Participation of Women Representatives in Decision-Making Process of Bangladesh: A Study on Upazila Parishads of Barishal Division

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Abstract

Upazila Parishad is the midway of local government structure, but the roles of women representatives are not clear there under various acts and ordinances. In spite of a growing literacy rate and political awareness, women's participation in decision making rate remain quite low due to various factors like socio-cultural obstacle, structural deficiencies, attitudinal problems etc. So, a mere increase of the number of women representatives is of little value, unless it is accompanied by enhancement of the quality of their participation that reflects the composition of society, strengthen democracy and promote proper functioning. That's why this study has tried to find out the actual influence of political economy, rules and laws on decision of women representatives, how much impediments are dominant to ignore the capacity of them. The analyses of obtained data are mainly from primary sources - Barisal Sadar and Nalchity Upazila Parishad through qualitative approach majorly. In-depth interviews and observation methods have been employed to collect data and have validated through case studies. Three most relevant theories have been employed for testing hypothesis to give a research conclusion.

Keywords: Decision-Making, Local Government Institution (LGI), Upazila Parishad, Empowerment, Women's Participation.

Background of the Study

Development is not perceptible when any of potential sources of society will be disregarded. It is empirically believed that women are more likely to exhibit cooperative, compassionate, and human types of behaviors than men. Due to the rural people's easy access to the women representatives, their modest approach and integrity attracts community people to women

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leaders enormously beneficial for them. (Mizanur, 2015). Around all the constitutional recommendations for women have documented after the liberation war, but discrimination is still realizing. Indeed, Bangladesh has demonstrated some success in increasing the number of elected female representatives over the years (Nuhiya, 2018) . Markedly, electoral reform and introduction of quotas into political party structures has brought about the rise of women's representation in Bangladesh. This research has encouraged with existing literature survey where a few numbers of paper found about women's decision-making status at Upazilla Parishad. There was less effort to compare the gap among existing opportunistic attempts, challenges and broad images of how it affects the public life positively and negatively. UN declared Women's Decade (1976-85), politics in Bangladesh both local and national level remains male-dominated with respect to number, position in the party hierarchy, effectiveness in the national legislature and other political structures. Many women are limited by financial resources which further inhibit their effective participation in politics. (Information Breif, 2015). Women representatives in Upazilas, is influencing the decision-making process despite having some structural deficiencies and socio-cultural impediments. The 7th Five Year Plan (2016-2020) of the Government of Bangladesh considers women's engagement in political and economic activities as a crosscutting issue. Vision 2021 aims to ensure 33% representation of women in all the committees within the political parties by 2021. (Juthika, 2018). The Universal Declaration of the Human Rights (1948), Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), the Civil and Political Rights International Pact (1966), and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979) and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 have strongly supported decision making participation of women in all level. 4th U.N. World Conference on Women Beijing, China, September 1995 also emphasized on women participation and considerations of their potentials.[1] But after 25 years, actally the mask of positivity we can see everywhere rather a practical positive world for women. Alcântara Costa (2010) points out that if a few numbers of women enter into politics, they change, but politics remains the same. If we want politics to be changed, the entrance of women into formal politics is necessary but not sufficient condition. The consequences of patriarchal structure and culture of the political parties on the representation of women needs to be reduced.

Hypothesis of this paper is that the number of the representations of women with decision making power is not enough supportive to

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[1] **Hillary Rodham Clinton** 1995 stated that If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all. Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely — and the right to be heard.

overcome the dominance of socio-cultural, political, economic factors. Besides, the utilization of existing legal mandates is also less realizing in practice whereas women politics is historically inaugurated from family / patriarchy.[2]

Theoretical Framework

Participation and Decision Making

Without the inclusion of women representatives in all decision-making structures, the project of democratization remains incomplete (Costa, 2010). Bigger participation brings many alternatives that help to choose the best one. (Nazmul & Rahman, 2012). In these circumstances, the importance of participation in decision-making depends on greater credibility on connecting more people with change opportunity and recognizing ideas where more participation opens the avenue of opportunities. In 1970s, Women in Development (WID) approach highlighted that women's contribution in development are not recognized by policy makers and they are treated as beneficiaries, not as active agent in development. The Women and Development Approach (WAD) explored that women are already engaged in development process but exploitative in nature. In 1980s, Gender and Development (GAD) approach emphasized on special attention needs to ensure women rights and give independence to them in terms of making decisions. So, the changing pattern of these universal approaches keeps a mirror in front of all challenge's women representatives are facing in now a day. The centralization of government is also the reason of women's low status. So, adequate political participation of women representatives along with considering their decision is the precondition for bringing them in the mainstream of development process. (Nazmul & Rahman, 2012, p. 211).

Upazila Parishad in the Context of Decision-Making Status of Women Representatives

Vast opportunity for engaging women with no discrimination and less domination of the central for the continuous improvement in public service delivery must be ensured. Strong local government system can ensure transparency, accountability, effective participation and equal opportunities for all. Although the participation of women in Parliament is increasing but unfortunately their participation in local government is declining. (Juthika, 2018, p. 53) . In the 2014 elections, the number of female contestants dropped to a total of 1,507 in 458 Upazila, a 48% decline in one term. (Naznin, 2016). Before independence, various attempts tried to restructure the local government, but local government in Bangladesh is typically dominated by central bureaucrats and

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[2] **Lori S. Ashford** states that the low proportion of women in political decisionmaking positions reflects men's historical advantages in electoral systems and long-standing inequalities between men and women in society.

politicians who lead from the centre (Rahman, 2010; Ahmed, 2009). The Upazila Parishad Act 2009 ensures the restoring powers of MPs over the councils and making the elected Chairmen virtually powerless. The Upazila Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen are unclear about their roles in relation to UNOs and local MPs. (Sayadur, 2012). In addition to these, when women want to participate election process, they face the challenges of 'money politics' as prevailing political culture to spend huge amount of money. Most of the women come in the representation depending mainly on men in their family for financial support. Such stereotyped and imbalanced gender relations at home reflect the reality where prevent women from entering into the public domain effectively (Panday, 2013). Sometimes, it has seen that the amount of budget under women representation individually loss the maximum scope of utilization with the domination of male staff. Now, it's time to find out their promptness, readiness, eagerness and capability they gained through managing the effects of political economy with other challenges; measure the initiatives that extends the scope for decision-making in the work place. The working pattern of both female and male representatives at Upazila Parishad have compared for getting the view of powerlessness along with factors related.
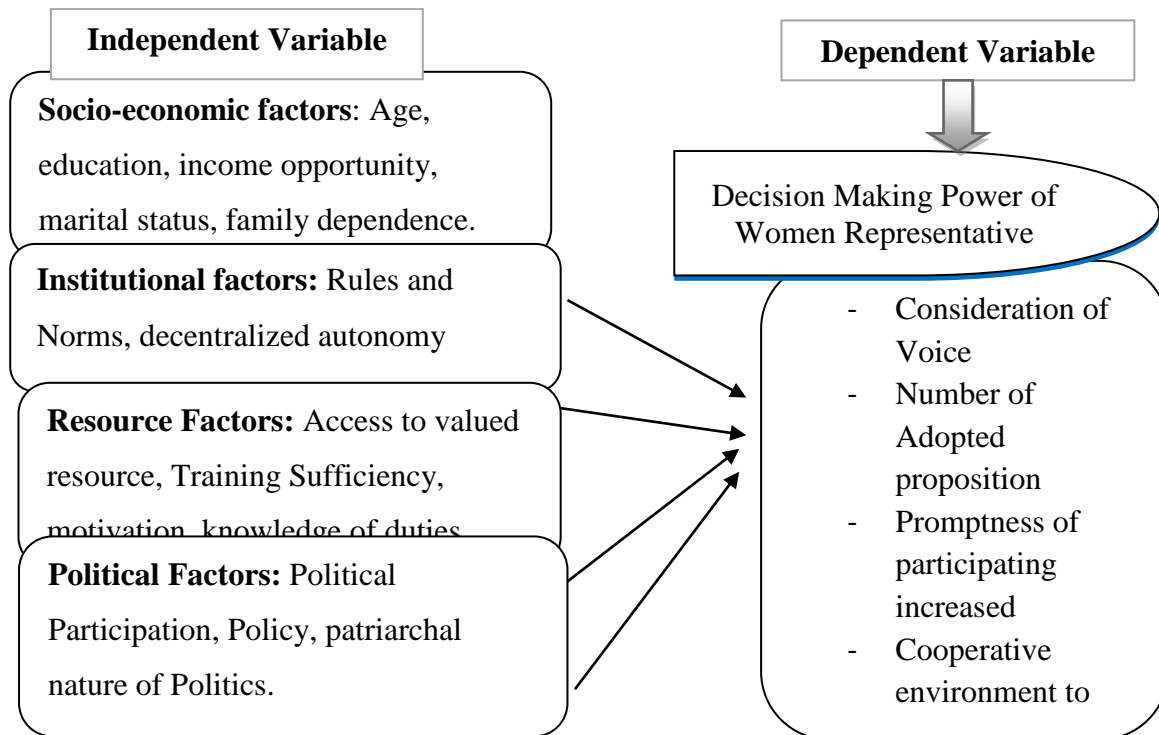
Upazila Parishad; (where to participate)

Most of the decisions of Upazila service delivery are taken in the meeting of Standing Committees. For this reason, committee members have been included as respondent.
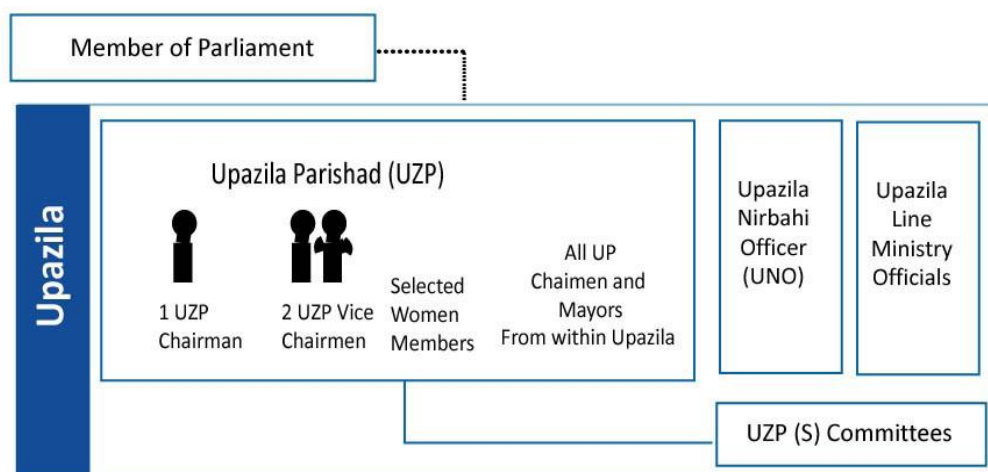
Figure -1: Present Structure of Upazila Parishad (Aminuzzaman, 2017).

Therefore, existing literature review exposes that having the sense of opportunity to make decision is situational/ contextual. Variables explore the outlines of research objectives.[3] Here situation indicates some specific or non specific variables given below…..

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[3] Rebecca Bevans (2021) explored that variables interpret the results of the study.

Independent Variable	**Dependent Variable**

Socio-economic factors: Age, education, income opportunity, marital status, family dependence.

Institutional factors: Rules and Norms, decentralized autonomy

Resource Factors: Access to valued resource, Training Sufficiency, motivation, knowledge of duties

Political Factors: Political Participation, Policy, patriarchal nature of Politics.

Decision Making Power of Women Representative

- Consideration of Voice
- Number of Adopted proposition
- Promptness of participating increased
- Cooperative environment to

Figure -2: Variables that are dominant in the decision making of women at Upazila Parishad

The impact of decision-making depends on the supportive and repulsive environment they work. Understanding existing rules and their income sources makes them confident to participate further, recognition of their voices makes them empowered. Especially upazilla meeting can play an effective role to consider their opinions by the members of the meeting and finally by their ability to influence the decisions of the Parishad. Capability to influence depends on educational background, the decentralized mentality of staff, implementation of national empowerment commitments, normative support, and constraints, training initiatives, etc. The social-cultural context of Bangladesh creates barriers to their mobility in society and sometimes restricts them from going outside to attend meetings or public events. (Juthika, 2018, p. 38). Due to family responsibilities, women face impediments to play political roles actively. Unless women are involved in the decision and policy-making processes at all levels of the state, changes in the political, social, and economic status of women will continue to remain marginal (Shamim & Nasreen, 2002). Education provides skills and knowledge to minimize inferiority complexities and low self-esteem. (Adam & Lenz, 2010) Gender discourse, social norms, beliefs, and behavioral practices of institutions hinder women's participation. (Pandit, 2010). There is a lack of de facto authority of women in development activities, decision-making, despite having positions (Hassan, 2016). Less trust in the capacity of women (Muhammed, 2017) blocks the chance of their

participation. Voting is not used in decision-making, only 33.33% of female vice chairmen are influencing the decision-making of UZPs (Hossain & Majumder, 2013).

Methodology

This research draws basically on qualitative approach. As exploring specificity is important to strengthen findings, this study has used some graphical representation of data. Most of the collected data are from primary sources. Books, journals, articles, files, government reports, the internet, websites, etc. are utilized as secondary sources of data for obtaining authentic and reliable literature reviews. The rationale for selecting these two (Barishal Sadar Upazila and Nalchity Upazilla Parishad of Barishal Division) Upazila is that both of these are located near to one another and comparing between these two is easier to get distinct views of decision-making status of women representatives, if any. There are two women representatives (female vice-chairman) in two Upazilas. For the validation of obtained data, the opinion of civil society, experts, the educated class have prioritized women participation in the decision-making process as most of them are aware about the condition of Upazila representation. Total respondents are 40 heterogeneous purposive in nature. In-depth interviews have been conducted face to face with 28 respondents (20 from two Upazila Parishads representatives and administrative officials and 8 repondents from from civil socity, educated class and expertise from nearby residents of concerned Upazila; and rest of the rspondents were included on observation then as part of the methodological requirement and also for not getting scope of single interview. Case studies have been included for validating data. The following table exposes the sample distribution:

Table 1: Sample Distribution

Sl No	Upazilas	Category of sample						Total
		Chairman	Vice - Chairman	Union Parishad Chairman	UNO	Upazila Officials	Local People	
1.	Barishal Sadar Upazila	1 - Men	1-Women 1 - Men	3 - Men	1-women	5 (Men)	5	17
2.	Nalchity Upazila	1 Men	1(Men) 1(women)	2 - Men	1- Men	5 (Men)	4	15
3.	Civil Society							3
4.	Educated Class							2
5.	Expertise							3
Total : 40								

Testing Theories with analyzing findings

William Richard Scott (2008) exposed that an institution has three pillars about how these forces motivate different decisions and work as the 'building block of institutional structures'. All of these three have been analyzed with data and information obtained from the field survey. **Regulative Pillar** and **Normative Pillar** exposes that laws, policies (coercive) shape decisions, and collective effort with shared values work to avoid coercion at the time of increasing inclusiveness.

Figure -3: Inclusive Knowledge and Awareness about rights and duties (independent variable)
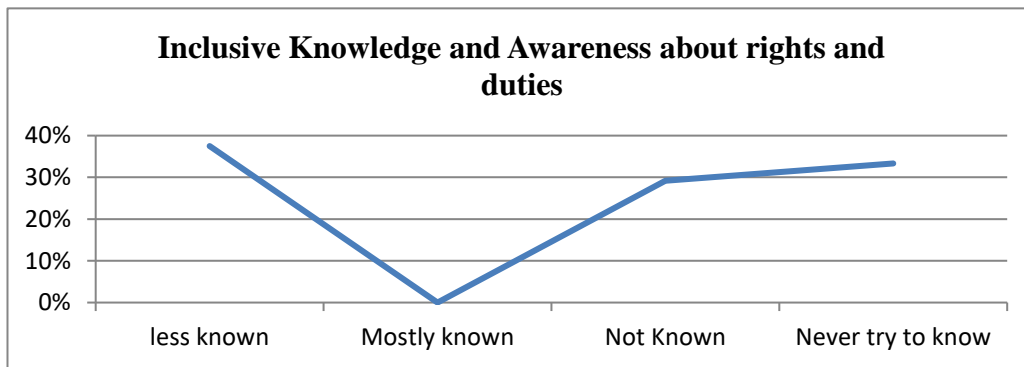
Source: Field data.

A total of 24 respondents have been asked including women representatives (female vice-chairman), UNO, and other male co-workers (Standing Committee members) whether FVCs are aware of their duties or not. Although under the Upazila act 1998, important responsibilities like taking part in employment generating activities, initiating projects from small industries, etc. for female vice-chairmen are recommended for making policy from the Upazila level and taking part in national development, they are not well aware of these. About 33.33% of the respondents have agreed that women representatives never try to know their specific duties under various acts. They don't have a manual (work distribution document) of Upazila Parishad. For instance, the female vice-chairman of Nalchity Upazila was not known about an act of 2015 which recommends 25% of projects will be implemented by Women representatives. Vice-chairmen are less effective because signatory power is in the hand of the Upazila Chairman and Upazila Nirbahi Officer for initiating any development activity or financial allocation. Besides, there is no specific transportation facility for vice chairmen for covering remote area issues. The supportive allowance of 5000 taka is not enough for vice chairmen (by male vice chairman of Nalchity Upazila). Scope and obstructions are indeed the same here for both women and men representatives. But for female representatives, needs more secured transportation facilities than men. In these circumstances, their mobility is marginalized with insufficient transportation facilities. So, the upazila

administration sometimes unable to distribute equal function to both of them. Sometimes women representatives show excuses for not participating in challenging tasks of remote areas. Here, collective effort and shared values are not realizing to ensure inclusiveness, decision making, and working scopes are blocking; trust of male co-workers and citizens decreases silently about their capability and affect the empowerment.

Case Study 1:

Barishal Sadar Upazila built a team to support vulnerable people after devastating cyclone 'bulbul' in November 2019. However, there were no women representatives because when the female vice-chairman was asked for joining on this issue, she raised excuses as the target area was far from her residents. Surprisingly one of the respondents claimed that when a big opportunistic offer comes from the central government like 'some allowance will be given to Upazila representatives for participating in cyclone confronting activities or organize any abroad training, women representatives will accept it and claim it as their right'. So, taking part in the decision-making process sometimes depends on individual norms and values.

Source: field data and research systhesis.

Cultural - Cognitive Pillar explores that Social Reality recognizes what an individual does are from the internal representation of his or her environment (related to socio-economic factors).

Figure -4: Socio-Economic factors that influence active participation (independent variables interlinked)
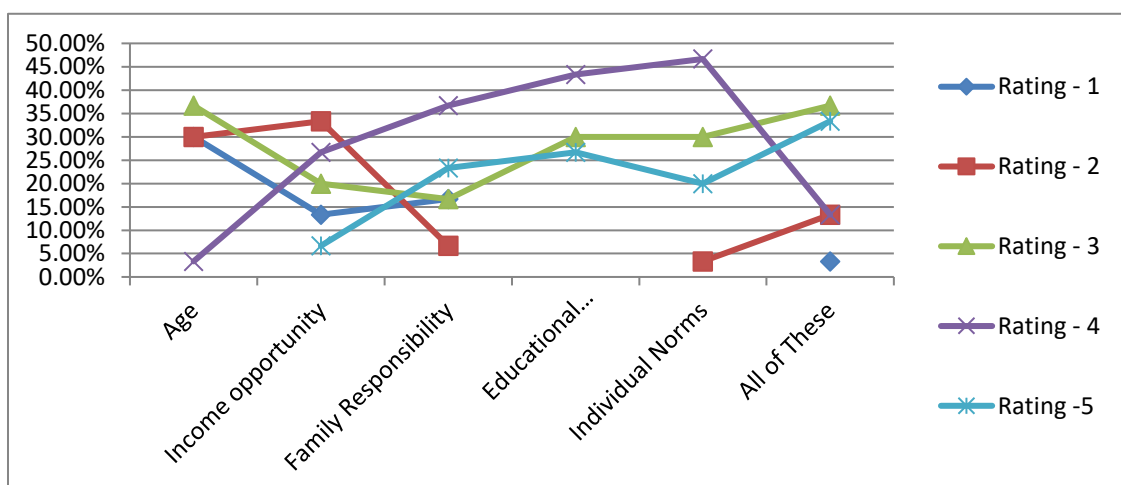
Source: Field data.

The entire amount (40) of respondents has participated to rate on these concepts. About 46.66% (most of them are co-workers of women

representatives) believe that 'individual norms' (like the strong desire of providing services to the citizen, being stick to play duties) are important to overcome all the challenges they face. About 36.67% claimed that old-aged woman representatives are less able to participate in fieldwork activities actively than men. For instance, the female vice-chairman of Nalchity Upazila is an almost aged person staying in Barishal City (far from the Upazila area). Some of her co-workers claimed, although she participates in various meetings and rallies of programs, the effectiveness of her participation is not ensured because of her less promptness. About 43. 33% believe educational qualification makes women representative aware about duties and rights so that she can manage any challenges fast with self intelligence. Although we cannot avoid her experience of working as **Naila Kabeer's 'Resource' dimension** also support experience as a precondition. Educational qualification is also supportive for the adaptability of changes for fast and systematic service delivery with advanced problem-solving approaches. In Bangladesh, the scenario of a less educated person in the political domain is changing. Both of the female vice-chairmen of Barishal and Nalchity Upazila has MA degree. Total 483 women vice-chairman are holding chair in Bangladesh and most of them are educated. (Paasilinna, 2016) Women representatives from both Upazila claimed family responsibilities often make them less active in their Upazila responsibilities. Sometimes they cannot call for the meeting to be present at the Upazila regularly. One of the women representatives mentioned that 'maternity leave' also a reason for lagging over men from stated duties. About 33.33 % claimed that women representatives may not be motivated to participate actively in working criteria for the lack of income opportunities and less honorarium (27,000 taka) from Upazila. They (women) need more secured transportation facilities. Therefore, insufficient arrangement from Upazila (for both men and women vice-chairman) makes the flexibility of movement for women representatives marginal.

So, the culture may influence the way women choose to apply and interact with the system of institutional practices; affecting the internal issues of their life. Their patterns of interaction with the working environment are often dominant**.**

Naila Kabeer's Three Dimension Model recognizes that an empowered one accepts responsibility even in an ambiguous situation. Therefore, they should have a supportive environment. Empowerment is a process of change in three interdependent dimensions that make up choices. For the need of '**Resources (pre-conditions)'** skills, creativity, access to training programs, engagement with solidarity groups, self-efficacy, imagination, and creativity are needed. These factors explore the freedom of choices provided to women representatives.

Figure - 5: The Condition of Participation on Training and Perception on it (Resource factors - independent variables)**.**
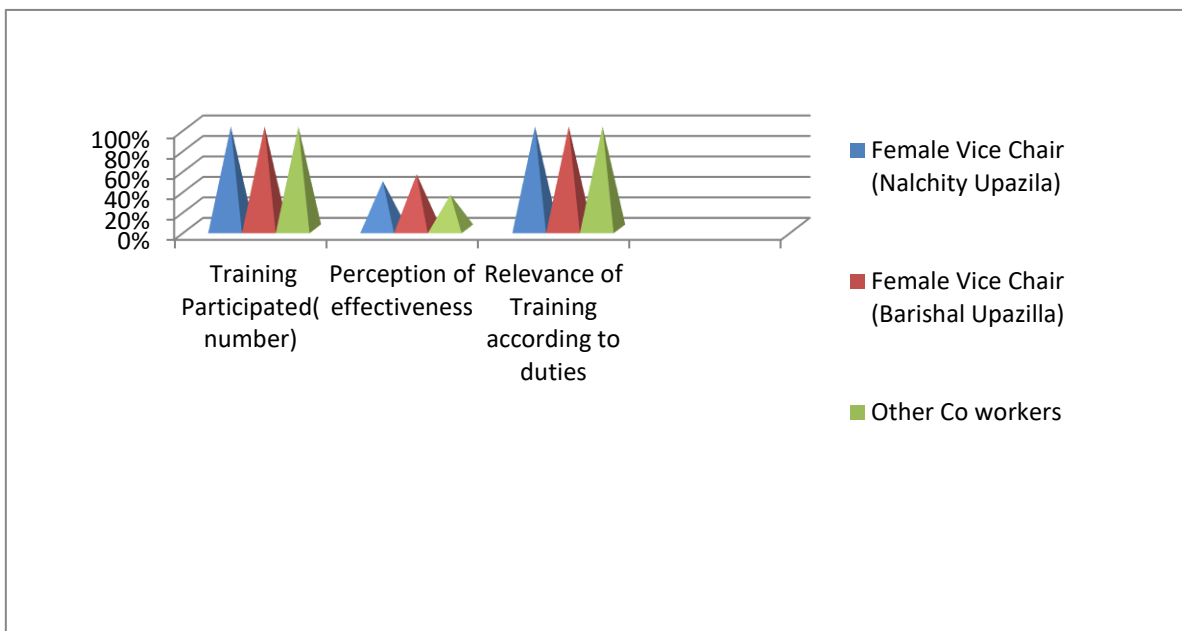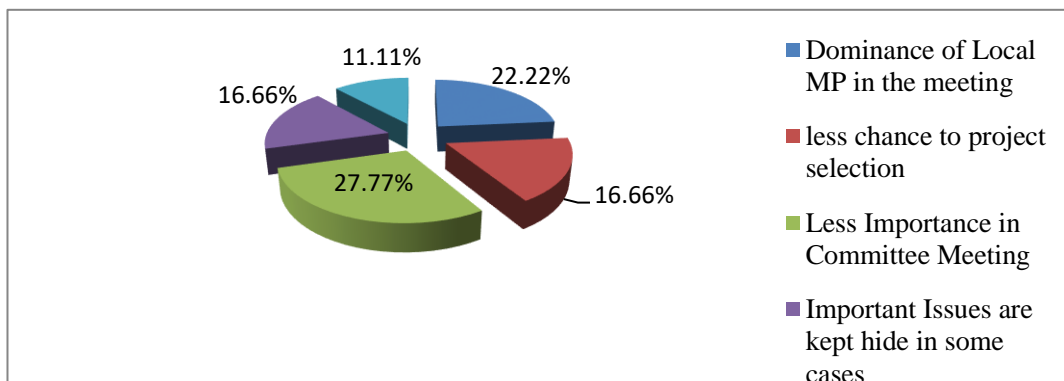

Source: Field data.

Female vice-chairmen were asked as to what extent they feel that training is useful for their duties. About 46.66% and 53.33% of training held they participated even on abroad training respectively from Nalchity Upazila and Barishal Sadar Upazila. And they claimed that all the training are helpful to work rationally. Female vice-chair of Nalchity Upazila assured that she participated in around on 9 training; 'Aparajita' was one of them (related to the development of women). It's important to mention that she is the chairman of the National Women Development Association, Nalchity Upazila. Female vice chairman of Barishal Sadar Upazila participated even on 3-4 abroad training. The majority of their co-workers claimed that the number of training and effectiveness of these is enough for actively participating in decision-making according to their stated responsibilities. But it creates anxiousness when they don't utilize the knowledge of training. Most of the speeches of them in meeting and training are merely political, not relevant to the subject matter of meeting or training they participated. Even sometimes they recognize that there are no important tasks in Upazila for them (by UNO of Barishal Sadar Upazila). Some local influential people claimed that signatory power and all of the financial allocation is in the hand of the Upazila Chairman and Upazila Nirbahi Officer. In this circumstance, vice-chairmen may lose motivation to participate in decision-making. 'Raising voice here less important according to a female vice-chairman. This situation is the same for both men and women vice-chairman. But most of the female vice-chairman believes the term 'reserved' in different public policy or agandas for women, makes them marginalized in the context of active

participation in decision-making. Besides, co-workers and civil society claimed that political leader's mental inacceptance of women as election contestants of him is also a great impediment. Female Vice-chairman of Barishal Sadar Upazila claimed that the condition of more participation of women without a reserved seats is not established yet. Political nominations for the election are sometimes patriarchal. However, all of the training arrangements may not be effective due to less importance on the post/disginition of female vice-chairmen. Sometimes, women representatives are powerful politically and locally but obstacles still exist (as women) more or less by socio-economic factors. In this situation '**Agency (Process)'** may change the situation of dominance with bargaining, negotiation, deception, manipulation, subversion, resistance, protest, cognitive processes of reflection, and analysis against any impediment. These criteria may establish an opportunity for the right of providing services to the citizen.

Figure 6: Impediments in Engagement and Voices of Women Representatives in Upazila Meeting (Political factors interlinked-independent variables)

Source: Field data.

These criteria of question surveyed among 18 respondents of two Upazilas including UNO, UZC, Departmental Officials (in the committee under FVC), and two female vice-chairs. About 27.77% of the respondent (most of them are from Nalchity Upazila) explored that there is less important for women representatives in the committee meeting. About 22.22% of respondents claimed that project selection is sometimes dominated by Local MP in the meeting. Data obtained from Barishal Sadar Upazila clarified that the nominations of Upazila representatives by local MP are biased especially unequal in the nomination for Upazila Chairman Post. The female vice-chairman was applied for UZC nomination (with 3-year experience as Upazila Vice Chairman) continuously. Some local people also believe that a female vice-chairman is more eligible than the present UZC. But the nomination was finally for a male. About this issue, female vice chairmen mentioned 'even my party does not believe in women representation, that is why I failed to get a

nomination as UZC frequently.' About 16.66% strongly claimed that important issues and rules are kept hide for not giving the right of participation in decision making. For instance, vice-chairmen (male and female of two Upazilas) are not aware of the Act of 2015 which recommends that 25% of the project of the Upazila Parishad will be implemented by women representatives. Female Vice-chairman of Barishal Sadar Upazila claimed, 'this issue kept hide from her, which (act) come via online to the Upazila and UNO didn't provide this information' whereas UNO of Barishal Sadar Upazila claimed that 25% allocation keeps for women representatives separately. About 27.77% and 11.11% respondent claimed that complexities in project selection arise when women representatives raise voice in the meeting for prioritizing any project. All of the members of the meeting recognize the proposal by them if it is rational, but these are not implemented later. Here, the female vice-chairman mentioned the coordination gap among administrative officials and representatives. Some of the respondents claimed about FVCs absence in the Upazila meeting. Often Upazila Chairman takes the sign of committee members for 5-6 meetings in advance. They select and allocate projects according to their choice (by a Union Parishad Member of Barishal Sadar Upazila).

Achievement (outcome): When women representatives are aware of the acts and ordinances related to them, they can fight against above all obstacles legally (supported by Scott's Regulative and Normative Pillar). So, the ability to challenge inequalities, rather than a difference in personal preference or individual characteristics (such as laziness) is important where having power is not an issue (Kabeer, 1999).

Case Study - 2:

Female Vice Chairman of Barishal Sadar claimed that 3% of the Women Development Forums share project allocation (according to act, as women representatives); firstly to the Upazila Chairman but he didn't emphasize it. Then she tried to contact UNO with this issue with the evidence of the act. Then UNO contacted Upazila Chairman and said that if she contacts with upper administration or ministry, this fact will grow worst. Than 3% of WDF allocation was given to her. She provided 18 sewing machines to women with providing training to them. Here, she believes that the signatory power of UNO and UZC are a great obstacle as a female vice-chairman. Although this obstacle is also for male vice-chairman, as women representatives despite having separate allocation by acts and mandates, comparatively they have to fight more than male representatives to get project allocation.

Source: Field data and research systhesis.

With the implication of the above issue, Valerie Miller's '**Power to** among 4 expressions of power proves that the ability to act that grows in

the process of taking action, developing skills and capacities; realizing that one can effect change.' It damaged the **'Power Over' effect** where domination extends affecting the ways in which women representatives view themselves, their rights and capabilities'. Through **'Power Within'** - where the sense of confidence, dignity, and self-esteem of this female vice-chairman came from gaining awareness from her working experience and realizing the possibility of doing something about it. (Lisa & Miller, 2002) .The validity of Miller's dimension is depended upon other. For this reason, above all the dimension of these theories is relevant as situational consideration to act the responsibilities of women representatives of Upazila Parishad.

Figure - 7: Probes of Political Participation as Upazila Representatives.
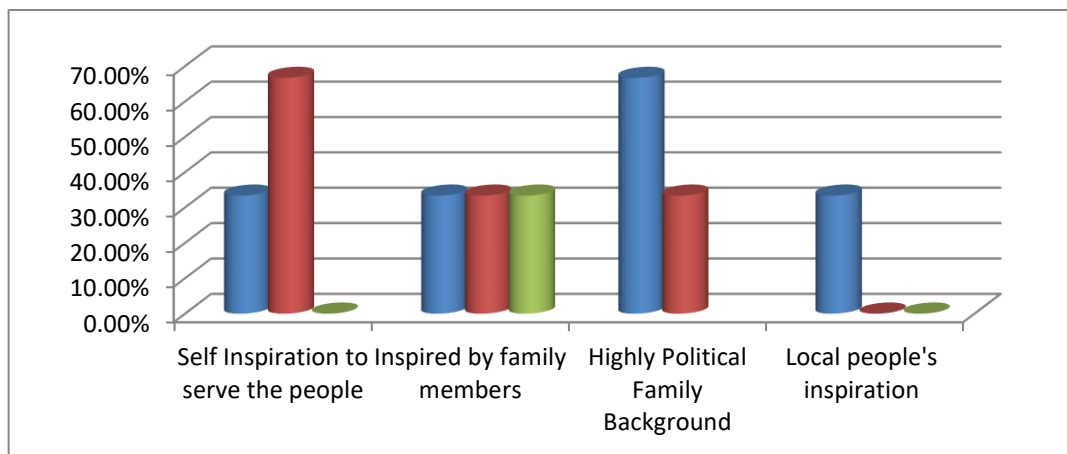
Source: Field data.

Most of the women representatives (66.66%) are from a highly political family background. They believe that without political family background there is less opportunity for mobility and priority in the decision-making process. Whenever they want to deliver a speech or raising voice in taking decisions on Upazila monthly meeting, they get less time comparatively than male members. Some of the officials claimed that women representatives are less prompt in raising voice. But women representatives expressed that the reason for remaining silent is the experience when their voice was ignored frequently. Male co-workers refused it by justifying that if they (women) keep their active working process, a citizen will keep trust in them with their service demand where nobody will create any impediment. According to obtained data (through the in-depth interview from local influential people), citizen mostly comes to male representatives because they believe that services can get fast from male than female representatives (besides signatory power is in the authority of UNO and UZC and implementing by Union Parishad Chairmen). Self-inspiration was sometimes obstructed by their family and societal outlook which demotivated them to come in Upazila Representation.

Case Study - 3

Female Vice Chairman from Nalchity Upazila Parishad mentioned her struggles with political carrier since 1996. With these, she had kept herself stable in the decision of being representative. She came into politics from the inspiration of her husband. After his death, people tried to reprobate her from politics with the worst lies about her, but she was strong. So, this study believes that if women representatives want to work well, each and every obstruction will eliminate.

Source : Field data and research systhesis.

Although the existing social structure (thinking and practicing) is changing, the whole scenario is not out of abusive practices at all.

Figure - 8: Complexities of Participation in Decision Making (wholistic view over most severe factors from independent variables on two Upazila)
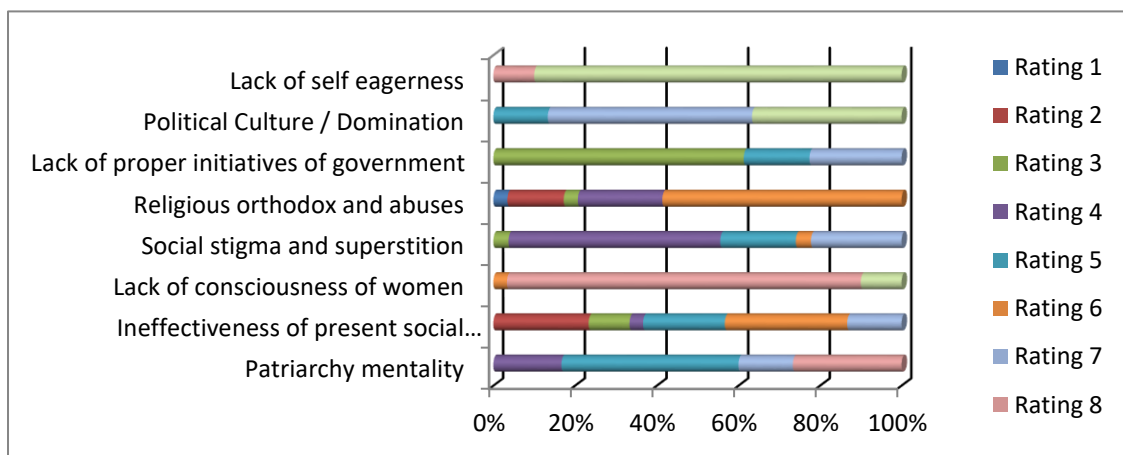
Source: Field data.

Overwhelming thing from survey data and above all theoretical analysis shows about 90% of the respondent believes that in spite of having challenges and other institutional barriers, the female vice-chairman can overcome all of these with self-consciousness and eagerness (supported by 86.66% of the responded). Only 23.33% of the respondent supported that there is a lack of government initiatives to reduce impediments. About 56.6% and 44.66% mostly believe that religious and social barriers (respectively) are decreasing gradually and the working environment is more serviceable than past for women representatives. About 43.33% rated patriarchal mentality as existing especially in committee decision making. About 26.66% hold back from reassessing on it and expressed that sometimes male members of the meeting push women for raising voices as a committee members but they are less eager to speak up. They are not aware of their responsibilities. Among 13.33% of the respondent

highly rated that there is patriarchal nature in selecting a high position. For example panel chair in Nalchity Upazila Parishad is always a male member, although existing laws support women vice-chairman also as panel chair. Often selection process completes without her presence. But in Barishal Upazila, the panel chair becomes from both of them (men and women) by turn. It's mentionable that no single factor or experience created a sense of powerlessness; rather a build-up of factors and experiences that has developed into a disempowering situation. (John & Hutchison, 1993). All the factors should be considered in the government recommendations. According to the above analysis, here the expression of the **'Power With** - describes collective action or agency, and includes both the psychological and political power that comes from being united' is obstructed with the mentality of gender discrimination in Upazila.

Case Study - 4

The meeting of 'Agricultural and Irrigation Committee' was held (under female vice-chairman) in November 2019 in Barishal Sadar Upazila. Total 6 numbers of women were present there including the female vice-chairman, but none of them kept any speech. As committee chair, the female vice-chairman silent enough. One administrative personnel claimed, their speech in the meeting was irrational to the subject matter of the meeting.

Source: Field data and research systhesis.

With a strong collective effort, the mentality of inequality may reduce in the working environment. Nobody will be left behind.

Figure 9: Loopholes for powerlessness and less promptness of women representatives
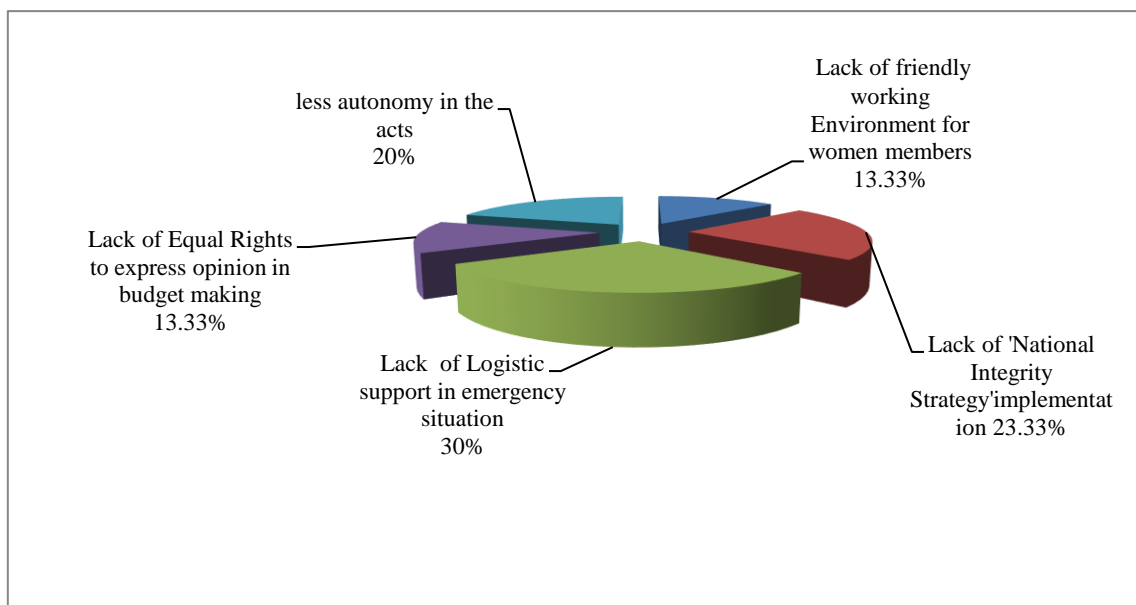
Source: Field data

Table 2: Simple scenario of two upazilas based on dependent and independent variables[4]

SL no	Independent variables	Nalchity Upazila	Barishar Sadar Upazila	Reasoning
1.	Socio-economic factors	Highly dominant to obstruct flexibility for implementing responsibilities	Less	Societal culture and beliefs influence government system highly
2.	Institutional factors	Less emphasized	Not well emphasized but self promptness works	No specific evaluative strategy to implement rules and autonomy. Culture of public service is not same from each upazila.
3.	Resource factors	Less emphasized from upazila but women representative herself	Same	Very few training and expertise importance.
5.	Political factors	highly impacted factor on women representatives and administration impacts from political factors	same	Most of the decision are overpowered by MPs and other political leaders.

Source: *Field data observasion (open comments from upazila representatives and others)*

All of the respondents explored these criteria as the scope of well-functioning for women representatives. They have recognized the need for women's empowerment through active participation in the Upazila

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[4] Socio-economic factors: Age, education, income opportunity, marital status, family dependence

Institutional factors: Rules and Norms, decentralized autonomy

Resource Factors: Access to valued resource, Training Sufficiency, motivation, knowledge of duties

Political Factors: Political Participation, Policy, patriarchal nature of Politics.

decision-making process. But the present condition of practicing determined responsibilities is not examined through specified tools or techniques nationally or locally. This is the reason for institutionalizing/ practicing loopholes which are taken as simple problems. But this research believes that the impacts of deviation from legal or rational procedures (with having no cure) can affect the national development process. Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Nalchity Upazila (women) expressed that the dominating political culture sometimes keeps women representatives minor in their decision. Women representatives may want to serve people well and raise voices. But invisible obstacles create complexities whether they will be able to implement or not. In such conditions, she loses public trust. Because when the motivation is low, the promptness of working will hamper. Besides, some representatives (male) are more powerful not only politically but also locally. Surprisingly, citizens come to them rather responsible female vice-chairmen. The administrative practices of Upazila representatives are also based on citizen's outlook (as they will get services from males easily). It's now an institutional norm. So, the scope of making a decision on citizen need is obstructed here invisibly.

Implications and Recommendations

A step ahead towards empowerment is that women representatives are choosing their path themselves and keeping their choices first. So, motivation works as determining factor to participate in decision-making eagerly. Training and skill may be obstructed when acts create the scope of participation for women representatives but actual formal power is on UNO, UZC, local MP, and others. These patriarchal norms decrease opportunities for creating the scope of a friendly working environment for women representatives. There is no woman-friendly washroom support in two Upazila, even the office room for the female vice chairman at Nalchity Upazila was filled with many sacks of polythene for almost 1 week. She complained to UNO (was not informed about it before). The number of projects implemented by women representatives is not satisfactory. Even they couldn't remember the names of training participated well. They had to fight for getting project allocation in some cases. The allocation of Standing Committees accomplished after 8 months of starting working tenure at Nalchity Upazila; the numbers of meetings held are 5-6. As a result, the condition of participation in decision-making was less realized in some cases. Now, this research stands on such thing which wants to tell that problems are itself the way of solutions. Unless problems don't solve with enormous strategies, no further scope of solution mentality won't grow. But there are some formal recommendations from this research…

Recommendation 1: *The need for a women-friendly environment in Upazila must be considered nationally and locally. Government can*

provide committees or add a compulsory provision which will monitor the normative condition of Upazila performance.

Recommendation 2: *The specification of the function for women representatives must be ensured without the direct authority of the Upazila Chairman; instead of this, the provisions of punishment may enforce for deviating from providing the actual right of women representatives.*

Recommendation 3*: Depoliticization of Upazila activities.*

Recommendation 4: *Arranging various workshops about changing the outlook for minimizing the patriarchal nature of working.*

The exercise of political power by local MPs should be evaluated. Obtained information of this study found that Upazila Representatives often illegally perform their activities in the name of local MP's permission.

Recommendation 5: *The performance appraisal through the 'National Integrity Strategy' is needed to measure the improvement.*

In spite of having Five Year plan at Upazila along with the budget allocation, it is seized by Upazila Representatives including Women at Nalchity Upazila. Here the performance scheme is not trustable. Upazila male representatives refused the excuses of non-equality condition for women in decision making in this case.

Recommendation 6: *Partial Signature Power should be given to female vice-chairmen especially women-related activities.*

Recommendation 7: *Raising Self Awareness by women representatives to attain the opportunities in the acts.*

The study also observes that women's participation in decision-making is influenced by institutional, demographic, and agency factors at UZP. Some indicators like rules, norms and training are found statistically significant through conducting the in-depth interview. Political economy is another factor that influences, but it was difficult to explore because respondents were trying to maintain confidentiality. Kabeer's empowerment theory helps to explain how the agency factors make women capable of raising their voice, influencing decisions, make decisions and also be able to act upon them. All of these are further validated by the case studies. Moreover, the provision of 3% ADP fund under women's leadership contained in the gazette of 2015 helps FVCs to be involved in development activities; but the provision of 25% of total project under Upazila women representative is unknown to them still now. Here, Scott's Institutional theory has indicated how the understanding of rules and laws helps FVCs to gain "knowledge" and "confidence" that enables

them to raise voice and challenges the power structure in case of any discrimination and finally influence the UZP decision-making. Respondents claimed that the Government's rules and laws relating to the empowerment of women representatives are many, but the practices of these rules are abusive in nature. Those who do not know how to use; cannot be able to utilize these (supportive laws). Using well by women representatives, formal rules can change the ending of the story. The hypothesis of this study has proved that existing legal mandates about women representatives are less practiced in most of the Upazila activities. All perspectives of participation are obstructed invisibly rather than visibly. Although an exception has found that some relevant invariants for the institutionalization of obstructive practices cause for less eagerness of women representatives. It's hard to find out the actual problem and prescribe something for its cure. But for the welfare of public life and gaining national image, considering all of the potentialities in women's leadership with analyzing the context of challenges affecting them and enforce efficient ways to turn these into advantages; keeping in mind that any political decision can obstruct or avail their participation in decision making. Human psychology for doing or not doing or the way of doing is often undetermined and uncontrollable instantly. The institutional structure was found less systematic, the experimentation of specificity for women representative's concerning activities to reduce patriarchal outlook even in the election process is needed. Because, reforming election criteria is the prior condition to start an authentic and participatory approach to deliver service that's most crucial to ensure a decision-making process on right track.

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