being provided by the local government body. Attention to the needs of women, children, elderly people and vulnerable groups was reported for being most responded to overall (mean = 3.99; SD = 0.99). This was agreed or strongly agreed to by some 78.8% of respondents. The authors argued that this finding indicates how visible women representatives are in the fight for outcomes specifically beneficial towards socially vulnerable groups. Their involvement in these domains could reinforce the inclusivity of local government, as community development decisions will be informed by groups that might otherwise have less voice. The highest second score was found on communication of community problems to the Union Parishad with a mean 3.95 (SD = 0.99). 76.3% of the respondents somewhat agreed and strongly agreed that women representatives communicated the community problems well. This finding suggests that women representatives are potentially playing a crucial intermediary role between citizens and local government. Communicating problems at community level helps Union Parishads to prioritise and act more effectively.

This factor, Women's contribution to community-level problem-solving, received a mean of 3.88 (SD = 1.01) and was supported by about 74.5% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. In a similar vein, involvement in identifying local community needs was averaged at 3.87 (SD = 1.00). The results indicated that women representatives were seen as being both responsive to problem identification and solutions. This is an important aspect of responsive local governance as a truly effective development plan comes only with correctly identifying the priorities of the community. The indicator about promote and enhance community participation in local development activities, mean = 3.83, SD = 1.02); women contribution to development program planning record a average of 3.80 (SD = 1.03). It shows that women representatives were important in mobilizing citizens and facilitated local development planning. This will provide space for better communication of Union Parishads with communities and greater citizen ownership of development. Women had a mean score of 3.79 (SD = 1.04) on how well development projects shape their agenda to meet community needs. While the majority of respondents (71.3%) agreed or strongly agreed, it scored slightly lower than community problem identification and communication. This could imply that women representatives were more firmly implicated in articulating needs than in ascertaining whether the projects implemented eventually responded to those very needs.

"Women representatives participate in monitoring Union Parishad development activities" participation in monitoring Union Parishad development activities, recorded the least mean score of 3.73 (SD = 1.07). However, 69.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The relatively lower score suggests that women representatives faced larger obstacle in their ability to monitor the implementation of development projects as compared to identifying community problems or communicating local needs. Monitoring often involves access to project information, technical expertise, bureaucratic authority and inter-institutional cooperation: not all representatives have equal access to these resources.

The results showed that women representatives were active agents in providing accountability at the level of Union Parishads by responding to community needs, conveying local issue concerns, advocating for vulnerable groups and contributing to issues resolution. Yet they are comparatively less involved with the monitoring of developmental projects, indicating a potential area for common institutional support and capacity development (Chile & Agaigbe, 2026). If women representatives were also given training, information on monitoring mechanisms, and administrative resources to carry out their duties, this would enable such representatives to participate more effectively across the entire development cycle from needs identification and planning of interventions through monitoring of implementation to evaluation. Such reinforced engagement could result in the eventual establishment of more responsive, inclusive and effective rural local government.

4.5 Institutional Support for Women's Participation

Eight indicators were used to investigate the institutional support for women participants, addressing their opportunities for participation; the cooperation from male representatives and Union Parishad officials regarding women's participation; and access to information, training, committee participation, institutional rules; and administrative or technical assistance. A five-point Likert scale was used for the responses from 1 = strongly disagree to 1 = strongly agree. The results suggested that respondents were relatively positive about the institutional environment for women's involvement, yet some realms of support enjoyed by women in sport lagged behind.

Table 5: Institutional Support for Women's Participation

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
The Union Parishad provides adequate opportunities for women representatives to participate in administrative activities.	21 (5.3)	39 (9.8)	68 (17.0)	178 (44.5)	94 (23.5)	3.71	1.06
Male representatives generally support women's participation in Union Parishad activities.	25 (6.3)	47 (11.8)	73 (18.3)	166 (41.5)	89 (22.3)	3.62	1.11
Union Parishad officials cooperate with women representatives.	18 (4.5)	35 (8.8)	61 (15.3)	184 (46.0)	102 (25.5)	3.79	1.04
Women representatives receive adequate information about Union Parishad activities.	24 (6.0)	44 (11.0)	76 (19.0)	170 (42.5)	86 (21.5)	3.62	1.10
Women representatives receive adequate training for performing their responsibilities.	28 (7.0)	51 (12.8)	79 (19.8)	159 (39.8)	83 (20.8)	3.54	1.13
Union Parishad meetings provide an appropriate environment for women to express their views.	20 (5.0)	40 (10.0)	67 (16.8)	178 (44.5)	95 (23.8)	3.72	1.06
Institutional rules support women's meaningful participation in Union Parishad activities.	22 (5.5)	43 (10.8)	70 (17.5)	177 (44.3)	88 (22.0)	3.66	1.08
Women representatives receive adequate administrative and technical support.	26 (6.5)	48 (12.0)	76 (19.0)	166 (41.5)	84 (21.0)	3.58	1.12
Overall Institutional Support for Women's Participation	—	—	—	—	—	**3.66**	**0.91**

The findings in Table 5 showed that the institutional support for women participation had an overall mean score of 3.66 (SD =.91), which implies moderately low positive perception. Most respondents agreed to the items on institutional opportunities for cooperation, access and availability of information, training, and administrative support. Yet, the relatively low aggregate score also reflected the fact that institutional arrangements did not yet fully overcome barriers to women's active engagement in the Union Parishad. Union Parishad officials' cooperation is the highest mean score (MSWP3 = 3.79, SD = 1.04). About 71.5% of respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that all union parishad officials worked alongside women representatives. This observation indicates that the administrative officials, in general, provided a friendly environment for woman representatives to perform their duties. Officials need to support women representatives as they are unable to work without institutional help such as administrative knowledge, documentation, procedures and technical support is essential for their role in local governance. An appropriate environment for women to articulate their opinions during Union Parishad meetings mean =3.72(SD=1.06) respondents who agreed or strongly agreed = 68·3% Also, the opportunity to participate in administrative activities had a mean of 3.71 (SD = 1.06). The results suggested that the formal institutional environment generally served as a space for opportunities to women representatives in relation to their participation and expression of views. These are the opportunities that help transform formal representation into active engagement.

The indicator about institutional rules for the facilitation of substantive participation had a mean of 3.66 (SD = 1·08). Overall about two-thirds (66.3%) of the subjects agreed or strongly agreed that institutional rules were favorable for women joining. Even while a favorable collective outcome has emerged, this finding of neutral and negative responses indicates that formal provisions through institution may fail to yield equal opportunities for substantive participation. This reinforces the idea that rules which exist are best implemented through effective practice rather than just on paper. The mean scores of male representative's support for women participations and sufficiency of information about Union Parishad activities were 3.62 in both cases. Roughly 63.8% and 64.0% of respondents concurred or strongly agreed to these statements, respectively. The results show that the presence of male representatives and institutional information available another fairly but should be improved further. Because

much local decision making relies on knowledge, timeliness of access to information and collaboration some weaknesses in knowing both may diminish a woman legislator's ability to be effective. The indicator for administrative and technical support had a mean of 3.58 (SD = 1.12), with 62.5% responding 'Agree' or Strongly Agree The lower score implied that women representatives may not receive adequate technical or administrative support to fulfil their obligations. This could be especially true when representatives have to interact with development programs/budgets/admin-tracking which need technical expertise. Adequate training had the lowest mean score, (M = 3.54; SD = 1.13). The weakest indicator of institutional support was that 60.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that women representatives were given sufficient training. This finding indicates that capacity-building opportunities may not be enough for all women representatives. Periodic capacity building on important topics such as local government norms and practices, fiscal responsibilities, development-planning, project monitoring, delivery of public goods and services, administrative processes could be beneficial in enabling women representatives to perform their functions better.

Overall, the findings of were supportive but weak across all dimensions for institutional support for women to participate. Cooperation from Union Parishad officials and participation in meetings are the few stronger enabling, while most of them like training, administrative and technical support, access to information, and support from male representatives remained comparatively weaker. The implications of these findings are that to increase the participation of women, there must not only be formal representation but also a conducive institutional environment (Ali & Kamraju, 2023). Enhanced training programs, timely access to information, more technical assistance and collegiality among male and female representatives might empower women in the administration of Union Parishads (and subsequently improve administrative performance).

4.6 Administrative Performance of Union Parishads

Table 6 shows the findings on administrative performance of Union Parishads. It evaluated administrative performance in five dimensions: service delivery performance, administrative efficiency, transparency and accountability, responsiveness and inclusiveness; development and problem-solving. The findings indicated a moderate level of administrative performance (overall mean = 3.05, SD = 0.88) on the five-point Likert scale. This indicated that the respondents generally viewed Union Parishads as functional sufficient in performing their administrative duties but with considerable room for improvement.

Table 6 shows that, on average, the administrative performance of Union Parishads was moderate (M = 3.05; SD = 0.88). For the dimensions, development and problem-solving displayed relatively higher performance but particularly in terms of local development projects (M = 3.11) and infrastructure problems (M = 3.10). Service delivery was moderately satisfactory as well, with an average accessibility of public services (M = 3.08). By contrast, however, administrative efficiency lagged behind compared to other processes especially in terms of efficiently dealing with administrative procedures (M = 3.00). Moderate scores for Transparency and Accountability With respect to accountability in particular, our lowest individual mean score (M = 2.99) The abstracts suggested that Union Parishads had been moderately well performing in performing their roles as facilitators of local economic development and problem-solving but were lagging behind significantly with administrative efficiency, accountability, responsiveness to citizens needs and more accountability for inclusive governance. Overall, the findings demonstrated that administrative performance in Union Parishads was moderate rather than highly satisfactory, with an overall mean of 3.05. The results suggested that Union Parishads were performing their core responsibilities to a reasonable extent, particularly in local development implementation, infrastructure problem-solving, and addressing administrative problems. However, weaker performance in administrative efficiency, representative accountability, citizen participation, and responsiveness indicated that important institutional challenges remained. From the perspective of the present study, these results provided an important basis for examining whether greater and more meaningful participation of women representatives could contribute to improved administrative outcomes. Women's participation may potentially strengthen the responsiveness of Union Parishads by bringing community-level concerns into decision-making, increasing attention to vulnerable groups, improving participatory governance, and encouraging greater accountability. Thus, the moderate level of administrative performance observed in the study reinforced the importance of investigating the extent to which different dimensions of women's participation influence the overall effectiveness of Union Parishads.

Table 6: Administrative Performance of Union Parishads

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
The Union Parishad provides public services to citizens efficiently.	10 (2.5)	94 (23.5)	173 (43.3)	106 (26.5)	17 (4.3)	3.07	0.88
Union Parishad services are delivered within a reasonable time.	19 (4.8)	91 (22.8)	163 (40.8)	106 (26.5)	21 (5.3)	3.05	0.94
The Union Parishad responds effectively to citizens' service-related needs.	13 (3.3)	88 (22.0)	181 (45.3)	104 (26.0)	14 (3.5)	3.05	0.87
Public services are accessible to different groups of rural citizens.	12 (3.0)	89 (22.3)	170 (42.5)	114 (28.5)	15 (3.8)	3.08	0.88
The Union Parishad uses its available resources efficiently.	13 (3.3)	88 (22.0)	187 (46.8)	98 (24.5)	14 (3.5)	3.03	0.86
Administrative procedures are completed efficiently.	16 (4.0)	97 (24.3)	177 (44.3)	93 (23.3)	17 (4.3)	3.00	0.90
Union Parishad officials perform their responsibilities effectively.	13 (3.3)	96 (24.0)	175 (43.8)	102 (25.5)	14 (3.5)	3.02	0.88
The Union Parishad responds quickly to local administrative problems.	9 (2.3)	93 (23.3)	167 (41.8)	114 (28.5)	17 (4.3)	3.09	0.88
Union Parishad decisions are communicated clearly to local citizens.	14 (3.5)	89 (22.3)	174 (43.5)	109 (27.3)	14 (3.5)	3.05	0.88
Information about Union Parishad activities is accessible to citizens.	14 (3.5)	84 (21.0)	182 (45.5)	102 (25.5)	18 (4.5)	3.07	0.88
Union Parishad representatives are accountable for their decisions and actions.	12 (3.0)	110 (27.5)	164 (41.0)	98 (24.5)	16 (4.0)	2.99	0.90
The Union Parishad maintains transparency in implementation of development activities.	12 (3.0)	85 (21.3)	179 (44.8)	110 (27.5)	14 (3.5)	3.07	0.86
The Union Parishad responds to needs of disadvantaged community members.	18 (4.5)	83 (20.8)	178 (44.5)	103 (25.8)	18 (4.5)	3.05	0.91
The Union Parishad gives adequate attention to women's concerns.	17 (4.3)	76 (19.0)	193 (48.3)	102 (25.5)	12 (3.0)	3.04	0.86
Citizens' opinions are considered when making important local decisions.	11 (2.8)	88 (22.0)	191 (47.8)	94 (23.5)	16 (4.0)	3.04	0.85
The Union Parishad provides opportunities for citizens to participate in local governance.	12 (3.0)	95 (23.8)	179 (44.8)	102 (25.5)	12 (3.0)	3.02	0.86
The Union Parishad effectively identifies local development priorities.	14 (3.5)	88 (22.0)	174 (43.5)	106 (26.5)	18 (4.5)	3.07	0.90
Local development projects are implemented effectively.	12 (3.0)	85 (21.3)	165 (41.3)	125 (31.3)	13 (3.3)	3.11	0.88
The Union Parishad effectively addresses local infrastructure problems.	12 (3.0)	85 (21.3)	174 (43.5)	111 (27.8)	18 (4.5)	3.10	0.88

Statement	Strongly Disagree n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Agree n (%)	Strongly Agree n (%)	Mean	SD
The Union Parishad effectively resolves community-level administrative problems.	12 (3.0)	86 (21.5)	187 (46.8)	100 (25.0)	15 (3.8)	3.05	0.86
Overall Administrative Performance of Union Parishads	—	—	—	—	—	**3.05**	**0.88**

The findings showed that administrative performance regarding Union Parishads was at moderate level and it was not commendable with the overall mean of 3.05. The finding indicated that Union Parishads are relatively performing well on their basic functions such as executing local level development, solving infrastructure problems and overcoming administrative obstacles (Djafar et al., 2025). But weaker scores on administrative efficiency, representative accountability, citizen participation and responsiveness showed that key institutional challenges persisted. These results formed an important basis to examine whether more and higher quality women representatives could yield better political or administrative outcomes, from the perspective of the present study. Women may contribute to more responsive Union Parishads by bringing local issues into decision-making, raising the profile of marginalised groups (including women), encouraging inclusive forms of governance, and holding local authorities accountable. As such, the average level of administrative work found in this study supplemented the need to analyze how various aspects of women's quality of participation have an impact on the overall performance of Union Parishads.

4.7 Perceived Influence of Women's Participation on Administrative Performance

Perceived influence on administrative performance of Union Parishads by women participation was assessed with eight statements which were measured in a Likert system (1-5). The descriptive statistics for perceived influence is presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Perceived Influence of Women's Participation on Administrative Performance

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Greater participation of women representatives improves Union Parishad decision-making.	3.07	0.91	Moderate
Women's participation contributes to better public service delivery.	3.05	0.89	Moderate
Women's participation improves responsiveness of Union Parishad administration.	3.03	0.91	Moderate
Women's participation strengthens transparency in local administration.	3.06	0.89	Moderate
Women's participation improves attention to community needs.	2.99	0.89	Moderate
Women's participation contributes to more inclusive local development.	3.06	0.86	Moderate
Women's participation helps improve accountability of Union Parishad representatives.	3.08	0.91	Moderate
Greater involvement of women representatives improves overall administrative performance.	3.01	0.92	Moderate
Overall Perceived Influence of Women's Participation	**3.04**	**0.71**	**Moderate**

The overall mean score was 3.04 (SD =0.71) indicating moderate perceived influence level. For the statement that women's participation helped improve Union Parishad representatives' accountability, the mean score was highest at 3.08, (SD = 0.91). Next was the belief that more women representatives enhanced decision-making, with a mean of 3.07 (SD = 0.91). Women engagement in inclusive local development and transparency of local administration (3.06) 45 Women's engagement in local administration sheltered a similarly upward result with the mean value at 3.06, although not unlike its shed average range, remained somewhat on the positive side of assessment. On the other hand, less than 25% of respondents believed that women's involvement improved attention to community needs, with a mean score of 2.99 (SD = 0.89); or even overall administrative performance with a mean score of 3.01 (SD = 0.92). The overall results also indicated that respondents acknowledged a moderate positive effect of women's participation on some attributes of Union Parishad functioning particularly accountability, decision making, transparency and inclusive development. Nevertheless, the modest average score still suggested that it had not yet been viewed as a strong or fully institutionalized influence. Such findings may suggest that the deeper gender representation created more space for participatory governance, yet structural constraints, limited power and authority, poor information access and lack of institutional support or incentives curtailed its administrative reach (Karim et al., 2025). This indicated the need to strengthen the role of women

representatives in decision-making, accountability mechanisms, service delivery, and local development planning well beyond mere numerical representation.

5. Findings

- While women representatives have moderately high access to decision-making at the Union Parishad, especially in meetings and local development discussions, they have very low influence over resources.
- Women representatives had moderate levels of political and administrative empowerment, with a better capacity for advocacy on issues relating to women and other vulnerable groups, but less access to information and committees.
- Participation of women was among community and development activities where participation levels were high compared to other activities − specifically in terms of identifying community needs, communicating local issues, and addressing the concerns of vulnerable groups.
- Institutional support was at medium level for women participation, with good cooperation from bohiod of Union Parishad officials and average with training together to administrative/technical section.
- Findings showed that women participation had a moderate impact perception in terms of Union Parishad administrative performance with respect to accountability, decision-making, transparency and inclusive local development being the most significant contributions.
- The main findings indicated that the Union Parishads administrative performances were improved through strengthening women substantive decision-making authority, empowerment, community participation and institutional support.

6. Recommendations

- Ensure meaningful space for the voice and decision-making power of women representatives in key Union Parishad decisions, particularly around resource allocations and development planning.
- Further political and administrative empowerment via periodic training on governance, budgeting, leadership, administrational protocols and local development planning.
- Timeliness of access to information given relevant administration, finance and development information needed by women representatives in taking the right decision about their participation.
- Enhance institutional support by increasing responsiveness of Union Parishad officials and male representatives in addition to building a supportive environment for women participation.
- Ensure that project planning, implementation, supervision and evaluation include women representatives to increase their participation in monitoring.
- Enhance responsiveness of vulnerable groups by using the knowledge of women representatives at community level to respond to the needs of women, children, elderly persons and other disadvantaged citizens.
- Increase transparency and accountability through women representatives contributing in identifying monitoring public spending, development projects, delivery of services and administrative decisions.
- Strengthen administrative and technical support by appointing dedicated staff to mentor and provide institutional assistance for women representatives.
- Encourage citizen participation and inclusive governance by creating more opportunities for women representatives and members of the community to participate in local decision-making processes.

7. Conclusion

The study found that women's participation only moderately contributes to the performance of Union Parishads in rural Bangladesh. Women representatives actively participated in community and development activities, especially in relation to community need assessment, localization of local problems, and voice on the issues of vulnerable groups but less involved in decisions making and political and administrative empowerment. Institutional support was not overwhelming; cooperation from Union Parishad officials was found mostly positive but training, information access and technical assistance needed further refinement. Women Participation and Governance Findings also indicated moderate perceived effect of women participation on administrative performance (strengthening accountability, decision-making, transparency, inclusive local development). However, there were limits to their substantive decision-making authority and institutional backing which appeared to restrict the wider administrative impact of women taking part. Hence, the strengthening of power, capacity,

access to information and institutional support for women representatives along with their involvement in the monitoring of development activities and allocation of resources are critical for changing formal representation into meaningful participation and enhancing Union Parishad administration in all aspects such as effectiveness, responsiveness transparency and inclusiveness in rural Bangladesh.

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