A SURVEY

ON

REPRESENTATION AND VIOLANCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN BANGLADESH

MARCH 2009

Foreword

I am thankful to South Asia Partnership and Dr. Rohit Kumar Nepali executive Director SAP International for giving Democracywatch this opportunity to conduct this important study of "A Survey on Representation and Violence Against Women in Politics in Bangladesh" This has been all the more important for Bangladesh as in this Ninth Parliamentary Election held on 28 December 2008 a record number of women candidates contested which was a total 59 and 19 women won with considerable margin against their opponents.

This survey was conducted within a very short time and in 9 constituencies (3% of total constituency). But it was very important to do this for providing deep insights for the future women politicians; academicians and activist for endeavoring to make the path of the women politicians' smoother for more representation in the parliament.

The ratio of men and women in Bangladesh is 100:106. Although it is much better this time 19 directly elected and 45 indirectly elected women in the Ninth parliament, but still we have to strive harder to provide more opportunities, confidence and more representatives from half of the population. The halves who are marginalized victims of violence, ill health due to early marriage, deprived of equal opportunities to properties and employment due to lack of education and many more malaise, which can only be addressed by women legislators. We are witnessing the dawn of a new era with more representatives of women in the parliaments. This will open doors to many more in future who will not be frightened to be parliamentarian and to address women's issues.

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<u>Acknowledgement</u>

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IN BANGLADESH

1.   Introduction

The political parties, governments, international agencies and stakeholder groups concerned with increasing women's representation have advocated a range of initiatives to break through the barriers for women in elected office, including using rhetorical strategies, equal opportunity, and affirmative action policies. Some of the major options that are available include basic reform of majoritarian electoral systems by moving towards combined or proportionate arrangements, as well as the use of reserved seats for women, the implementation of statutory gender quotas by law, and the adoption of voluntary gender quotas within particular parties.

Involving women and men in decision-making processes is a sine qua non of any democratic framework. Democracy, by definition, therefore cannot be gender-blind. It strives towards equality and representation of women and men in all political and decision-making processes. What is now often questioned is how to increase the numbers of women in democratic institutions like parliament, and other important political premises. Many significant studies and analyses of women in parliament have been compiled over the last few years. Researchers have also studied this area from a variety of angles. Thus far, most of the work has focused on an extremely important dimension: that of studying and assessing the ways and means by which women can enter parliament. The emphasis has been directed towards equality in opportunity to achieve parliamentary power and the obstacles and hindrances faced in this process.

Women around the world at every socio-political level find themselves under-represented in parliament and far removed from decision-making levels. While the political playing-field in each country has its own particular characteristics, one feature remains common to all: it is uneven and not conducive to women's participation. Several empirical studies have amply established the fact that women who want to enter politics usually find the political, public, cultural and social

environment unfriendly or even hostile to them[1]. Women generally face numerous obstacles in articulating and shaping their own interests. These obstacles have been categorized into three broad areas: political, ideological and psychological and socioeconomic.

1.1.   Political Obstacles

It is argued that men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation. The existence of this male-dominated model results in either women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics. By now, over 95 per cent of all countries in the world have granted women the two most fundamental democratic rights: the right to vote and the right to stand for elections[2].

In theory, the right to stand for elections, to become a candidate, and to get elected, is based on the right to vote. The reality is, however, that women's right to vote remains restricted: principally because the only candidates to vote for are male. This is true not only for partial and developing democracies, but for established democracies as well. Research findings further indicate that political structures rather than social factors play a more significant role in women's parliamentary recruitment.

Among the political obstacles that women face, the following features are the dominant ones:
- The prevalence of the "masculine model" of political life and of elected governmental bodies;
- The lack of party support, such as limited financial support for women candidates; limited access to political networks; and the prevalence of double standards;
- The lack of contact and co-operation with other public organizations such as trade unions and women's groups;
- The absence of well-developed education and training systems for women's leadership in general, and for orienting young women toward political life in particular;
- The nature of the electoral system, which may or may not be favourable to women candidates.

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[1] Nadezdha Shvedovz, *Obstacles to* Woman's Participation in Parliament, see www. idea. int./ women/ parl

[2] New Zealand was the first country to give women the right to vote in 1893; and Finland was the first to adopt both fundamental democratic rights in 1906. There are still a few countries that deny women both the right to vote and the right to stand for elections.[1]

1.2 Ideological and Psychological Hindrances

Ideological and psychological hindrances for women in entering parliament include the following:

- Gender ideology and cultural patterns, as well as pre-determined social roles assigned to man and women;
- Women's lack of confidence to run for elections;
- Women's perception of politics as a "dirty" game and also as 'corrupt[3]';
- The way in which women are portrayed in the mass media.

1.3 Socio-economic Obstacles

The socio-economic obstacles impacting on women's participation in parliament could be further classified as follows:

- Poverty and unemployment;
- Lack of adequate financial resources;
- Illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions;
- The dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations.

Various factors can complicate women's entry into parliament, such as:

- Women's inadequate access to and integration into political institutions as the tailoring of many of these institutions is according to male standards and political attitudes;
- Lack of party support, including money and other resources to fund women's campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility;
- Women's low self-esteem and self-confidence, supported by certain cultural patterns which do not facilitate women's access to political careers; and,
- The type of electoral system as well as the lack of quota reservations.

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[3] Although the perception of corruption may not always be a fair reflection of the actual state of affairs, it is itself having an impact on women's attitude towards a political career. Is it a coincidence that countries with a small or moderate degree of corruption seem to have a higher rate of women's representation in elected bodies? According to the Transparency International Report of 2008, countries such as Kenya, Russia, Syria, Bangladesh and others are perceived to be one of the most corrupt (ranked 10th). Women's representation in parliaments in these countries is very low only two to nine per cent are women MPs. Whereas Sweden, Denmark, and New Zealand are perceived as the least corrupt, and in these countries women MPs comprise from 30 per cent to 40.4 per cent in other words, five to ten times more.

Data drawn from 24 established democracies over the post World War II period reveal that women have always had a slight advantage in proportional representation (PR) systems[4]. Until 1970, this advantage was quite small: there are only a couple percent differences in women's representation in countries with majoritarian or single-member district systems, versus countries with proportional representation or multi-member district systems. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, however, there is a dramatic increase in women's representation in PR systems, while only modest gains in majoritarian systems[5].

1.4. Lessons for Women's Representation: A Global Perspective

A number of lessons for increasing women's representation can be drawn from the review of available literature and experiences:

- **Women should organize themselves inside and outside political parties.** Being organized in interest groups both inside and outside political parties provides valuable experience for women and gives them a power base on which to build if they aspire for office. Political groups as well as professional groups, such as women doctors or women lawyers associations, can play an important role as a recruiting ground for women candidates. Being organized also increases visibility and legitimacy. In addition, in political parties where women commonly do a considerable amount of the essential party work, it is important to be organized into a woman's caucus that can lobby for improved representation.

- **Women should urge parties to set clear rules for candidate selection.** It is more likely that women will benefit if parties have clear bureaucratic procedures for selecting candidates rather than a system based on loyalty to those in power. When the rules of the game are clear it is possible for women to develop strategies to improve representation.

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[4] A proportional representation (PR) system is any system, which consciously attempts to reduce the disparity between a party's share of the national vote and its share of the parliamentary seats. For example, if a party wins 40 per cent of the votes, it should win approximately 40 per cent of the seats. Closed list is a form of list PR in which electors are restricted to voting for a party only, and cannot express a preference for any candidate within a party list.

[5] There is a considerable accumulation of comparative evidence that underlines the structural advantages of PR in advantaging women's representation. Of the top 10 countries as of March 1998 in terms of women's representation – Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, the Seychelles, Germany, New Zealand, Argentina and Austria – all utilized various forms of proportional representation. Several individual country situations in which electoral systems have been changed have further emphasized the apparent structural superiority of PR systems.

When the process is dominated by patronage, rules can be murky and decisions are often made by a limited number of persons, who are almost certainly predominately male.

- **While PR systems are better in the long run, immediate results cannot be guaranteed.** While changes in the electoral system make greater representation more likely, and in the long run there is no question that electoral system changes will help women improve their representation levels, an immediate effect cannot be guaranteed. While PR systems on average have higher proportions of women than majoritarian systems, this will not be true for every case. Furthermore, researchers find that PR systems, on average, do not help women in the developing countries. The non-effect for the electoral system variable in developing countries is an important example of a more general point. While certain institutions or rules may advantage one group or another, an effect will appear only if the group is sufficiently well organized to take advantage of the situation. If not, the institutional arrangement can have no effect on outcomes. The failure of PR to help women in lesser-developed countries is an example of this, and it is also seen in the relatively small difference between proportional systems and majoritarian systems for the period from 1945-1970. If the forces interested in women's representation are not effectively organized, then the electoral system is expected to have only limited effects.

- **Changing the electoral system is only one part of a more comprehensive strategy for improving women's representation.** Women will need to become active and effective voices within their individual parties and within society as a whole. In order to be able to take advantage of the institutional supports, certain electoral structures have to be provided.

2.   Women's Seats in Bangladesh Parliament

The participation of women in the parliamentary elections has increased in the last three decades. In order to ascertain women's representation in the Parliament, a special provision had been made for 15 seats for women in the first parliament in 1973 for 10 years in addition to the 300 general seats. The number of women reserved seats had increased up to 30 for another 15 years through another constitutional amendment in 1979. This provision was forfeited in 1987 and as a result there was no provision for women's reserved seats in the 4th parliament. With the expiry of the duration in 1987, the scope of reserved seats for the parliament was again revived through the 10th amendment in 1990 for ten years, which ended in 2000.

On 16 May 2004, the Jatiyo Sangshad (the national parliament) passed the 14th constitutional amendment to reintroduce quotas for women. The number of seats in parliament was raised to 345, 45 (13%) of which will be reserved for women in the next parliament.

In Bangladesh, women's participation in the electoral process has increased since 1979 and the scenarios have significantly improved in the last three parliamentary elections (1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008) under the Care Taker Governments.[6] Nevertheless, their participation in electoral and legislative politics are still insignificant as it is less then 2 percent of the overall candidates and percentage of women won in the general seats never exceeded 5 percent in the parliament elections. It is unusual that 48 percent of total voters are women but their representation in the legislature is only 5 percent.

46 women candidates had taken part in the fifth parliamentary polls held in February 1991 but only four came out victorious. In the 1996 parliamentary elections, only five candidates won in 11 seats, which included five by Khaleda Zia and four by Sheikh Hasina. In the 2001 poll, the 13 winners out of 41 women contestants included Hasina and Khaleda who won five seats each. In the ninth Parliamentary election in 2008, 60 women had contested for 65 constituencies.

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[6] In the parlance of institutional government, a caretaker government is one which normally takes care of state administration for an interim period until the regular new government is formed. In Bangladesh the demand for neutral caretaker government largely originated from a lack of trust in the political government under which the election was held. In the face of mounting agitation and a clear demonstration of lack of trust by the people through the lowest voter turn-out in the history of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia resigned after making the 13th amendment in the constitution of Bangladesh on 26 March 1996. This amendment called for a non-party caretaker government headed by the immediate past Chief Justice to conduct the general elections.

Bangladesh, in its ninth Parliamentart election held in December 29, 2008where politics is dominated by two women Sheikh Hasina and Begum Khaleda Zia, has a record 64 women sitting in its ninth Parliament. For the first time, 19 women contesting for 23 parliamentary seats defeated their rivals by huge margins in the election that saw the Hasina-led alliance winning three-fourths of the 300 seats. They have been joined by 45 women nominated to the assembly as per a provision in the constitution, 29 of them from the ruling alliance, boosting their majority.

But for many reasons, these seats have been found to be unimportant in comparison with the general seats. Women MPs have to represent 6.7 times bigger areas than that of a general constituency, no linkage with their constituencies etc. However, the main reason is that the major political parties, especially ruling parties had been using women's reserved seats as a 'vote bank' to obtain (absolute) majority in the parliaments.

3.   Survey Findings

This section of the paper presents the findings of an opinion survey carried out nine constituencies of Bangladesh. In collaboration with **South Asian Partnership, International**, the survey was carried out by **Democracywatch** from 28 to 30 December 2008; on, before and after the election day of the 9th Parliamentary election.

Objectives of the Study:

The overall objective of the survey was to understand adequate participation of women in the electoral process so as to observe equitable representation of women in policy making. However, the specific objectives of the survey were:

1. Analyze election result from the point of view of number of women elected through the existing electoral system and the quota provision designed for women candidates.

2. Monitor and analyze political violence against women during the election period

Methodology:

Nine constituencies were chosen purposively from seven districts covering eleven women candidates contested from both major and small political parties. The list of constituencies is given below:

Table 1

List of Constituencies

Constituency	Party
Barisal 3	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
Faridpur 2	Bangladesh Awami League Bangladesh Nationalist Party
Dhaka 4	Bangladesh Awami League
Dhaka 9	Bangladesh Nationalist Party Gono Forum
Dhaka 19	Communist Party Bangladesh
Manikgonj 2	Bangladesh Nationalist Party
Gazipur 5	Bangladesh Awami League
Narayangonj 4	Bangladesh Awami League
Munshigonj 2	Bangladesh Awami League

Two questionnaires were administered; one for general voters who cast their vote in the general election and another for contesting women candidates. A total of 302 general voters and 6 woman candidates took part in the survey.

Constituency wise distribution of respondents is as follows:

Table 2

Constituency wise Distribution of Respondents

Constituency	Frequency	Percent
Barishal-3	22	7.3
Faridpur-2	51	16.9
Dhaka-4	31	10.3
Manikgonj-2	24	7.9
Gazipur-5	36	11.9
Dhaka-9	56	18.5
Munshigonj-2	24	7.9
Narayangonj-4	32	10.6
Dhaka-19	26	8.6
Total	302	100.0

Limitation of the Survey:

The survey experienced three limitations. Limitations are time constraints and incorporation of more than required variables in the process of measurement. The survey was conducted amidst of 2008 Parliamentary election. Problems were experienced to get the respondents, particularly voters at the polling centers. Another problem that the study encountered was during office/working hours respondents were not always available at their residents. Due to various reasons all women candidates such as: winning candidates had difficulties to get time for interview, losers were reluctant to give interview, and some candidates could not be reached as their cell phones were off etc could not be interviewed.

3.1. Findings from Voter Survey

Out of 302, almost half of the respondents were female (49.7 percent) and predominantly Muslim (86.1 percent).

3.1.1. Voting Decisions

38 percent among male and 47.6 percent among female respondents prefer to vote for female candidates. But whenever the respondents have decided to vote (92.4 percent), the proportions are increased to a large extent; 49.2 percent among male and 63.7 percent among female respondents would vote for female candidate in their respective constituencies (see table 3).

Interestingly, among Muslim, 54.3 percent would vote for female candidates. Among other ethnic community the percentages are little higher (Hindu 67.7 percent, Christian 66.7 percent).

Table 3
Voting for Male and Female Candidate by Gender

Candidate	Gender (%)		Total
	Male	Female	
Male Candidate	50.8	36.3	43.8
Female Candidate	49.2	63.7	56.2
Total	100	100	100

Factors influencing the voters' decisions: More than two-fifth (43.6 percent) of male and about one-third of female respondents have chosen female candidates for their party affiliation (see Table 4). Remarkably, more than one-third (35 percent) of the overall interviewees opted for female candidates due to their contribution to social development.

Table 4

Reasons for Voting Female Candidates

Reasons	(%)		
	Male	Female	Total
Political party affiliation of the candidate	43.6	31.8	37.7
Candidates political profile	23.5	25.7	24.6
Candidates campaign	4.0	6.1	5.1
Personal reason	34.2	29.7	32
Candidate's contribution to social development	40.9	29.1	35
No specific reason	0.7	6.1	3.4

Note: Multiple response counts

Voters' decision however was influenced by the presence of a prominent woman candidate. 44.5 percent said highest influence and 6.9 percent said moderately high influence. Furthermore, 28.2 percent respondents opined that the presence of a prominent woman candidate influenced them least while voting.

3.1.2. Support for Woman Candidates

Fifty six percent of the respondents supported the female candidates in the campaigning. 30.3 percent did other kinds of activities to support women candidates during election. Another 50 percent stated that they provide moral support to the women candidate (multiple response counts).

3.1.3. Threats to General Voters

During the 9th Parliamentary election, an insignificant portion (3.4 percent) of general voters in the surveyed areas had personally experienced any threats and only 5.1 percent of them knew of anyone who was threatened. Types of threats, however, the voter had experienced are as follows:

- Some unknown people offered money
- Some mustans forced directly to vote for a particular party/candidate
- Some mustans forced over cell phone to vote for a particular party/candidate

3.1.4. Violence against Women in Politics

48.6 percent of the interviewees were aware of the issue of violence against women in politics. As usually, this awareness is 10 percent higher among male voters (53.7 percent) than their female counterparts (43.6 percent).

But only about one-tenth (9.5 percent) of the voters interviewed knew of any women candidate who have faced violence of different sorts. Natures of violence are given below in the Ascending order of magnitudes:

- Divorced by husband for being candidate/in politics
- Threatened by opposition/rival group within the party
- Threatened by local Union Parishad chairman
- Harassment by police
- Opposition filed cases on attempt to murder
- Mental stress from family, society even from own party

The respondent however made recommendations on making fair and inclusive electoral process for women. Some of their recommendations are:

- Enact gender-friendly laws and regulation that would help to create congenial atmosphere in entering women in political leadership and electoral process
- Political consensus among the major political parties on women in politics. The government must play the major role in this regards. It is the political parties who could nominate more women candidates at all level of elections as it is generally perceived especially in Bangladesh that women are relatively honest, hard-working and committed to their agenda/political and election pledges

- Mass awareness needed to be increased in favor of women leadership. Social institutions and civil society should come forward to change social framework of attitude
- Female education must be increased. Though for last couple of decades government policies are in favor of female education especially in primary and secondary level, due to various social grounds and misconceptions, female drop-out rate is higher, in secondary education much higher than their male counterparts. Training of female party members on development issues of the country is required

The respondent also made recommendations to reduce violence against women in politics illustrated below:

- Need gender-friendly bureaucracy especially police administration
- Increase social awareness on women in politics. It is to be understood by the people of all strata that women consist more that half of the population and as well as more than half of the voters. Proportional representation therefore is essential in all socio-political institutions and leadership for a equilibrium and just society
- Quality mass education would change social mindset vis-à-vis violence against women who are in politics or would like to enter in politics.
- Now-a-days terrorism prevails in politics both in developed and developing countries hinders both men and women joining politics. Political terrorism must be controlled to reduce violence against women in politics.

Two-third (66.9 percent) of the respondents opined that family and about one-third (31 percent) thought that society is responsible for addressing the issues of violence against women in politics (see Table 5).

Table 5

Responsible for Addressing Issues of Violence against Women in Politics

Category	%
Family	66.9
Society	31.0
Party	22.6
Government	14.6
Police	11.3
Women candidates themselves	4.2
Election commission	2.1

Note: Multiple response counts

3.2.   Interview with Women Candidates

Out of 11 women contested in the December 2008 general election in the surveyed areas, six were interviewed on different issues like women in politics and women in elections. The research team tried to interview eleven candidates, but due to various reasons such as: winning candidates had difficulties to get time for interview, losers were reluctant to give interview, and some candidates could not be reached as their cell phones were off etc. the research team was unable to interview them. The profiles of six interviewed female candidates are elucidated as follows:

Table 6

Profile of Women Candidates Interviewed

Particulars	Name of the Candidate					
	Maher Afroze	**Shirin Sultana**	**Sanzida Khatun**	**Selima Rahman**	**Sarah Begum Kabari**	**Shama Obaed Islam**
Party	Awami League	BNP	Awami League	BNP	Awami League	BNP
Constituency	Gazipur 5	Dhaka 9	Dhaka 4	Barisal 3	Narayangonj 4	Faridpur 2
Election result	Winner	Defeated	Winner	Defeated	Winner	Defeated
Political status	Central Committee member	General Secretary, Bangladesh Jatiatabadi Maohila Dal (Women's wing of BNP)	General Secretary, Shampur Thana Awami League	Joint Secretary, Central BNP	No direct political status	No direct political status, father was a minister and central leader of BNP
Education	Masters	Masters	Masters	Masters	Higher secondary school	Masters
Background	Chairman, Bangladesh Family Planning Samity	Senate member, Dhaka University	Lawyer, Ex-Commissioner, Dhaka City Corporation	Former Minister for Cultural Affairs, Socio-cultural activists	Former film actress, film Director, Freedom fighter	IT related Businesswoman
Year of political affiliation	10-20 years	20+ years	10-20 years	20+ years	20+ years (indirectly)	1-5 years
Husband's affiliation with politics	No	Yes	No	No	No	No (father was affiliated with politics)

From Table 6 it is revealed that all candidates from Bangladesh Awami Leagues had won in the 9th Parliamentary election held in December 2008 and all from Bangladesh Nationalist Party lost though BNP candidates were relatively more experienced (except one) than Awami League in politics.

3.2.1. Support Environment

Support form family: All interviewed female candidates expressed that they got needful moral support form their family and husband. The family members were very encouraging understanding throughout the electoral process.

Support from political party: The candidates said their party supported them in campaigning period as well as throughout the electoral process.

Support form Media: Almost all candidates stated that the media covered their news well and they were very encouraging. Some candidates asserted that media showed complete support in portraying women candidates in the media positively. Only one candidate said the media covered a little of her news.

Support from Government: Almost all candidates opined that the then government provided them with enough security. Only one interviewee refrained from answering in this respect.

Support from general voters: All aspiring women law-makers expressed that their voters were very supportive and encouraging.

3.2.2. Economic and Financial Support

Support from family: Out of six, two respondents said their families supported financially more than they asked for. Another two said that their families supported as much as they could. One candidate's family provided only a nominal amount. One candidate refrained from answering.

Support from political party: Three candidates responded that their party provided them with equal amount to that of male candidates. Two of them said their party provided them 'enough' financial support. Only one candidate said that her party did not provide any financial help.

Support form others: Out of six candidates interviewed, three got support from their near distant relatives. The other three could not specify their financial back-up or perhaps, they did not need any support from others.

3.2.3. Personal Reflection

Four candidates were highly satisfied with election constituency given to them. One candidate was not satisfied with the constituency given to her. The remaining one said that her constituency was a challenge for her and as well as her chairperson.

3.2.4. Recommendation for Fair Electoral Process for Women

All of the female candidates were asked to make some recommendations on making fair and inclusive electoral process for women. Some of their recommendations are as follows:

- Party should give more nomination to female candidates.
- Women should be encouraged in taking part in politics and electoral process and they should have assistance from the government.
- The problem is Election Commission restricted the amount of money to spend which is not more than 15 hundred thousand taka. But in the present context this amount is not sufficient.
- Male and female candidates must be treated equally in electoral process.
- It depends on Election Commission, the Government and also the public how far electoral process of Bangladesh would be fair and supportive to women politicians.

3.2.5. Obstacles and Violence during Election Process

Three of the respondents had faced some kind of obstacles during the election process. The nature of the problem and perpetuators are:

Table 7

Kinds of Obstacles during Election Process Faced by Women Candidates

Nature	Perpetuators
Threats and coercion	• Competing male candidates • Family members • Male party members
Psychological violence	Family members

Rest of the interviewees did not face any kind of obstacles during the election process. But one of them expressed that she knew another woman politician who faced psychological violence during the electoral process.

Two respondents were not aware of formal mechanism to register complaints for the violence women candidates face during election. None of the interviewees registered complaints formally ever against the violence that they had faced during the election. All six respondents never adopted any informal strategies to handle violence themselves rather than going for formal mechanism.

Out of six, three candidates said that their parties code of conducts or manifestos addressed the issues of violence against women candidates in election. The remaining three was not sure about their party's stand in this regard.

Five, out of six respondents were not aware or not sure of Election Commission's code of conduct that addresses the violence against women in politics during election.

3.2.6. Recommendations to Reduce Violence against Women and Legal Framework on It

The respondents were asked to make some recommendations on how to reduce violence against women in politics and the changes to be brought in legal framework to better address the issues of violence against women in politics. Only two respondents replied on these aspects. They said the Government is responsible for addressing the issue of violence against women in politics.

They opined that Election Commission should provide more support to the female candidates and enact and implement new rules against violence. The government should also extend all kinds of moral support to women politicians. They also sought cooperation to their male counterparts to make political and electoral system engendered.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Bangladesh experience has revealed that women organizations have played a significant role in mobilizing the support and public opinion for women's representation in legislature. However, the major political parties so far have not taken any significant and positive steps towards their respective political agenda for women's representation in legislature. The concept of Proportional Representation is yet to be floated either by the activist groups or the major political parties. However there is no guarantee that the Proportional Representation systems would help women's representation in Bangladesh political system. Based on the empirical observations the study also reveals that a change in the electoral system is perhaps imperative for improving women's representation.

Bangladesh as in other countries still shows some features of 'masculine model' of politics and the electoral system is not favorable for women. Bangladeshi women have limited access to and control over family resources to run for such very costly election campaigns. The conventional barriers like education, professional skills and family barriers, however, do not seem to be a significant obstacle for the participation of women in Bangladesh politics, specially the highest level of national politics i.e. the Parliament.

Based on the empirical data following broad observations can be drawn:

1. Political parties should give more nomination to female candidates. Political consensus among the major political parties on women in politics is important. The government must play the major role in this regards. It is the political parties who could nominate more women candidates at all level of elections as it is generally perceived especially in Bangladesh that women are relatively honest, hard-working and committed to their agenda/political and election pledges.

2. Enact gender-friendly laws and regulations that would help to create congenial atmosphere in entering women in political leadership and electoral process

3. Mass awareness needed to be increased in favor of women leadership. Social institutions and civil society should come forward to change social framework of attitude.

4. The Election Commission should provide more support to the female candidates and enact and implement new rules against violence. The government should also extend all kinds of moral support to women politicians. Female also should seek cooperation to their male counterparts to make political and electoral system engendered.

5. Strengthen the self-confidence of women and women's leadership through different empowerment programs. Encourage women to hold leading positions in alliances, associations, political parties, local government and parliament.

6. Raise awareness of media and cooperate with them to create an engendered discourse to counteract the traditionalist media and to change the stereotype image of women and men in media.

Women Representation in Different Parliaments

Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 shows below the illuminate women representations in different parliaments of Bangladesh, comparison of women candidates of different political parties in the parliamentary elections of 2001 and 2008 and distribution of voters in terms of gender from 1979-2008.

Table 1
Women Representations in the General and Reserved Seats in the Jatiya Sangsad

Election Year	% of Female Candidate	Women won in Direct Elections	Women Won in By-elections	Total Female Won	% of Women-won General Seats	No. of Reserved Seats for Women	Overall % of Women Seats
1973	0.3	-	-	-	-	15	4.8
1979	0.9	-	2	2	0.7	30	9.7
1986	0.3	5	2	7	1.7	30	10.6
1988	0.7	4	-	4	1.3	-	1.3
1991	1.5	8*	1	5	1.7	30	10.6
1996	1.3	11*	2	7	2.7	30	11.2
2001	1.9	13*	-	6	2.0	-	2.0
2008	3.8	19	-	19	6.3	45	18.6

Note: Multiple seat winners

Table 2
Women Candidates Contested in the Parliamentary Elections 2001 and 2008

Party	2001		2008	
	Total Candidates	Female Candidates	Total Candidates	Female Candidates
Bangladesh Nationalist Party	252	3	260	15
Bangladesh Awami League	300	10	264	19
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	281*	3*		3
Jatiya Party (Manju)	140	3	7	1
Communist Party of Bangladesh	64	1	37	2
Gono Forum	-	-	45	5
JSD (R)	76**	-	-	-
BSD (K)	37	1	-	-
Other Parties	301	9	803	12
Independent	484	7	151	8
Total	1935	37	1567	65

Source: The Election Commission of Bangladesh.
* Islami Jatiya Oikyo Front (IJOF),   ** Unified Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)

Table 3
Eligible Male and Female Voters, and Distribution of Seats in terms of Gender

Election Year	Voters (%)		Overall Seats (%)	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1979	52.22	47.78	90.3	9.7
1986	52.68	47.32	89.4	10.6
1988	52.90	47.10	98.7	1.3
1991	52.99	47.01	89.4	10.6
1996	50.71	49.29	88.8	11.2
2001	51.49	48.50	98.0	2.0
2008	49.0	51.0	81.4	18.6

Note: Voter distribution of 1973election is not available

Table 4
Reserved Seats and Political Parties

Election Year	Reserved Seats	Parties	
1973	15	Awami League	-
1979	30	BNP	-
1986	30	Jatiya Party	-
1988	-	-	-
1991	30	BNP (28)	Jaamat-e-Islami (2)
1996	30	Awami League (27)	Jatiya Party (3)
2001	-	-	-
2008	45	Awami League (36), Jatiya Party (4)	BNP (5)

Source: The Election Commission of Bangladesh.

Table 5
Women Members in the Committees of Four Major Political Parties in Bangladesh

Political Parties	Committees	Total Members	Female Members
Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)	National Permanent Committee	14	1
	National Executive Committee	164	11
Bangladesh Awami League	Presidium and Secretariat	36	5
	Executive Committee	64	5
Jatiya Party (Ershad)	National Permanent Committee	31	2
	National Executive Committee	201	6
Jaamat-e-Islami Bangladesh	Majlish-e-Shura	141	-
	Majlish-e-Amla	24	-

Source: Different sources

Table 6
Women Representation in the Cabinets 1972-2009

Period	Total Minister	Women Minister	% of Women Minister
1972-75 (Awami League Government)	50	2	4.0
1976-82 (BNP Government)	101	6	5.9
1982-90 (Jatiya Party Government)	133	4	3.0
1991-96 (BNP Government)	39	3	7.7
1996-2001 (Awami League Government)	42	4	9.5
2001-2006 (4-party Alliance Government)	60	3	5.0
2009 till to date (Grand Alliance Government)	38	5	13.2

Appendix II:

Map of the Surveyed Constituency