

## **Female Union Council (UP) Members**

### **Mr. Mizanur Rahman (Bangladesh)**

Bangladesh is a country of villages (79,828), with the majority of people living in rural areas. All people know about the Union Council (Parishad/Panchayat in India)—the grassroots level, rural-based local government agency representing the community. There are 4486 Union Councils (UP) throughout Bangladesh. The Union Council is the lowest tier of the administrative unit in Bangladesh. Its main functions include public welfare, maintenance of law and order, revenue collection, development, relief and rehabilitation works, and distribution of foods and materials provided by the government and NGOs. Its source of income includes grants, taxes, fees, and other sources.



Ms. Khurshida, a social worker, became a new UP member.

The UPs are governed by one elected chairperson, nine regular members and three female members: both men and women can run for the position of chairperson and the nine regular members, but three seats are reserved for women in order to ensure gender equality and empower women who may be found in vulnerable positions. The voters of the Union Council directly elect all. UP female

members often focus on development planning and implementation to eliminate poverty. My area's former member Nasrin emerged as a development provider and newly-elected Ms. Morzina determined to render better services.

Newly elected UP female members are concerned about their duties and responsibilities. They can sometimes be deprived of assigned works because of their political affiliations and/or affinity with opposition parties, which may be in direct opposition to the current ruling party.

A tough balance must be maintained between the leaders and their constituents at the village level in order to get enough aid, relief, assistance and funding for development projects. There are women members (both reserved positions and directly elected) and female chairpersons in positions of leadership in rural Bangladesh that manage village-centric development projects, distribute of food cards for vulnerable groups, women and landless people, administer and monitor welfare programs, and launch advocacy and awareness programs for women. Almost all women UP members

are kitchen managers and have become grassroots-level development actors and pioneers for empowering women and gender equality.

The government's outlook for empowering women's media campaigns, training schemes for female UP members and local movements can strengthen the pivotal role of female UP members as a key catalytic agent of socio-economic change in the countryside. Kitchen managers have become a driving force to alleviate poverty among the rootless community. They need training from the government, CSOs and NGOs to address the needs of the stakeholders and voters. They distribute grants to widows, the destitute, those with disabilities, maintain law and order, halt eve teasing, prevent the trafficking of women and children, and act as local arbitrators in rape cases, violence towards women, divorce, child marriage, and dowries. In most cases, female UP members have good relationships with their male counterparts, but a few are coldly rebuffed and may be on the receiving end of cold and undesirable behavior. There are different committees within the UP headed by members, such as law and order, family planning, women and children and lucrative project committees, but the latter committee is often led by men because of gender inequality. There are many standing committees at UP ordinance papers but in practice they do not exist. As well, within the context of work allocation, female UP members are often deprived of their actual rights.

Female UP members may be pioneers in different fields of development, and require intensive training to achieve realistic measures to enhance rural welfare programs. It may be feasible for the Local Government Ministry, Members of Parliament (MP), Deputy Commissioners (DC), Sub-Districts Officers (UNO) and Chairpersons to allocate more assignments to empower female UP members as the people's voice and real players during times of distress, such as cyclones, famines and other natural disasters, in daily life.