Organizational Democracy and Women's Empowerment: An Examination of Four Advocacy Organizations in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Women's empowerment is an important aim of the development activities of Non
-Government Organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh. In a patriarchal society, women experience
discrimination and their participation in decision making processes often is not allowed in
domestic, political and economic affairs. Most women's organizations mainly work to create a
better, non-discriminatory, and equal society for women. To focus on this goal, these
organizations often are not conscious of democracy at their own workplaces and equal
participation of their members and employees in decision making. In addition, only a small
amount of scholarship has been concerned with the structures and governance, organizational
democracy, and women's participatory roles in organizational decision making. By using a
multiple case study design, this research explores the ways four advocacy women's NGOs in
Bangladesh promote women's empowerment and equality at the organizational level and how
organizational structures and internal decision making processes help NGOs to achieve these
goals. None of the organizations has pure democratic or bureaucratic structure and participatory
decision making process. More democratic organizational structures or participatory decision
making processes are more effective in promoting more cognitive and psychological
empowerment of its members and employees.

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Chowdhury Shahriar, who taught me how to pursue dreams and love of our lives, our daughter Meera Chowdhury.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Theoretical Context

Organizations are an important part of our everyday lives. Nearly everything we do is related to organizations. From a hospital where we were born, a construction company that builds the houses where we live, to schools, universities, workplaces, banks, to law enforcement agencies, non-government offices, and multinational corporations all are organizations. We may only see the different physical structures and different sets of policies and procedures of these various organizations; however, all organizations have a few common characteristics. According to Daft (1998, 2013), organizations are "social entities that are goal directed, are designed as deliberately structured and coordinated activities systems, and are linked to the external environment" (p. 11). In this definition *social entities* means that any organization is constituted of people who interact with each other. These people interact to accomplish different tasks that are essential for the organization to fulfill its goals. *Coordinated activities systems* refer to management who necessarily structure and coordinate resources to achieve organizational goals. Any organization cannot exist or achieve its purposes without building relationship and interacting with its external environment such as clients, competitors, contributors, government and other organizations.

Organizations have different forms and structures. In the contemporary world many organizations embrace the form of bureaucracy, an idea that was introduced over a century ago by Max Weber. Weber believed bureaucracy was the most efficient and effective form of organizations and the pillar of modern society (Weber 1946, 1968). He described the bureaucratic form as an ideal way of organizing offices and argued that bureaucracy would

increasingly come to dominate all domains of the public and private sectors. It would succeed because it was a more rational and scientific way of seeing the world. In addition, bureaucracy was set up to deal with stable and routine tasks that were the basis of organizational efficiency (Weber 1946, 1968). As Weber was profoundly influential, some organizational analysts who followed him sought to confirm and extend his argument, like Robert Michel (1915), or they sought to delineate how bureaucracy could be rendered still more efficient, like Fredrick Taylor (1967).

Beginning in the 1960s, many scholars started to emphasize another system of authority in the workplace, which predominantly rejected the bureaucratic structure and developed a more democratic form (Mansbridge 1973, 1980; Iannello 1992; Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rothschild and Whitt 1986). They developed their own theory emphasizing the importance of workers' participation, non-bureaucratic management, and workers' equal rights. Even though democracy has different types and forms such as participatory, consensus-based, unitary, collective, deliberative, strong democracy, and representative, the central concept of this system is same as other types and forms that is quite opposite of the bureaucratic form (Pateman 1970; Mansbridge 1980; Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Iannello 1992; Barber 2003). Despite Weber's belief that bureaucracy would be revolution-poof, democratic organizations show that organizations in the modern world would not depend only on the bureaucratic form. In "democratic" organizations, there are no superiors and no subordinates; rather the ultimate authority remains in the hands of collectives. The principal goal of these democratic organizations is to create more humane, equal, and non-discriminatory workplaces and to escape from Weberian-dominated hierarchical authority. Often these organizations are called "alternative organizations" (Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rothschild and Whitt 1986).

Organizational management follows two different approaches: the top-down and the bottom-up approaches. The bureaucratic system mainly practices top-down management, which emphasizes control, close supervision, and hierarchy. Contrarily, the democratic organizations follow a more bottom-up approach, which is more flexible, supportive, and participatory. The first approach is based on "blueprint" and "scientific" management, while the second involves "people-centered" and "enabling" management (Lewis 2001, p. 15).

Organizations are not limited only to the state (public) and market (private) sectors. In the past several decades the "third sector" has emerged and played an important role in social, economic, and political development. This sector is also called the "non-profit" sector. It works in between of the state and market. Any kind of development cannot always be achieved by either the state or private sector; rather, it requires a balance among the state, market and a strong third sector as well. Especially in developing countries, the third sector plays a vital role in the field of economic, social, political development as well as in service delivery and the empowerment of marginal people including women, poor people and minorities. An important sub-group of the third sector is non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which is the central focus of this research.

In 1945, the United Nations (UN) first introduced the term NGO (Ahmed and Potter 2006; Lewis 2001; Willetts 2010). Before 1945, different terms were used to describe organizations that did not work for the government or in the private sector. Because of wide varieties of activities, locations, sizes and others, it is not possible to characterize NGOs with a single definition. However, it is understood that NGOs are those organizations that are not a part of a government, the business sector, or political parties; that do not make any profits; that do not advocate the use of violence, and that are concerned with human rights is general rather than

limited to a particular group (Ahmed and Potter 2006; Willetts 2010). These types of organizations have a formal status, independent self-governance, volunteer memberships and specific goals. NGOs are often called non-profit or not for profit organizations (NPOs) in the United States. At the national level, there are various reasons for the emergence of the NGO sector. These include poor performance of governments against poverty, changing development concerns from economic and political issues to more environmental, gender and social issues, and NGO's nature of activism, campaigning, advocacy and access to policy makers (Lewis 2001, p. 30-31). In contrast, at the international level reasons include the end of the Cold War and polarization of the two superpowers, the emergence of a global media system that provides a platform for NGOs to express their views, the spread of democratization, and the growth of inter-governmental negotiation with domestic issues (Lewis 2001; Fitzduff and Church 2004; Ahmed and Potter 2006).

NGOs consist not only of a group of organizations engaged in development and poverty reduction. They also emphasize concerns such as the environment, gender, human rights campaigning and advocacy, humanitarian relief in war and disasters, and conflict resolutions. NGOs can be large or small; international, national or local; externally funded or self-financed; volunteer or non- volunteer-based; charitable or non-charitable; radical or liberal; empowerment-based or rights-based. Any NGO could combine several of these elements. After its emergence, the NGO sector has been contributing significantly in various areas at the local, national and international levels. In 1997, Smith and Weiss found that the value of assistance delivered by various NGOs was greater than that provided by the United Nations system, excluding the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Fizduff and Church 2004, p. 3).

Even though NGOs have played significant roles, not much work was done for many years on the structures, governance and management of NGOs. Many NGO workers and leaders, who tended to consider themselves activists and organizers, were not aware of or interested in organizational management, as they were more task-oriented instead of focused on administration (Lewis 2001, p. 83). In addition, many of them believed management was more associated with the for-profit sector, and the top-down approach was opposite of participation, closeness with the grassroots, and sharing (Lewis 2001, p. 83). Therefore, they thought if they followed and learned about the administrative tasks and management, they would become "contaminated by the mainstream values of hierarchy and authority" and lose their "value driven characters" (Lewis 2001, 15-16).

While many organizations in the third sector were reluctant about organizational management because of its traditional bureaucratic form, some organizations showed successful uses of organizational management. Among these are initiatives of women's organizations. During the second wave of the women's movement in the United States, many women's organizations rejected formal organizational structures and embraced experimental collectivism to work with grassroots women (Iannello 1992; Lewis 2001). Gradually, women's organizations all over the world have received increased attention for their beliefs in and preference for collective action and egalitarian forms of organizations. Many women's organizations have been at the forefront of experimenting with more collective, democratic and egalitarian forms of organization, rather than more hierarchical forms, in order to empower underprivileged women and help them to gain equality (Bordt 1997; Iannello 1992; Rothschild and Whitt 1986).

In developing countries, the third sector plays a vital role in development and empowerment of poor people. In terms of women's equality and empowerment, women's

organizations including women's NGOs, and volunteer, grass roots and collective, and advocacy organizations are at the forefront. The importance of NGOs for women's issues was exhibited during the First UN World Conference on Women in 1975 in Mexico City, which approximately 6000 NGO representatives attended (Fitzduff and Church 2004, p. 3). Between 1975 and 1995 these numbers increased. By 1995, when Beijing hosted the Fourth World Conference, 40,000 active NGO participants overshadowed the relatively small number of government delegates, who totaled about 6,000 people (Fitzduff and Church 2004, p. 3). To avoid any unexpected situation during the conference, the Chinese government separated governmental and NGO activities locating smaller governmental proceeding in Beijing and placing the large number of NGO participants and their events in Huairo, a suburb of Beijing (Freeman 1996).

This large and growing number of NGO participants at UN women's conferences from 1975 to 1995 evidences the importance of NGO sector in the area of women's advancement and empowerment all over the world. Women's NGOs have been at the forefront of promoting new ideas; they encompass a major sector at the national and international levels through their various activities that can have significant effects on government's policies. NGOs play roles as advocates, trainers, and catalysts. The Fourth Conference in Beijing emphasized the growing strength of women's NGOs and their strong advocacy role in advancing policies and legislation to ensure equal participation and empowerment of women and implementation of the outcomes of the series of UN World Conferences on Women. Women's small scale participation in decision making at the community, national and international level through NGOs were acknowledged during the Fourth Conference which emphasized the important role of NGOs along with governments.

The NGO sector sometimes performs more efficiently than governments in developing

countries. Society in a developing country like Bangladesh is characterized by a patriarchal,

capitalist structure that influences all aspects of women's life. Females are discriminated against

from birth, as traditionally families prefer sons. Girls and women experience domestic violence

and social, economic, and political discriminations as well. Women's participation in decision

making often is not allowed in domestic, political, or economic affairs. Even though since 1991

both the prime minister and the leading opposition party leader have been women, the general

status of women in Bangladesh has changed little.

The women's movement emerged in Bangladesh from the country's nationalist

movement in the 1970s. The left-wing organization *Bangladesh Mahila Parishad*[1] was formed in

1970 with an association to some leftist parties, even though it did not have any affiliation with

any partisan politics until 1986 (BMP website 2012). It is the largest women's organization in

Bangladesh. It has taken a number of initiatives to influence government policies, including

campaigns to support anti-dowry legislation and for the ratification of CEDAW[2]. Since then,

many women's organizations have emerged that mainly focus on poverty alleviation, women's

rights, and equality.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the women's movement started to grow in domestic, regional and

international contexts, and its political involvement also increased (Basu 2005, p. 17). In this

time, the women's movement in the Indian sub-continent concentrated on violence against

women. Many South Asian feminist groups built connections with each other through regional

networks and conferences (Basu 2005, p. 17). In the 1980s, the political involvement of the

women's movement and women's organizations in Bangladesh increased because of the

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[1] Women's Association of Bangladesh
[2] The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

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authoritarian government's[3] "politicizing Islam and suppressing democracy" (Chowdhury 2000). Many women's and students' organizations, NGOs, and civil society groups played a vital role in removing this government and rebuilding democracy.

In 1991, the reestablishment of democracy fueled the women's movement in Bangladesh. Many new women's organizations developed with new agendas. The democratic environment also allowed for the formation of the Islamic parties, which had been limited after the country's independence in 1971 because of their controversial roles during the Liberation War. These parties are against women's politics and women's leadership. They do not even have a single female member in their parties. These Islamic political parties are one of the vital constraints on feminist groups and the women's movement. Such parties do not believe in women's equal rights. Although they support limited women's employment, they oppose women's factory work that brings women into contact with men (Basu 2005, p. 19). They believe that women are always subordinate to men, and they should stay in their households. In April 2013, a woman TV journalist came under attack while covering the radical Islamist group's rally. Leaders of the group demanded imposition of restrictions on open movement of male and female together (bdnews24.com).

Under these social and political circumstances, women's organizations in Bangladesh face many obstacles. Most of the women's collective organizations mainly work to create a better, non-discriminatory, and more equal society for women. To focus on this goal, these organizations often are not conscious of democracy at their own workplaces and equal participation of their own members and employees in the decision making processes. As most of the women's organizations work for women's empowerment, equality, and development, if they do not allow their own members and employees to participate in decision making and help them

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[3] From 1982 to 1990 Bangladesh had military-authoritarian government under Lt. Gen. H. M. Ershad

to become empowered through being involving in decision making, providing autonomy, sharing

proper information and overall removing hierarchy they never could be able to promote

participation and equality to other women. I argue that collective action and participation in a

democratic environment is necessary at the organizational level to more toward achieving

women's equality and empowerment.

Rationale for this Research

Considerable work has been done on the roles that various kinds of NGOs played in

developing countries and the potential of NGOs to challenge policies and practice (e.g, Hashemi

et al. 1996; Lewis 1999, 2001; Biswas and Kabir 2004; Goetz and Sengupta 2003; Pitt, Khandkar

and Cartwright 2003; Ahmed and Potter 2006). However, only a small amount of scholarship has

been concerned with the structures and governance of these organizations, organizational

democracy, women's participatory roles in organizational decision making, and the ways the

roles and activities of NGOs can be managed. Significant attention has been given to understand

the governance and management in the business and government sectors. As a result, the word

'management' being very close within these two sectors. This lack of attention to governance of

NGOs is an important gap.

While the women's movements and organizations that have emerged in Asia focus on

human rights, equality, and empowerment, they do not pay attention to democracy at the

organization level. Additionally, numbers of different studies support the claim that women's

collective or group activities that are required for different loan programs or economic

development programs enhance women's condition as well as their capacities. These loan

programs contribute to their empowerment within household decision making processes through

generating increased economic independence (Hashimi et al. 1996; Goetz and Sengupta 2003; Pitt, Khandkar and Cartwright 2003). However, these studies are only limited to household decision making at the community level, and sometimes studies focus on women concerned only with their economic development rather than social and political awareness. The meaning of democracy and participation to these women is limited to their right to vote every five years at the national level and every two years at the local level. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted on participatory democracy, collective actions, and other issues at the organizational level to enhance academic and public knowledge.

This research focuses on women's NGOs in Bangladesh. It is a developing country with few of the world's largest development NGOs. Two of these internationally known NGOs are the Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), whose focus is on women's empowerment and development. The growth of NGOs in Bangladesh is extraordinary. According to a World Bank report, in 2006 approximately 45,000 NGOs worked in Bangladesh, and over 90 percent of the villages had at least one NGO in 2000 (Ahmed and Potter 2006, p. 128). Most of the NGOs' missions, goals and activities are somehow related to the empowerment and development of poor people - especially women. This noticeable number of NGOs in Bangladesh and their wide ranges of activities make it an excellent site to explore the issue of organizational democracy, collective action, members' participation in decision making, and the empowerment of organizations' members and employees.

A large number of women in Bangladesh are illiterate, in poor health, and invisible in the system of the national politics; they suffer from legal, political, economic and social discrimination, and have the lowest rates of direct participation in governance structures (Chowdhury 2000; Mohsin 2010). Often they are not allowed to participate even in household

decision making, and their voices remain unheard. Even though women occupy most of the parties' highest positions, the condition of women at large is very different. Often these political positions are not symbols of women's empowerment or women's equality in the society. All of these female party leaders originally secured their positions through family connections because of not having an appropriate male heir. (Jahan 1987, 1995; Mohsin 2010)

There are many women in partisan politics in Bangladesh; however, most of them are selected for reserved seats as symbols of female representation. In addition, since 2008 a few women are in the Cabinet of Ministry, but they are always under scrutiny. Another picture, which is very common in South Asian countries during the election season, is that of long line of women in separate women-only polling booths. Normally voting rights is considered a form of political involvement, which is an indicator of democratization. However, voting rights is not sufficient for democratization. In a democratic environment, active participation allows women to be involved in decision making and to exercise their political, social and economic rights. To gain equal rights and greater access in the broader political democracy, women's active participation at the organization level is important. As Mason (1982) mentioned, "…it can be hypothesized that participation in government is approximated most by participation in the workplace. This is the workplace connection. To increase participation in the government, it is most efficient to increase participation in the workplace" (p.78).

According to Pateman's participatory theory of democracy, "…individuals should receive some 'training' in democracy outside the national political process." (1970, p. 45). She argues that participatory experience makes individuals psychologically strong; therefore, they can undertake further participation (Pateman 1970, p. 45).

This research is also important because it argues that direct participation and collective action at the organizational level help to lead to greater empowerment, independence, and equality for women. Agreeing with Mason and Pateman, this research also argues that an individual needs an institutional platform outside of the national political arena. NGOs could be this platform where people can learn and exercise their rights. This is important for women because they need to know which legal rights already exist and how best to exercise them. This research explores organizational dimensions such as organizational structure (hierarchical or not), decision making (democratic or not), members' and employees' activities (participatory or not), and whether and how these organizational characteristics help to promote women's empowerment and equality at the organization level. These dynamics have been previously studied at the community and national levels by economists and sociologists, but not widely at the organization level.

This dissertation research explores the way women's NGOs in Bangladesh, where society is dominated by males and democracy is not always engrained, promote women's empowerment and equality at the organizational level and how organizational structure and internal decision making processes help NGOs to achieve these goals.

The remainder of this chapter reviews the literature on organizational theory and decision making processes in various democratic organizations, the theoretical framework of the research. The chapter ends with an outline of specific research questions and two different propositions.

Theoretical and Research Context

Over the last few decades many researchers have studied organizational democracy, members' collective action, participation, and equal rights in decision making processes. They

worked to identify whether organizations exercise democracy at the organization level to make an anti-bureaucratic, non-hierarchical workplace, how organizations make decisions, and whether women's organizations are different from other organizations. These are all important to build my theoretical framework.

German sociologist Max Weber's bureaucracy theory is an essential part of organizational theory. Without discussing his theory, no organizational study would be complete. Weber was the first sociologist who saw clearly over a century ago how the development of bureaucracy in all domains of life would result from the development of modernity itself. Contrary to Karl Marx, he predicted that the bureaucratization of all organizations would take place in socialist economics as surely as in capitalist economics, despite the more utopian and egalitarian aspirations of the former. Weber argued that bureaucracy would succeed because it was a more rational and "scientific" way of seeing the world (Weber 1946).

Weber characterized the ideal type bureaucracy. It is first and foremost, "rule bound"… "its offices follow the principle of hierarchy", which means "each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one"… "each office has a clearly defined sphere of competence in the legal sense",… "candidates are selected on the basis of technical qualifications",… "the office is treated as the sole occupation of the incumbent and thus constitutes a career" (Weber 1968). Hundreds of scholarly volumes and articles have been written about Weber's conception of bureaucracy that "once…fully established, bureaucracy is among these social structures which are the hardest to destroy" (Weber 1946, p. 228).

After deep examination of numerous forms of domination and organizations in history, Weber concluded that three types of mind sets, or as he called them "legitimating principles", explain why the many accept being dominated by the few. He called these traditional,

charismatic and legal-rational forms of legitimation, each with an associated form of organization to administer the domination (Weber 1946). For a modern society, it is the legal-rational mindset that accepts hierarchical authority and the bureaucracy that administers it (Bendix 1962).

Weber was once asked whether direct democracy -- organization without domination -- was possible. He responded that once bureaucracy was firmly established, it would be revolution-proof. There would be coups, but no overthrow of the hierarchical structure itself. Interestingly, he noted that the Bakuninites (anarcho-syndicalists) were the only ones proposing local organizations without domination, but he found their view "utopian" and "naïve". He suggested that their aspiration to build collectivist organizations that were directly democratic and non-hierarchical would never come into being (Weber 1946, p. 229).

Before Rothschild-Whitt's study, no noticeable academic attention was given to the search for democratic organizations. In the 1970s, Rothschild developed a fourth type of organization to counter Weber's existing theory of bureaucracy, the "collectivist-democratic organization" which was grounded in shared substantive values for its legitimacy (Rothschild-Whitt 1979). Later Rothschild and Whitt (1986) defined collectivist organizations as "any enterprise in which control rests ultimately and overwhelmingly with the members-employees-owners, regardless of the particular legal framework through which this is achieved" (p. 2). It is a non-hierarchical, egalitarian, collectivist decision making process in which all members have voice that defines these organizations. This organization model can be distinguished from bureaucratic structures with eight elements: authority, rules, social control, social relations, recruitment and advancement, incentive structure, social stratification, and differentiation (Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rothschild and Whitt 1986).

In collectivist organizations, the decision making process is based on members' direct participation rather than representative democracy. Authority rests in the collectivity instead of offices. This is a kind of organization without hierarchy and with minimum rules. Normally, this kind of organization does not have strict written rules and standard procedures. Social control works primarily through personal and moral appeals, and social relations are personal and affective. In the collectivist organization members are recruited on the basis of friendship, shared values, and personality attributes instead of measurable qualifications. There is a low degree of task specialization and wage differences are strictly limited. The aim of collectivist organizations is to eliminate the division of labor (Rothschild and Whitt 1986). Here, participatory democracy means all members have direct and equal involvement in the decision making process. In this type of democracy, decision making is direct, face-to-face, consensual, and egalitarian (Mansbridge 1973; 1980). On the other hand, in a representative democracy few elected members make all decisions, and other members do not have direct involvement except the right of one vote per person.

Pateman (1970) emphasizes the importance of participatory democracy and citizens' involvement to the decision making process, while Schumpeter and other theorists claim that democracy should be seen as a political method or a set of institutional arrangements in which leaders compete for people's votes, and participation is limited to the choosing of decision makers (Pateman 1970, p. 3-4). Based on the theories of Rousseau, Mill, Cole, and others, Pateman develops a participatory theory of democracy. Its central assertion is that individual human beings are an important part of organizations and these two cannot be separated from each other. Representative institutions at the national level are not enough for democracy. The development of psychological attitudes, independence, and a general competence for

involvement in decision making are key features of democracy. This development is only possible through the process of participation (Pateman 1970, p. 42). She mentions a cross-cultural study conducted by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba[4] of the relationship between political efficacy and political participation and the effects of participation in voluntary organizations. This study found that political efficacy was higher among members of organizations than among non-members (Pateman 1970, p. 47).

Mansbridge (1980) develops two different types of organizational democracies, unitary and adversary democracy. Unitary democracy is based on friendship and equal respect among participants. This democracy is consensual and egalitarian. It assumes that citizens have a single common interest where everybody respects each other's interests and opinions. Unitary democracy has four central features: equal respect, consensus, common interest, and face-to-face contact (Mansbride 1980, p. 10). In contrast, the adversary form of democracy is the combination of the electoral process, one person one vote, and majority rule. Due to citizens' conflicting interests, people prefer secret ballots to make final decisions. This democracy emphasizes the equal protection of the members' interests (Mansbridge 1980). Mansbridge argues that adversary democracy is appropriate for a large group that normally cannot meet face-to-face and whose members do not necessarily know and care for each other. This system rejects the concept of friendship that is the basis of unitary democratic systems and the assumption of common good or

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[4] In another study Sidney Verba and others (1995) find that civic voluntarism e.g. citizens' involvement in family, work, school, and religion, as well as in their political participation as voters, campaigners, protesters, or community activists, is the basis of American democracy. They conducted a survey of 15,000 individuals including 2,500 personal interviews that focus on the central issues of involvement including how people come to be active, their motivations, their resources, and their networks. They find difference along cultural lines among African-Americans, Latinos, and whites as well as between the religiously observant and the secular. They observe family activism moving from generation to generation, and look into the special role of issues in the involvement including abortion rights and social welfare.
For detail please see "Voice and Equality" by Sidney Verba, K. L. Schlozman and H. E. Brady. 1995. Harvard University Press.

common public interest. After the emergence of large-scale nation-states and market economies, adversary democracy became popular (Mansbridge 1980).

In addition, many feminist scholars have criticized Weber's bureaucratic theory. They have argued that his theory was gender biased (Acker 1990, 2006; Ferguson 1984; Rothschild 2000). Weber's theory was based upon his observation of the Prussian army's hierarchical chain of command, which was entirely male-dominated. By embracing Weber's theory of bureaucracy, the entire field of organizational theory accepted this gender bias until the beginning of the second wave of the women's movement in the 1970s, when in North America feminist groups started to challenge hierarchical and bureaucratic organizations (Acker 1990; Iannello 1992).

In the middle of the 1960s, many large women's organizations emerged that sought greater representation of women in Congress, on boards of groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW), National Women's Political Caucus, Women's Equity Action League, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (BPW), and many others. (Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Iannello 1992). These organizations were interested in formal leadership and organizational structure. Therefore, they set up organizational structures that were 'top-down' hierarchical with elected officers (Iannello 1992, p. 37). In 1982, after failing to gain enough support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), many grassroots organizations initially remained devoted to an anti-hierarchical, egalitarian and grassroots approach (Iannello 1992, p. 37). These anti-hierarchical groups, for whom 'voice' and 'empowerment' were central, later set up hundreds of egalitarian, anti-hierarchical feminist organizations (Ferree and Martin 1995; Iannello 1992).

After World War II, so called "liberal" feminists were eager to eliminate or reduce patriarchy, but they largely accepted hierarchical structures in the workplace and sought to

incorporate women at higher levels in the public sphere and to gain equal women's rights (Iannello 1992; Ferguson 1984). However, by the 1980's, Marxist and radical feminists emphasized the influence of capitalism and patriarchy in both the public and private spheres and sought the reduction of both dynamics (Iannello 1992, p. 40).

Another stream of feminist thought was the anarchist feminism of Emma Goldman (Iannello 1992; Rothschild and Whitt 1986). Anarchist feminists concentrated on the nature of power within hierarchical organizations and the internal dynamics, and tried to develop an alternative structure of organization in which no one dominated others. This anarchist-feminist organizational structure is similar to the "collectivist-democratic organization" model of Rothschild and Whitt (1979; 1986) and Iannello's (1992) "modified consensus" form of decision making. In the collective organization, people rotate leadership, responsibilities are shared, decision making processes are consensus-oriented, every member has the right to express his/her opinion, and rules are kept to a minimum (Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Iannello 1992).

Even though Rothschild and Whitt's study of collective-democracy in cooperatives does not specifically focus on gender, their model does constitute an alternative to bureaucracy where legitimate decision making is based on the voice of all members, not just that of the manager or "man" in charge. The members of these organizations unite voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, cultural and basic human needs through jointly owned and democratically controlled endeavors. These are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, and solidarity and are explicitly anti-hierarchical (Rothschild and Whitt 1986). The collectivist democratic form of organization is similar to most of the feminist grassroots organizations in the 1960's and women's organizations whose primary goals are to empower

women and promote equality because of their preference for anti-hierarchical systems. (Ferree and Martin 1995; Iannello 1992).

Grounded on Rothschild's model of collectivist organizations, Iannello (1992) finds many feminist organizations develop a consensus-based decision making process that allows them to make decisions without hierarchy. She calls this model "modified consensus." According to Iannello, "Modified consensus is both the method of decision making process and a form of organization" (1992, p. xii). Consensual decision making means all members have the opportunity to discuss problems until an acceptable decision is made by all. Modified consensus is different from both hierarchical and consensus-based decision making processes. In a modified consensus process, "critical decisions" are those that decide organizational direction and are taken by all members on a consensus basis. In contrast, "routine decisions" refer to those that are important for day-to-day operation and are determined by the group of skilled and knowledgeable people (Iannello 1992, p. xii). Many women who have experience in consensus decision making have introduced modified consensus to other women's organizations, and women who are in decision making positions in many organizations have been implementing this process into their workplaces. Iannello describes this process as being "the result of feminist interventions" (Iannello 1992, p. 122).

At a more theoretical level, Acker (1990) argues that even though many feminist writings assume that organizational structure is gender neutral, organizations are not gender neutral. She examines organizations as "gendered processes in which both gender and sexuality have been obscured through a gender-neutral, asexual discourse" (Acker 1990).

Tomchin (2005) examined Twin Oaks, an intentional community and collective-democratic organization. She studies how it has developed an alternative work system and

division of labor to abolish organizational hierarchy and achieve gender equality "through its treatment of childcare as a non-gender specific and productive job, its absence of a competitive job-market, 'resource pooling', equal pay for all work, and equal access for all members to positions of responsibility and authority" (Tomchin 2005; Rothschild and Tomchin 2006).

Examples of women's collective participatory democratic organizations and empowerment are common and popular in other developed and developing countries as well. These organizations reject Weber's bureaucratic theory and prefer a non-hierarchical, equal rights, and democratic working environment. For instance, a significant and long-lived federation of women's cooperatives in the Mondragon area of Spain was started in the mid-1950s (Hacker and Elcorobairutia 1987; Taylor 1994). As of 2009, it comprised more than 100 cooperatives, interconnected through their own community banks with 389 branches located in all parts of Spain, and in schools and other institutions (Kelly and Messena 2009).

Another example of a women's collective democratic organization is the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which could be a model for people in any country. After starting as a trade union in 1972, this association provides a voice and recognition to women, who mainly work in the informal sector and remain an invisible group. SEWA helps women to become self-dependent, confident and empowered. As of 2003, it had more than 300,000 members at six different states in India, where most of women live in rural areas (Crowell 2003). Based on needs, SEWA organizes its members into different cooperatives, but an individual woman could be a member of several different cooperatives. The largest cooperative of this association is SEWA Bank, which does not accept any outside grants or subsidized loans to be used as capital for loans to members. SEWA has a democratically elected executive committee, which is filled predominately with working members, but not middle-class staff-members

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(Rothschild 2008, p. 152). Members' voices are an important issue for this organization. Although SEWA is an organization with many different branches, each branch and each individual organizer have a great deal of autonomy. The representatives of different committees share their plans and information with their members. Then, members have the chance to question, support and provide their opinions. Representatives and members discuss the agendas and finally make decisions consensually (Crowell 2003, p. 265). This association does not have any formal set of rules; rather, it has a set of principles that govern how members should do their work.

The Grameen Bank and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) in Bangladesh are two organizations that promote women's empowerment and development through micro-credit programs. These organizations function to help poor families to help themselves. This credit program is not based on collateral, but trust. In order to make women more self-reliant, the Grameen Bank and BRAC first establish groups of individual women as a collective that needs the loan. Both of these organizations provide a space for the women to build a community and collective (Smillie 2009; Yunus 1999). Anthony (2005) studied various microcredit institutes and found that the most successful organizations were those in which their members had established a collective identity (Yunus 1999).

The Pacific Institute for Women's Health conducted a study during 1996 and 1997 with researchers in eight different countries to find the impact of grants from the Global Fund on recipient organizations. It looked at the way these organizations promote women's empowerment and if being a member of or participant in the grantee organization benefited the women or improved their lives (PIWH 1998). This study gathered information from 56 organizations in eight countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Near East. It found that participation in the

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organizations' activities such as workshops, training, publications, services, and networking improved organizational staff, members, and beneficiary women's lives in diverse ways. Improvements included increased self-esteem, self-confidence, economic autonomy, knowledge, awareness, and overall to improved well-being.

Although Kelara Dinesh Beedi (KDB), an industrial collective organization in India, does not work for women's equality and rights, it is an example of workers' collective action that overthrew bureaucratic structure and developed a democratic form of organization to press for better wages, conditions and equal rights. KDB was established in the late 1960s from a conflict between factory workers and owners of large firms (Isaac et al. 1998, p.10). Even though it is a mixed-sex organization, almost 90 percent of its members are women. This group has equal voting rights on a one-person one-vote basis regardless of individual shares. Workers have direct and indirect decision making power over the improvement of working conditions, the distribution of surplus at the top management level, and the construction of new work sheds. Also, workers have the right to participate in trade unions (Isaac et al. 1998, p. 192).

To achieve equality and promote women's empowerment by eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, these women's organizations and sometimes organizations with a majority of women have created collective democratic organizations. These collective organizations believe in a democratic, equal opportunity, inclusive, and equal rights workplace where women can develop self-confidence, self-esteem, skills, understanding of rights and conditions, and empowerment.

A study by Blanchard and his associates (1999) found a practical approach to create structural empowerment in organizations that help employees to become more empowered. They described three interrelated keys that together can create an "empowered structure": sharing

accurate information widely, developing autonomy within groups or teams, and replacing a hierarchical system and mindset with self-managed teams (Blanchard et al. 1999; Randolph and Sashkin 2002). Even though this study was conducted in the for-profit organizations, I believe the combination of these three keys could be effective in the non-profit sector. The authors suggested that an environment of empowerment in the workplace could be built by using these three keys and releasing power among members and employees.

Based on the study of Blanchard and his associates, Randolph and Sashkin (2002) conducted research in multinational settings and found that by applying the three keys, it is possible to create an empowering workplace and that empowerment has positive impact on employees' performance (p.102). The authors found that in a multinational organization, the impact of cultural difference is crucial for the application and success of the keys to empowerment. Cultural differences sometimes make it easier to create an empowering structure and sometimes make it more difficult. In addition, Lawler et al. (1992) and Malone (1997) found that sharing information, giving more control and autonomy to employees and promoting empowerment increase motivation and performance (cited in Randolph and Sashkin 2002, p. 105).

The theoretical context of this research examines two important questions. Will other women's organizations, which mainly work for women and their development, be equally drawn to a collective, egalitarian and consensus driven form of organization in their efforts to achieve greater equality in their workplace? Are these collective organizations exercising a non-hierarchical collective approach to promote their own members' and employees' empowerment and equality in decision making? To answer these questions, I have chosen to analyze several women's collective organizations in Bangladesh.

Research Questions

This dissertation research examined three more specific questions.

- What are the organizational structures of women's organizations in Bangladesh? Are they democratic and non-hierarchical or hierarchical bureaucratic in nature?

- What are their internal decision making processes in these organizations? Do they promote equality and allow all members and employees in decision making process?

- Do these organizational structures, environments and procedures help to promote and raise female members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment in their personal, professional, social and political lives?

Propositions

I developed two propositions based on these research questions.

[1] The more egalitarian and inclusive the organization is in its structural form and internal processes, the more effective it will be in raising female members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment.

[2] The more participatory-democratic the organization's working environment and decision making processes are, the more effective the organization will be in raising female members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment.

To explore these research questions, using a case study design with interviews, observation, and document review for primary data, I analyzed four women's NGOs in Bangladesh. My examination of these organizations allowed me to shed light on the degree to which they are (or are not) able to develop fully participatory, non-hierarchical organizations,

focusing upon both the role of organizational structures and decision making processes and whether the organization's structural form and decision making process help to promote empowerment.

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 describes the research design, which includes various methods of data collection and data analysis. This chapter also introduces the four women's organizations in Bangladesh. Chapter 3 examines which organizations have democratic organizational structures and which organizations have more bureaucratic forms. The different organizational decision making processes and members' and employees' levels of participation will be examined in the Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the meaning of empowerment to the research participants, various empowerment initiatives in the organizations and if there is any relationship between the level of participants' organizational involvement and empowerment in their lives. Chapter 6 summarizes major findings, examines implications and possible future research and provides recommendations.

Chapter Two

Research Design

This dissertation research used qualitative approaches for collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative approach mostly uses in social science, which aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons of these human behaviors. This approach helps to explore new areas and little known phenomena (Creswell 2008; Marshall and Rossman 2010). It can also be used to gain more in-depth information. To achieve this aim, researchers collect data in the form of images, sounds, words, and numbers. When such data are grouped into patterns, they become information (Rossman and Rallis 2003).

The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide rich descriptions especially textual and visual- of how people experience a given phenomenon. It can provide information about contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals. Qualitative methods are also effective in identifying social norms in a group, the socioeconomic status of a person or a group, gender roles, ethnicity, religion, and other social issues (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Cassell and Symon 2004; Marshall and Rossman 2010). It allows greater spontaneity in and adaptation of the interaction between researchers and study participants. The researcher can observe participants' facial expressions and body language, which often describe more than verbal communication. Marshall and Rossman (2010) point out that the qualitative approach is useful for policymakers and practitioners because they are sometimes unable to derive detailed findings and meanings from experimental or quantitative observational research (p.57).

Qualitative methods were appropriate for this research because I explored a narrowly studied area and complex dynamics between organizations' structures and individual human

beings. Therefore, this research needed detailed contextual descriptions. I focused on the way

organizational structures and working environments affect women's experiences and their

understandings of democracy, equal rights, and empowerment. In addition, the relationship

among organizational structures, women's participation, and empowerment are not always

possible to understand by experimenting in a particular setting like controlled laboratory setting.

Therefore, this research was conducted in a natural setting. The researcher needs to be involved

with and get close to the research participants, situations, and surroundings because the

researcher's observation is an important part of the inquiry. All of these activities are only

possible in qualitative research.

From various strategies associated with the qualitative approach, I chose the case study

because this design has the ability to cope with a variety of evidence, including observation,

interviews, documents, and artifacts (Yin 2009, p. 8). In this way, rich data collection is possible.

Case study research includes single and multiple case studies. For this dissertation research, a

multiple-case design is useful because evidence from multiple cases would be more trustworthy

and robust. This design strengthens the results by replicating findings even it is sometimes

difficult to generalize from one case to another. To conduct a multiple-case study, each case has

to be selected carefully so that it either predicts similar results or contrasts predictable results

(Yin 2009, p. 47).

Based on my research questions and propositions, I selected a multiple case design. I

tried to look for a causal relationship between women's sense of efficacy and empowerment

(dependent variable) at different parts of their lives and organizational structures and decisions

making process (independent variable). In this research, each women's organization is the

subject of an individual case study; however, the whole study covers a total of four

organizations. Comparisons are made at three levels, organizational structure, decision making process, and empowerment initiatives.

Sites and Cases Selection

For any research, selecting sites, cases, and participants is very important for designing a study. It serves as a guide for the researchers to continue and successfully finish their research. For this research, the research site was the NGO sector in Bangladesh and the cases were women's organizations. As mentioned before, Bangladesh has an extraordinary numbers of NGOs, which makes it a suitable site to study NGOs. Since women in Bangladesh are deprived and oppressed in different ways, hundreds of women's organizations work for women's development and welfare.

All of the selected organizations were founded by women with the primary goal is to promote women's empowerment and equality. To find and compare reliable data, several elements of the four organizations were held constant: the sex of the members (all female), location (urban or central office in a city), focus (women's empowerment), organization status (non-governmental), size based on annual budgets (5 to 10 crore BD taka) and age (more than 20 years old). To ensure that organizational activities could be compared, all four organizations were around 20 or more years old. Based on various sources (websites and publications), I selected two organizations that claim to be democratic in nature and two that did not, providing variation on the independent variable. I used pseudonyms for all four case-study organizations to conceal their identities. These organizations were the Anti-Discriminatory Group, Activist Women's Organization, Women's Union, and Women's Rights League. A brief overview of these selected organizations is given at the end of this chapter.

There were multiple rationales behind the selection of these particular organizations. First, all four organizations work for women's empowerment and development in the social, political and economic sectors. Second, these are widely known organizations at the national and international levels. Third, all of these are governed by a group of female members and depend on paid employees for operational activities. Fourth, all of the organizations are easily accessible because they allow researchers to study their organizations and volunteers for various activities. For example, the Anti-Discriminatory Group has regular weekly meetings, which are open for any interested person, and offers different volunteer activities. According to the website, several foreign students have done various research projects in the Activist Women's Organization, and the Women's Rights League has a three-month intern opportunity for students and academics. In addition, my familiarity with the social setting, people, and language were other reasons for selecting Bangladesh's women's organizations as cases. Although two of the four organizations are older and their areas of activities are different, all four organizations are unified by the priority that each works for women's equality, empowerment, and rights. Moreover, these organizations are more advocacy-based than service providing.

Research Participants

In the research design, I planned to use two types of sampling. One is snowball sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique, appropriate to use in research when participants of a population are difficult to locate. In this technique researcher starts with one participant and then based on research requirements identifies other participants with the help of the first person. This is a method for sampling for participants in a network. A second type of sampling is criterion sampling, which is selecting cases that meet some criterion of interest. It is useful for

quality assurance (Marshall and Rossman 2010, p. 111). Based on members' information from various publications and organizations' websites, I assumed that there would be different types of organizational members, including founding members, general members, volunteers, paid full-time staff, paid part-time staff, honorary members, and male employees. Therefore, I would include participants from every category to get a wide range of data about their individual experiences. In addition, I thought there would be a large number of female members and employees in the four organizations. With criterion sampling, snowball sampling would be helpful to select participants.

After starting field work, however, I found that only the Anti-Discriminatory Group had a large number of members and employees, while the other three organizations had a small group of members but a large number of paid employees. Therefore, based on the criterion sampling technique, I selected three types of participants: founding members, general members and employees. Other criteria included participants from different committees, work groups, and departments. I found male employees occupied many positions especially in the upper-ranked such as director, manager, coordinator, administration and finance officer. Thus, I included a few of them to obtain their views of and understanding of structure, decision making and women's empowerment.

The total number of participants was 36 women and seven men. Nine female participants were selected from each organization, including one founding member, and two or three general members and employees. I selected only women who had been involved for a minimum of two years to ensure considerable experience with their respective organizations. Among the seven male participants, three were from the Activist Women's Organization, two from the Women's Union and two from the Women's Rights League. All male participants were paid employees, as

there were no male members in these organizations. After starting the main field research, I requested the lists of all four organizations' members and employees so that I could begin sampling participants. Yet none of these organizations made available any official copy of its member or employee lists. Only the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union provided me a hand written list of its members, which was incomplete. However, an administrative staff in the Anti-Discriminatory Group informed me that it did not have any updated official member list at that moment; therefore, I should talk with members to get a possible list of current active members. Later, I talked with the current president, but she was also not positive about the members' list. Hence, I used snowball sampling for this organization. The participants recommended other people. For example, during an interview with Shoheli Ahmed, she suggested that I could talk with two other long-term active members Sonia Sultana and Farhana Parvin. On the other hand, the Women's Rights League did not give me any official or unofficial list of members or employees. I talked with my contact person and gathered the names of a few long-term employees who were the participants from this organization.

Entering the Field

Getting access in the field for collecting data is an important step in the whole research process, and it is not always easy for researchers. To enter a research setting requires an appropriate approach to the organization's authorized persons either in a letter or email, or by phone. I started to contact the four organizations via email with a brief introduction of myself, my academic background and a description of my research objective, the reason I chose their organizations, work plan, and a tentative time frame for the field work. It also included consent forms and confidentiality issues. I had assumed being a native student researcher from a foreign

university would make it easier for me to gain accessibility. Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses, even a month after first contact, from any of these organizations. Therefore, I contacted all offices over the phone and got permission to attend a weekly meeting from the Anti-Discriminatory Group. During the meeting, I explained my research purpose, presented my work plan, and immediately got permission for further research. Even though entering into the Anti-Discriminatory Group was easy, getting information and setting up interviews went less smoothly. It took almost two months before starting interviews, as most of the members and employees were busy with their various projects, and many did not regularly attend meetings. By this time, I attended their weekly meetings, reviewed documents, and tried to develop rapport with members and employees. I had to ask the administrative officer and sometimes various members for any documents from their office.

For the Women's Union, I was able to contact a project coordinator, and he took a week to give me an appointment with the executive director who is the second top person after the president in the organization. After listening to my purpose, the executive director was not very interested at first, but when I expressed interest in being a part of any of their projects and helping them in exchange for my research in the organization, she allowed it. The executive director informed the administrative officer, and she approved my examining the requested documents. She allowed me to sit in the office where all assistant coordinators work. The administrative officer introduced me to all of the project coordinators, assistant coordinators and other employees who welcomed me warmly.

Compared to the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Women's Union, getting permission, developing rapport, and conducting research at the Activist Women's Organization were easy and organized. I contacted this organization over the phone, and on my first attempt I

reached the director of the organization. He was very nice and supportive. He requested that I allow him couple of days to talk with the executive director and others. After three days, I received an email granting me permission and providing me with an appointment with him. During the first day, I met with the executive director, who was very enthusiastic about my research and all other employees in the office. On the same day they provided me with all requested documents and a work station with a computer.

The most difficult initial contact was with the Women's Rights League. I contacted them over the phone a couple of times and visited the office twice before getting limited access for interviews and document review. I was not allowed to attend any meetings. A few requested documents including its constitution, gender policy, and meeting minutes were not available for review. The employees were not comfortable talking with me. My contact person informed me that their internal evaluation and a few organizational changes were under process at that time, and their executive members, director and employees were busy. For this reason, they could not allow any outsiders. From limited observation my understanding was that because I did not have the permission of the executive director, employees were not interested in talking with me.

Data Collection and Analysis

I used three methods of collecting data: observation, interviews, and document review. Participant observation was conducted in each of the research sites. Observational materials were amplified by the semi-structured interviews with selected participants of each of the organizations. An open-ended questionnaire was used to gather data from these participants during the interviews.

Interviews

The interview is one of the central forms of gathering data in qualitative research. This method allows research participants to express their own perspective to others in their own words. Research interviews are based on conversations between participant and researcher where the researcher mainly decides the purpose and structure of interview. Interviews can be structured, unstructured, and semi-structured.

Semi-structured interviews were used with a number of members and staff from three organizations. A set of open-ended questions (Appendix D) asking for written responses, was used only for the employees of the Women's Rights League, as they were not comfortable giving oral interviews. I used two different sets of interview guides (Appendix D and E) with specific questions that were organized by topic for executive directors and for members and employees. I did not ask all questions in the same order. Instead, the flow of the interviews depended on the answers of the participants. I started interviews with the executive directors with the question of organizational history, while the general members' and employees' interviews began with the reasons behind joining their respective organizations. Before starting every interview, I informed participants that all forms of identity and provided information would be kept secret. I provided a written consent form, and allowed them to read it (Appendix A and B). The interview time was from 40 minutes to an hour and half.

Interviews were recorded on a tape recorder after getting participants' permission. I transcribed all recordings. All interviews were conducted in Bangla (the local native language). Later, with the permission of dissertation committee members, only a few parts were translated by a professional translator. Because of the confidential nature of the interviews, I scrubbed all identifying data from each transcript in accordance with IRB requirements. I used pseudonyms

of all organizations and participants. I will keep copies of the interview recordings as the primary investigator under IRB guidelines until 2015. Afterward, all evidence will be destroyed.

In the original research design, I planned to interview 40 women from the four organizations. After starting the field work, I discovered that there were not enough female members and employees in three of the organizations (all except the Anti-Discriminatory Group), who could be participants. Therefore, a total of 36 women were selected as research participants. Among them, I formally interviewed 27 women. All interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis. Participants from the Women's Rights League were not comfortable with the formal interview process. Also, I did not have enough access to talk with them informally. Therefore, I made an open-ended questionnaire with all interview questions and requested that they answer as many as possible during their free time. I provided the questionnaire to a total of nine women, but only seven with partial answers were returned.

Informal conversation was also a part of this research. During the participant observation phase, I had many conversations that helped me to build rapport and obtain information about respondents' personal lives. Even though including male participants was not in the initial research plan, after starting work I found that a few male employees have been playing an important role in these organizations. Hence, I had semi-formal conversations with several male participants to find their perspectives on women's empowerment and the role of the organizations.

Observation

Another important source of data is observation. This is a research technique where the researcher can see the participants' activities in a natural setting without interrupting. It involves systematic noting and recoding of events, behavior, and activities. Observation could be covert

or overt (Bailey 2007, p. 80). Also, this could be structured, unstructured or a combination of both. Structured observations have a specific guideline, schedule and settings, while unstructured observations are more flexible and do not have particular setting. Observation could be held at any time even during at in-depth interview, where researchers have to observe and take notes of participant's body language, tone of voice, facial expression, and gestures with their words (Marshall and Rossman 2010). Regarding the researcher's involvement, observation can be participant and non-participant (Bailey 2007; Yin 2003). In participant observation, the researcher normally takes part in the activities with research subjects and observes. In non-participant observation, the researcher only observes.

Due to ethical concerns, observation in this research was overt. Before starting the field work, I informed the executive director of each organization about the plan of the observation. It was undertaken in four research settings between January and August 2011. Observation in the Anti-Discriminatory Group, the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union was intensive, while in the Women's Rights League it was limited. The duration of the field observation was five to eight months. I also used a combination of structured and unstructured and participant and non-participant observation. To gather data from observations, I made a list of indicators of the organization's structure and decision making processes (Appendix C).

Observation plots included the participants' regular activities, members and employees' weekly meetings, a few executive committee meetings, and group activities. Observations during the meetings were mostly structured because I tried to find the patterns of participants' involvement and organizational decision making from these sessions. The observation time ranged from approximately one to three hours. A majority of the observation was participatory observation because I was involved with projects. When I contacted the organizations for the

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first time, I noticed that people were not very comfortable with my research and presence at their workplace. Therefore, I decided that if I could participate in any of their activities, it would help me build rapport quickly, observe participants' regular activities and their level of involvement in person, and find inside information. In this way, I became involved with a few of their regular project activities, weekly meetings, and group work and observed closely. Additionally, I took field notes both during and immediately after the observed events. Later, I used information from these observations to cross check the data from interviews and informal conversation. The fourth organization, the Women's Rights League, did not allow me to attend any meetings. Also, my access to the employees' work area was not on a regular basis. Therefore, documents, the interview questionnaire, and limited informal conversation with few employees were used to obtain necessary information.

Document Review

I examined written documents from each of the organizations. These included the constitution, gender policy, human resource policy, funding proposals, organizational strategic plans, evaluation reports, meeting minutes, annual reports, journals, website, different publications, newsletters, brochures and other materials. The purpose of this document review was mainly to understand the organizational history, change over time, structure, rules and regulations, management process, routine activities. The initial review of the organizations' websites helped in understanding the organizations' visions, missions and objectives. I also see documents to verify information from other publications and interviews. This technique helped to uncover topics for more informal conversation.

Analysis of documents has both advantages and disadvantages. For example, documents are stable because researchers can review them repeatedly. Also, changes in many events and

settings are covered over a long span of time. The main disadvantage is lack of accessibility. For example, during my field research, two organizations did not provide their constitutions, and three organizations did not allow me to review their meeting minutes and notes. All of their annual reports were mainly displays of the positive aspects of the organizations.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data include words and observations of participants' expressions. Analysis and interpretation of data are required to bring order and understanding of these words and expressions. Sometimes, data collection and the process of analysis run parallel, and data collection could change based on initial interpretation of data. A majority of data of the organizational structures and decision making were gathered from the observations and document reviews based on the indicators I made before starting the fieldwork. With coding, I tried to find patterns, themes and develop categories. Afterward, the coding was organized into groups of codes, clusters, sub-clusters and sub-groups. From these sub-clusters, patterns, themes and categories were emerged. I found several patterns: all four organizations have committees, boards, board members, regular meetings, written documents, and rules and regulations. Based on these patterns, data were placed in categories: e.g., complexity, formalization, and centralized and decentralized decision making points, active participation, limited participation, long-term effects. After that, I interpreted what I had learned from the data. This interpretation provided a sequence of meanings of themes, categories and patterns of data. This process is called "telling the story" (Marshall and Rossman 2010, p. 219). I used important segments of data to support the interpretation. In addition, data were always cross checked with observations, interviewees' answers and documents that I got from various sources.

All interviews were transcribed. Interview questions focused on two areas: participants'
involvement in the organization's decision making and empowerment in their lives. I focused on
each question to look at how individuals responded. Afterward, I organized data by questions
and looked across all answers of the participants to identify patterns.

Limitations of Research

During this research I have to face some limitations. The first was the short period of
time of the research. This fieldwork was conducted in a 10 month period, making it impossible to
observe an organization for a long time. Also, branch offices, which are an important part of plan
implementation, were not part of the research because of distance, limited time and funds.

Second was limited accessibility to observe organizational activities, interview members
and employees, and review documents. I had only limited access to members' meetings in two
organizations while the scope of observation and interviews was limited in another organization.
No organization allowed me to review its budgets and financial reports. Also, access to
documents was restricted.

Another limitation was that I was unable to observe participants' decision making in their
personal lives, which is important for evidence of empowerment. Information from interviews
was the only available source.

Generalization based on the findings of this research is questionable due to the small
numbers of cases and participants. Another limitation is that this research has some bias toward
democratic organizational forms and participatory decision making approaches. I continue to
believe this is an appropriate system of organizational management and that this system can
promote empowerment among people.

Description of Cases

      This section briefly describes each of the focal organizations. These descriptions include organizational formation, working areas, major activities, members and employees, and financial sources.

Anti-Discriminatory Group

      The Anti-Discriminatory Group is a women's organization established in the early 1980s by a group of young women from different professions. Their common dream was to create an autonomous space for women so that they can raise their own voices, work for the advancement of women's rights, and build resistance against violence, discrimination and injustice. During a three-day workshop on women and development, where more than 30 female workers from different NGOs shared their personal and working experiences, they realized the links between women's personal experience and social discrimination. The Anti-Discriminatory Group was created to build a collective identity among women and to pursue their vision of social change and women's liberation.

      Activities of this organization are related to gender justice, including advocacy campaigns, lobbying, workshops, research, discussions, cultural events, training, and participatory discussion forums. Discussions form the basis of the organization's programs and activities. it has specific projects as well. Currently, the Anti-Discriminatory Group has been working in six inter-related thematic areas: equality and political empowerment of women, reducing violence against women and women's human rights, women's health and reproductive rights, gender issues in the environment, cultural politics and representation of women, and communal harmony.

Significant activities of the Anti-Discriminatory Group include a number of protests on the issues of equal citizenship and secularism (since it has not been able to change the state's decision, this remains an ongoing concern for the organization); a national conference of women's organizations; workshop of acid survivors; and promoting human rights for sex workers. The main focus of the conferences was to represent women as development workers rather than development recipients.

Shahana Rahman, one of the founders, said that grassroots women's experience during various workshops helped them to determine the base of the organization:

> From the start we opted for a strategy that stressed process over blueprint, and a process that entailed continuous learning and clarification based on the participation of women and the sharing of first-hand experiences. We wanted engagement on the basis of personal identification with the issues. As a result, every issue that we have taken up has a basis in the reality of our lives and of women's lives more generally. We say that "we speak about ourselves and we speak for ourselves" (Shahana Rahman).

The organization's main financial sources are members' fees, members' donations, members' fundraising activities for the organization, and foreign, government and personal donations. Its foreign donors include the Asia Foundation, Oxfam-GB, Asian Development Bank, Department of International Development – UK, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and UNICEF (Website 2011). The Anti-Discriminatory Group is supported by its members' wide variety of skills and expertise in different disciplines contributed through their voluntary time and funds.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group is mostly operated by its two types of members, primary and general, and paid employees. It has almost 120 members and 50 full time paid staff. Among these paid staff, almost half are also primary members of the organization. All of its members are women. To continue its operation, the organization needs a minimum of 21 members. Any

Bangladeshi woman who is 18 or more years old and not a member of any political party can be a member of this group. Every member has to pay $0.25[5] per month. If necessary, any member can be exempt from paying monthly fees. If any general member does not pay monthly fees without any exemption, she cannot vote, even if she attends the general meeting. A person's membership could be canceled if she acts against the best interest of the organization, becomes a member of any partisan politics or withdraws her membership.

Activist Women's Organization

During the early 1980s, when many NGOs had been providing services and relief without thinking of the root causes of poverty and discrimination in the authoritarian and patriarchal Bangladeshi system, a group of women realized that grassroots women were ignored by the partisan politics and even by the women's movement since upper class women were mostly involved with the women's movement. This group believed that without grassroots women, women's rights would not be established in Bangladesh. With this realization, they began to consider starting a NGO for women's empowerment. Before that, during the late 1970s, one of the founders observed the lack of women's representation at the senior levels of most professions and discrimination against women in the workplace. Therefore, this group developed an organizational goal, objective, and core values after discussion of two years, and signed the formal document of a new NGO.

After successfully operating for more than 15 years, the organization had to face a challenging situation in running its activities. This situation hampered its receiving foreign donations, and forced it to adopt many changes. During this crisis time, it maintained a low profile and continued with only a few of its advocacy and networking activities in collaboration

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[5] One dollar is equivalent to 80 Bangladeshi taka; 20 taka is $0.25.

with other like-minded organizations, networks, and individuals. Beginning in 2007, the situation changed, and this organization renewed its registration for receiving funds from foreign donors.

The Activist Women's Organization works as a "catalyst and a facilitator" for women's equal rights and empowerment from the family to the state levels (Annual Report 2012). It follows a rights-based approach by linking community to the national level. The vision of the organization is "A society that is free from all sorts of discrimination against women and where women enjoy equal rights and status in all spheres of life from family to state." (Website 2011) The core activities of the Activist Women's Organization are institution building; awareness raising; livelihood activities; reforms of different policies; systems and mindsets; and advocacy and lobbying. The program principles are participation, changing mindsets, geographical focus, experimentation and learning, and micro-macro linkage (Website 2011). The Activist Women's Organization believes its "friendly and family-like working environment, cooperative mentality and teamwork, and non-hierarchical management with an activist orientation are the assets of the organization's ongoing successes" (Strategic plan report 2008-2012).

Foreign donations are the main financial source of funding. This organization received its first foreign donations from the Church World Service in New York. With this money, it established a formal office and started projects in two areas. During the 1990s, it started to receive more foreign funding from European countries such as Germany, the UK, France and Sweden. During an interview, the executive director mentioned that it is very selective in terms of foreign donations. The Activist Women's Organization first reviews the situation, identifies its strategy and then looks for funding opportunities. She also mentioned that if the organization believes a donor is placing any kind of restrictions, it is not afraid of saying no. Rasheda Jaman, an employee added: "Our organization does not receive funding from all donors. Our ED is very

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selective and very careful about donors. If any donor's policy does not match our organizational interests and if they try to control our activities, we do not agree to work with them, even they offer us a good funding" (Rasheda Jaman).

The Activist Women's Organization has two types of board members: general body and executive committee members. The executive committee, which is composed of seven to 13 members, is elected by the 34 general body members. The executive committee includes a chairperson, two vice chairpersons, a member secretary, a treasurer and two to eight general members. The executive director is the member secretary. Any woman who is 18 or more years old, believes in women's empowerment and equality, and is of Bangladeshi nationality can be a member regardless of caste, creed or religion. Every member has to pay $1.50 in annual fees. A member can continue her membership indefinitely as long as she pays her annual fees. However, disciplinary measures would be taken against any member if she acted against the best interest of the organization, declaration and constitution, or was involved in activities that ruin the reputation of the organization.

This women's organization has two groups of paid staff: those at the Dhaka central office and staff at centers outside of Dhaka city. The total number of staff is approximately 60. The central office staff includes the executive director, director, deputy director, project coordinators, training offices, financial, administrative and human resource officers, internal auditors, and support staff (receptionist, driver, office attendant). In addition, every center includes a manager, a development officer, a program officer, three community organizers, and finance officers. The majority of the central office staff is female, except the director, two coordinators, and the administrative and finance heads. In contrast, of the five center managers, four are male. Almost all community organizers who work directly in the field are female. During the research period,

this organization had a comparatively smaller number of paid employees at the central office than the other organizations. In its crisis time, many long-term staff had to leave the organization. After surviving, the size of its staff has been increasing. However, during this research, there was no designated project coordinator for any particular project.

Approximately 50 percent of the current employees have been working at the organization for more than ten years, while relatively few have been working 15 to 18 years. All worked during its crisis period sometimes for lower pay. According to the employees, they remained with the organization in solidarity because it had become a part of their lives. Most of these long-term employees joined the organization first as volunteers. After three to six months, they got job offers and started work permanently. Still, the Activist Women's Organization encourages and provides opportunities for those who are interested in volunteer work.

	Anti-Discriminatory Group	Activist Women's Organization	Women's Union	Women's Rights League
Age	Almost 30 years	26 years	22 years	22 years
Size of Annual Budget	Mid-Size 6-10 cror BD TK	Mid-Size 6-10 cror BD TK	Mid-Size 6-10 cror BD TK	Mid-Size 6-10 cror BD TK
Legal status	National NGO. Registered with the Directorate of Women Affairs and NGO Affairs Bureau	National NGO. Registered with the Directorate of Women Affairs and NGO Affairs Bureau	National NGO. Registered with the Directorate of Women Affairs and NGO Affairs Bureau	National NGO. Registered with the Directorate of Women Affairs and NGO Affairs Bureau
Location	Main office: Dhaka	Main office: Dhaka	Main office: Dhaka	Main office: Dhaka
Main Focus	Social, political & economic empowerment.	Social, political & economic empowerment.	Women workers social, political & economic empowerment.	Women and girls social, political & economic empowerment

Sex of Members	Members: All Female Employees: All Female	Members: All Female. Employees: Mixed-sex but majority female	Members: All Female. Employees: Mixed-sex but majority female	Members: All Female. Employees: Mixed-sex but majority female

Table 1: Comparison of Cases

Table 1 shows a comparison of four organizations. All four organizations are more than 20 years old, mid-sized and the main offices are located in the capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka. These are all national NGOs registered with the Directorate of Women Affairs and NGO Affairs Bureau. The main focus are social, political and economic empowerment of women. Women's Union mainly works with female workers. All members and majority employees in these organizations are female while there are few male employees in the Activist Women's organization, Women's Union and Women's Rights League.

Women's Union

The Women's Union is one of the leading national women's organizations that works with female workers, emphasizing their empowerment, rights, respect and authority. It was founded in the 1990s by a group of young women led by one with experiences in leftist student politics, labor, and socio-cultural movements. It started operation first in an industrial area that was devastated by the structural adjustment program of international financial institutions. From the late 1990s, besides organizing female workers in the industrial sector, it started working with female workers both in the formal and informal sectors[6].

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[6] According to ILO website (2013), "…it most often means poor employment conditions and is associated with increasing poverty. Some of the characteristic features of informal employment are lack of protection in the event of non-payment of wages, compulsory overtime or extra shifts, lay-offs without notice or compensation, unsafe working conditions and the absence of social benefits such as pensions, sick pay and health insurance. Women,

The main areas of the Women's Union's involvement are gender equality, workers'

rights, and economic justice. Even though this organization started working with only women

and female workers' issues, it soon realized all workers in the informal sector were deprived and

vulnerable. Therefore, it extended its work to include all workers including industrial workers;

women in readymade garment factories; agricultural, migrant, and domestic workers; small and

marginal farmers; and landless groups.

The primary focus of the Women's Union is "Gender sensitivity and promotion of

women's rights and equal access for women in all the program and project" (Official profile).

This organization believes all movements are part of the greater movement for social change,

and it participates and cooperates mostly in society's democratic transformation. The Union's

mission is "To develop an organization of women-workers and movements through participation

with women-workers, women and laborers and likeminded individuals, initiatives, institutions

and movements" (Official profile).

The organizational geographical coverage is much of the entire country. It works in 35

(out of 65) districts under all six divisions. Among the 35, 10 are covered through direct program

implementation by the organization itself, and others are covered through its network partners.

By 2010, the Women's Union had reached about one-half million female workers in both the

formal and informal sectors. Foreign donations are its main funding source. During my research,

it implemented different projects supported by national and international donors including

Oxfam GB, Oxfam Novib, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The Women's Union is governed by a general committee of 35 members, an executive

committee of 11 members, and a Program Management Team (PMT). The general committee is

migrants and other vulnerable groups of workers who are excluded from other opportunities have little choice but to take informal low-quality jobs." http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/employment-promotion/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm

the highest authority, while the PMT is the lower level of management authority. The executive committee, whose members are elected by the general committee, has a president, a general secretary, and a treasurer. Even though the president's position is permanent, other board members are elected for two year terms. A total of 134 paid staff (86 female and 48 male) operate the activities. These includes an executive director (female), three directors (one female and two male), five coordinators (four female and one male) for different projects, three assistant coordinators, finance, administrative officers at the central office, and other staff at the centers. Any Bangladeshi woman at least 18 or older who believes in women's empowerment and equality can be a member of the general committee. Members have to pay $2.50 annually. The organization sometimes sends membership invitations to women who could be valuable for the organization.

Women's Rights League

The Women's Rights League was founded in the early 1990s to promote gender equality and human rights and to foster the personal empowerment of women in Bangladesh. This organization aims to mobilize women both as beneficiaries and agents of change to transform development policy and programs. The organizational vision is "To create an enabling environment for gender mainstreaming, promotion of human rights, and socio-economic and political empowerment of women." (Website 2011). The League is based in Dhaka with regional offices throughout the country.

The Women's Rights League's main work strategy is influencing governmental policies by advocacy and lobbying; networking with government organizations, NGOs, private sector and women's groups; training on human rights and gender equality; political process at the local

level; campaign; consultancy; project activities; policy research on gender. The League primarily provides support for capacity building, networking, and human rights advocacy for women. Its areas of development focus are gender training, capacity building, and advice to increase women's confidence, self-esteem, skills and competence to promote and protect rights and equality. It is also involved in gender responsive poverty alleviation and community health care services.

Like the other three organizations, the Women's Rights League depends on foreign funding. Its major foreign donors are Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), Christofell the Blinder Mission (CBM), Germany, Canadian International Development Agencies (CIDA), the British High Commission of Dhaka, SOLS-France, the Urgent Action Fund, Global Fund for Women, the Tides Foundation of the USA and the Netherlands. It also receives government funds, private and personal donations and member dues.

The Women's Rights League has about 116 paid staff; field level employees consist of 69 males and 47 females (Annual Report 2008-09). According to an employee, in the Dhaka office almost 60 percent of the employees are female. However, from annual reports and my limited observation, I found that most of the staff in the Dhaka office and most of those in managerial positions are men. Most of the female staff work at the field level.

Chapter Three

Organizational Structures of Women's Organizations in Bangladesh

Many organizational theorists maintain that to understand the whole organization, it should be viewed as a system (Daft 1998; Robbins 1990). Systems can be classified as being either closed or open. A closed system is typically autonomous, enclosed, not dependent, and does not interact with its external environment. On the other hand, an open system interacts with the environment and depends on it for resources and survival. An organization is an open system. It extracts resources (inputs) from the external environment, processes, transforms, and then delivers outputs to the environment. For any organization, inputs may include employees, information, financial resources, and raw materials, while outputs may include products and services, employee satisfaction, pollution and other byproducts of the transformation process (Daft 1998, p. 14).

Every organization has a certain structure. Organizations could have multiple structures. Organizational structure provides a framework for the responsibilities of employees, reporting relationships, lines of authority, decision making power, linking and coordinating organizational resources from the environment, patterns of information flow, communication through the levels of management and others. An organizational organogram or chart shows the formal organizational structure. Organizational charts reflect if the organization has a more hierarchical or a flatter structure. Organizational structure depends on the goals and strategies of the organization, its client base, its services, and its management. Formal structure may be affected by public laws, the demands or requirements of other organizations.

To understand an organization, its design and structures are important. I imply Daft's (1998) organizational design dimensions: structural and contextual (p.15). In a recent edition Daft refers to the contextual dimensions as "contingency" dimensions (Daft 2013). Structural dimensions are the internal characteristics of an organization that make up an organization's structure. Structural dimensions have three core components: complexity of activities, degree of formalization, and decision making point (Daft 1998, 2013; Robbins 1990). Within these core components, other components are hierarchy of authority, span of control, specialization, standardization, and professionalism (Daft 1998, 2013; Robbins 1990). On the other hand, contingency dimensions are the whole organization and its external environments including size, technology, organizational culture, statutes, goals, strategies, donor requirements for structural accountability, social and cultural norms (Daft 1998, 2013). Both types of dimensions interact with each other to accomplish the goal(s) of an organization.

Bureaucratic organization is one of the common organizational forms. Some refer to any organizations that have non-bureaucratic structures as alternative or collective organizations (Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Rothschild 2000; 2006). As mentioned earlier, Rothschild-Whitt (1979) highlighted two ideal type organizations: bureaucratic organizations and collectivist democratic organizations. The eight characteristics of these ideal types can fit under the Daft's three structural dimensions (see Table 2)

Characteristics of Two Ideal Types	Structural Dimensions
Social Stratification, Differentiation	Complexity
Rules, Social Relations, Recruitment and Advancement, Incentive Structure	Formalization
Authority, Social Control	Centralization/Decentralization

Table 2: Characteristics of organizations and structural dimensions

In this chapter based on my observations, interviews and other evidence, I will apply Table 2 to describe the structural dimensions of four organizations in Bangladesh. It will help us to determine whether four organizations are either collectivist-democratic or hierarchical. These dimensions relate to an organization's decision making process and the way it works for women's empowerment. Before exploring the structural form of each of the four organizations, I will briefly describe what these components of structural dimensions refer to. In addition, discussing the components of the four organizations will help to clarify the relationship between the structural dimensions and being more or less democratic. Organizations that are more complex, more formalized, and have more central decision making authority tend to be more hierarchical or less democratic. Organizations that are comparatively less complex, informal, with less centralized decision making authority, and more employees from lower levels in the organizational decision making process tend to be non-hierarchical, participatory collectivist democratic organizations.

Organizational Structures of Women's Organizations in Bangladesh

The purpose of this section is to more fully describe the structural form of each organization to identify how their authorities work, whether these organizations are more or less formalized, whether they emphasize employees' involvement, their processes of information flow, and other management issues. Every organization's individual structural form helps one better understand its operational system and management style that are associated with the effectiveness of the organization to achieve its goals. For example, if the structure of an organization is highly formalized and bureaucratic and emphasizes hierarchy, there is normally a narrow opportunity for involvement of employees from lower levels in the decision making

process. In contrast, informal or less formalized and flatter structural form allows more opportunities for employees to be involved in decision making.

Complexity of Activities

The complexity of activities of an organization refers to the degree of differentiation or number of activities that exist within it (Robbins 1990; Daft 1998, 2013). Complexity can be vertical, horizontal or spatial. Vertical complexity refers to the depth of the organizational hierarchy, while horizontal complexity is the number of job titles or departments that span the organization. Spatial complexity refers to the degree to which the location of an organization's offices and employees is spread geographically (Robbins 1990, p. 89). For example, some organizations have only a few braches in a few locations, while others have branches all over a country or the world. Rothschild's (1979, 1986) social stratification and differentiation characteristics are similar to this dimension because both social and job differentiation increase complexity in the organizational structure.

The complexity of an organization increases when the level of hierarchy increases. Hierarchy refers to an organizational system based on top-down flow of power, where according to Weber, "each lower officer is controlled and supervised by a higher one" (Iannello 1992, p. 16). For Iannello (1992), "Hierarchy can be defined as a vertical and horizontal system of domination with varying degrees of centralized communication" (p.17). In a hierarchical system, power is centralized. Power can reduce individual's autonomy, freedom, spontaneity, creativity, dignity and independence (Perrow 1986, p. 26). Coordination and specialization are key elements of hierarchy.

According to Perrow (1986), the span of control is the building block of hierarchy (p. 29). Span of control is the number of employees that are supervised and controlled directly by a higher officer; it can be narrower or wider. When a higher officer controls few people, the span of control would be narrow, and organizational level of authority would be taller. Contrarily, when a superior controls many subordinates, the span of control would be wider and authority level would be flatter (see Figure 1).
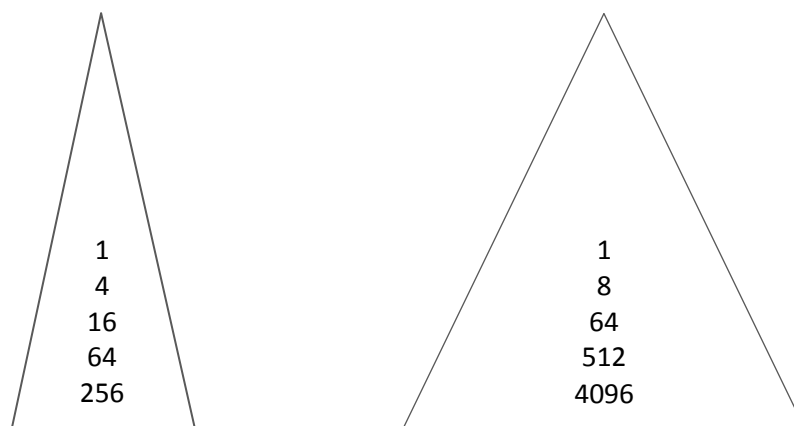
Figure 1: Span of Control

Source: Robbins 1990, p. 93

Tall organizational structures provide close supervision and control, but can complicate coordination and communication because of the many levels of authority. However, a flat structure has a shorter communication system and less opportunity for close supervision as each superior has to manage many subordinators (Perrow 1986; 2000). Therefore, organizational systems with flat and wide spans of control provide opportunities for more participation for lower level employees.

Among the four cases, the Anti-Discriminatory Group has less complexity, less hierarchy and a wider span of control, while the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League have greater hierarchy, complexity and narrower spans of control. The organizational chart of the Anti-Discriminatory Group (see Figure 2) demonstrates that this organization has lower vertical and horizontal complexity and a relatively wide span of control.
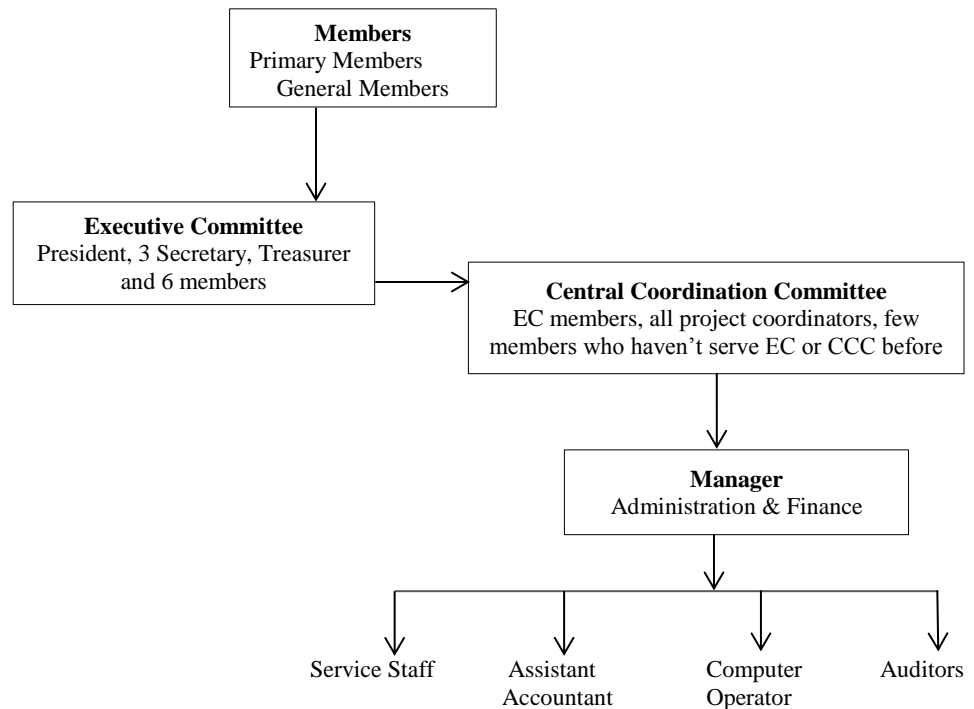
Figure 2: Organogram of the Anti-Discriminatory Group

Source: Provided by Anti-Discriminatory Group's members

The Anti-Discriminatory Group has only vertical hierarchies, which mean shallow hierarchy. There is no spatial differentiation because this organization is located only in Dhaka. It works all over the country through networking with other autonomous organizations. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has less horizontal complexity because there are few job titles and departments, and it has only different committees. One person can be a member of several

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different committees at the same time. The Group does not have any strict job titles for its members, but it has designated administrative and finance departments that are staffed by paid employees but supervised and approved by the executive committee. This system helps members and employees interact easily with each other, reduces the chance of oligarchy and allows people to play their role autonomously.

The complex part of the Anti-Discriminatory Group is the categories of its membership and the lengthy process of getting final membership. It has two different types of memberships: primary and general. If an interested woman wants to be a primary member, she has to attend meetings and volunteer in organizational activities for at least six months. Afterward, she has to submit a written application to the central coordination committee. If the committee approves, she receives a primary membership. During the first six months of membership, a new member learns about the organization's values, objectives, principles, goals, and activities. Primary members do not have voting rights. A paid staffer could be a primary member after finishing all procedures.

After six months of having primary membership, if a member wants to get general membership, she has to submit another written application to the executive committee. If this committee approves, she gets general membership and enjoys voting rights. Primary member who is also a paid employee of the organization is not eligible for the general membership. Primary members normally enjoy the same rights as general members and have almost the same responsibilities except for voting rights and electing a member of the executive committee and the central coordination committees. From informal conversation with different members I found that this organization does not refuse any application for general membership. A one year provisional period allows a new member to get involved with organizational activities and show

their dedication to the organization to become eligible for a permanent membership. For example, my own experience with this organization supports this observation. As a volunteer I had the opportunity to attend all weekly meetings, express my opinion, discuss any issues during meeting, and participate in the workshop.

Even though this different and complicated membership process is lengthy, the current members think this is a very clear cut and effective process that allows an interested woman to become a member after knowing the organizational values and objectives. According to one of its members Sonia Sultana,

> Sometimes many women get involved with an organization just for "time pass". They are not interested to take any serious responsibility, and after few months, they leave. However, in the Anti-Discriminatory Group, we allow them to come, observe and learn about our activities and then, when they would decide, they would go through our membership process and dedicate their expertise for the organization. (Sonia Sultana)

Compared to the Anti-Discriminatory Group, the other three organizations' membership processes are very simple. All three have only a few members in their general body and executive committee, while others who work for the organizations are paid employees. As Chapter Two mentioned, the Anti-Discriminatory Group is governed and operated by its own members with few paid employees. To the contrary, the other three organizations are operated mainly by the paid employees and governed by their members. These latter organizations have relatively few members, varying from 21 to 35. Two employees from different organizations mentioned that their organizations prefer to keep members in the general body and executive committee small because it is easy to communicate with all of them. However, sometimes members send membership invitations to educated, visible, vocal women of the society who could be valuable for the organization and provide advice and suggestions.

The Activist Women's Organization has moderate vertical, horizontal and spatial complexity. Organizational project activities are done by the coordinators with the direct supervision of the directors and the executive director. Even though there are six different coordinator's positions found in the organizational chart, in practice only five persons (three female and two male) are responsible for all six divisions, and the deputy director is one of them. In this organization, according to the employees, no single person is responsible for each project, and they do teamwork for everything. For example, there is a designated person for project monitoring and evaluation. This person also works for project implementation and advocacy. According to an employee, Shipa Rahman, the Activist Women's Organization does not have any project assistant coordinator or separate person for writing reports like many other organizations. All coordinators, who are responsible for any project, normally coordinate with the field, collect information, and update and write reports for that project. Other people also help each other when it is necessary.

The Activist Women's Organization has comparatively more hierarchy than the Anti-Discriminatory Group, but it has a flatter structure with a wider span of control than the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. According to the Activist Women's Organization's organizational chart (see Figure 3), the central office has six levels of hierarchy. In all four organizations except the Anti-Discriminatory Group, the executive director maintains liaison with the members of the general body, the executive committee and the organization's paid employees. The administrative and finance departments are supervised directly by the executive director.

General Body → Executive Committee → Executive Director → Director → Deputy Director

- Project Coordinators
- Coordinator Capacity Building/Training
- Coordinator PME
- Coordinator Program Implementation
- Coordinator Doc & Publication
- Coordinator Advocacy

Support Unit
- HR Officer
- Admin Officer
- Accounts Officer → Accountant
- Internal Auditor

Other Support Staff
Receptionist/Driver/Messenger

Center Office Report to Central Office

Center Manager
- Accountants → Support Staff
- Development Officers (Program & Capacity Building) → Community Organizers (Field level)
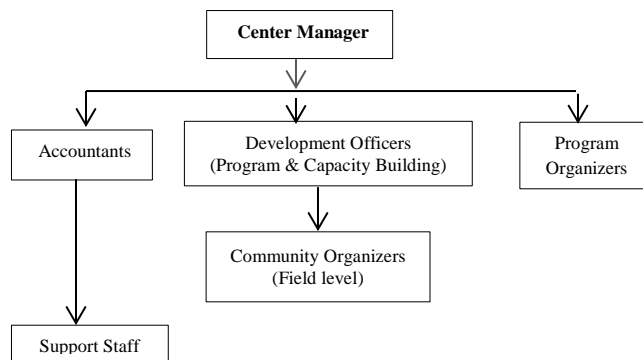- Program Organizers

Figure 3: Organogram of the Activist Women's Organization

Source: Activist Women's Organization's Annual Report 2010

The Activist Women's Organization does not have any rigid horizontal complexity because it has fewer employees work in few sections. However, it does have spatial complexity as it has five centers all over the country, but it is not as complex as the Women's Union. The center managers are in charge of their respective centers. All managers are directly accountable for their centers to the executive director, working through the coordinators and deputy director. Every center has its own accounting section that works under the supervision of the account section of the central office. The community organizers are lower level paid employees who work directly in the field and report to the development officer.

Of the four organizations, the most complex and hierarchical are the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. The Women's Union has nine and the Women's Rights League has seven levels of authority, which start from the executive committee and go down to the field workers. In both organizations, the general committee and the council are the highest authorities. The Women's Union has a tall functional structural form with a narrow span of control (see Figure 4). Several groups of employees work in the different sections according to their skills. These groups are directors, managers, project coordinators, assistant coordinators, program officers, human resource and finance officers, and office assistants.
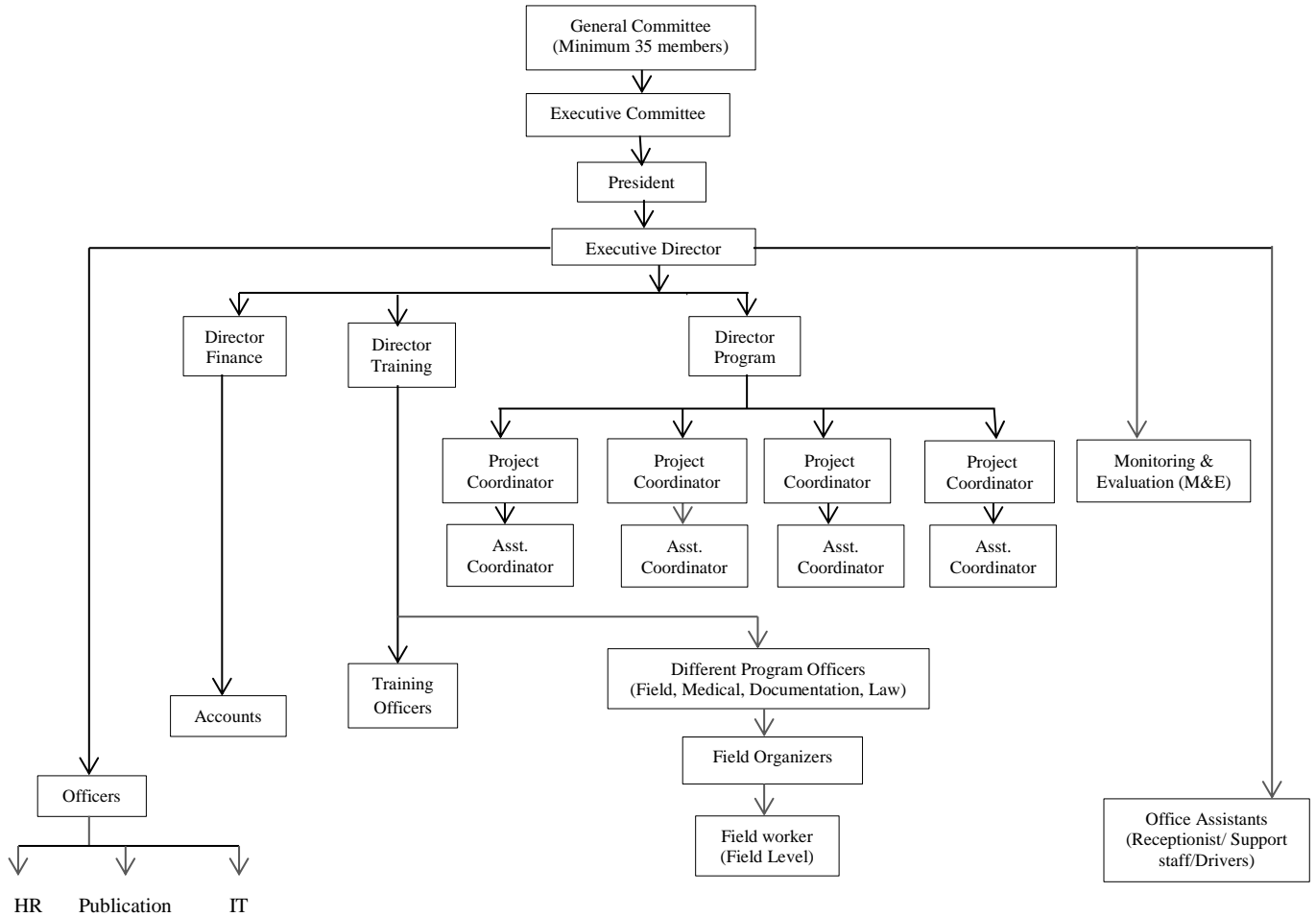
Figure 4: Organogram of the Women's Union

Source: Provided by Women's Union's Head Office

The Women's Union has vertical complexity and a narrow span of control; no one person supervises more than three or four others, and the span of control starts from the position of the executive director. The program directors are responsible for the different projects and programs, and four different project coordinators work under them. The reporting process is down-up, indicating internal hierarchy. The field organizers report to and communicate with assistant coordinators, and assistant coordinators report to project coordinators. The assistant coordinators, training officers and other officers always communicate with and frequently visit the field and

maintain liaison between the head office and the field offices. All directors, coordinators, assistant coordinators and officers work directly under the supervision of the executive director. All employees report to her through directors and project coordinators in most cases. The executive director gives answers to the executive committee members, and the executive committee seeks permission and approval from the general council/body.

Like the Women's Union, the Women's Rights League also has vertical as well as horizontal complexity. According to the organizational chart (see Figure 5), the managers conduct the main activities, followed by the senior program coordinators and associate program coordinators. There are more than eight managerial positions for different functions. The Women's Rights League is administered on a program-to-program basis under the direct guidance and leadership of the executive director with the support of three directors and all managers (Annual Report 2008-09). The line of accountability for program management begins from the main office and extends down to the field staff.

Field Level

Senior Program Coordinator for all projects

$\Downarrow$

Associate Program Coordinators for all projects

$\Downarrow$

All Programs Supervisors/Trainers/Program Organizers/Support Staff
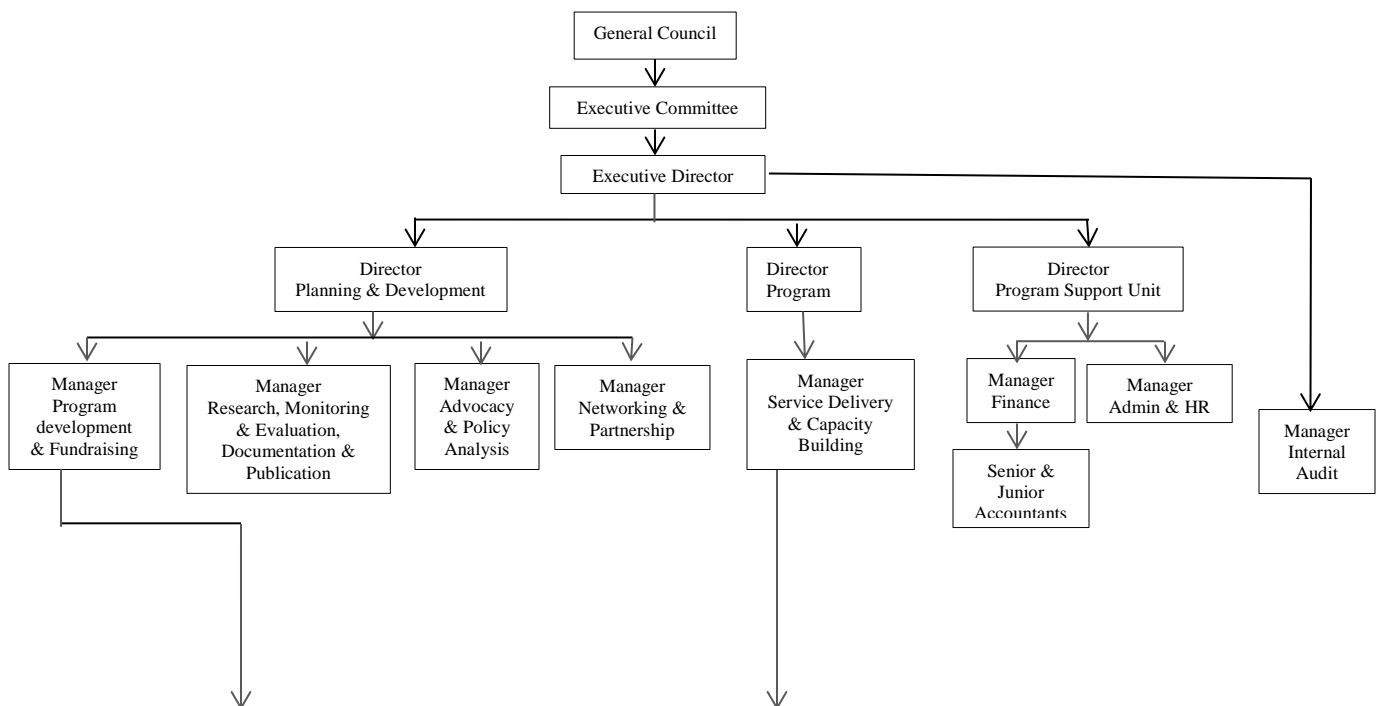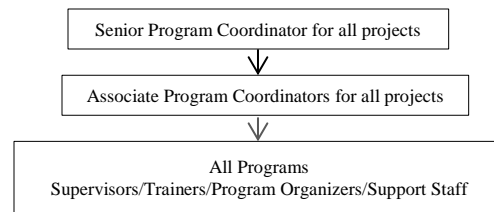
Figure 5: Organogram of the Women's Rights League

Source: Women's Rights League's Annual Report 2009

Formalization

Formalization refers to the number of written documents in an organization or the degree to which an organization tends to document its rules and regulations (Daft 1998, p. 14). Documentation could be written or non-written rules, job descriptions, regulations, policy manuals and any other official documents that employees require to follow to do their jobs in exactly the same way every time. Most of Rothschild's ideal typical characteristics such as rules, social relations, recruitment and advancement, and incentive structure are similar to this dimension. In a democratic organization, there are no formal rules, social relations are personal, recruitment is based on friends and informal skills, and incentives are normative and solidary. Highly formalized organizations have explicit job descriptions, many rules and regulations, clearly defined procedures for their employees, and policies or work manuals for most activities. Those that have minimal or no written rules and regulations are considered less formalized or informal organizations.

All four cases in this study are more or less formal. NGOs have to follow various rules and regulations of the home government and donors to operate their organizations appropriately and smoothly because contemporary NGOs are funded mostly by foreign donations. The Government of Bangladesh monitors all NGOs' projects and financial activities so that NGOs

cannot operate any activities against the government with foreign help. Therefore, NGOs must be registered[7] by the NGO Affairs Bureau and other related ministries. NGOs require renewing its registration every year. During registration time, NGOs have to submit its constitutions, final annual reports, financial reports, and sometimes project-by-project reports.

Sometimes NGOs also need to follow donors' financial management plans such as how much funding should go for training, staff salaries, project monitoring, and other expenses. Even though NGOs normally prepare budgets and donors provide funds based on the budgets, donors can make adjustments and put conditions on funding. NGOs sometimes have to follow outside rules as well as adopt various formal rules and regulations inside organizations. However, adoption and formalization of rules by different NGOs vary. Some NGOs strictly follow and operate activities based on formalized rules and regulations, while some prepare rules and regulations but do not follow them rigorously.

All four organizations have written constitutions that they follow regularly. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has a ten-page long constitution, which mainly includes objectives, conditions to be a member, rights and responsibilities of members, different committees and their responsibilities, the election process, financial policies, the rules of constitution amendment, and other organization-related issues. Its constitution is written in Bangla so that all members can read and understand it. In contrast, the Activist Women's Organization has a five-page declaration and constitution that is written in English. It mainly includes the structure and responsibilities of the general body and executive committee members. Based on my observation, it was clear that the Anti-Discriminatory Group strictly follows its constitution, while it does not have or follow other policy manuals or rules and regulations. The Activist

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[7] NGOs are registered by the NGO Affairs Bureau of the Government of Bangladesh under the Foreign Donation Regulation Ordinance.

Women's Organization does not strictly follow its constitution; however, it has other written policies and rules that it maintains for regular activities. The Women's Union and the Women's Rights League have constitutions, but they did not make them available to me. Based on interviews with the executive directors, it seemed that these two organizations also follow their constitutions.

Except for the Anti-Discriminatory Group, the three other organizations have various policies for handling and addressing gender, human resources, finance and operations. For example, the executive director of the Women's Union emphasized various policies and said that her organization manages all of its activities according to the constitution, human resources policy, the financial manual, the operational manual, gender policy, and other ad hoc policies as well as rules and regulations. This suggests that the Women's Union has a very formal management system.

Every organization has a gender policy[8]. The Women's Union's gender policy is long and written in English, while the Activist Women's Organization's gender policy is short, specific and written in Bangla. The Anti-Discriminatory Group does not have a gender policy. The Women's Rights League did not provide me its gender policy. In response to the question about having a gender policy for members and employees, the president of the Anti-Discriminatory Group Shoheli Ahmed said:

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[8] Here gender policy refers to organizations' commitment to support gender equality and non-discrimination. The goal of this policy is to provide a better and gender sensitive workplace for both women and men, promote equity and equality, eliminate discrimination, and create women-friendly work environment through affirmative discrimination, gender responsive programs, management, strategies and processes. According to the Activist Women's Organization gender policy is a policy that provide specific direction to change and improve the gender relations and create a gender sensitive workplace. All four organizations provide for three months maternity and two weeks paternity leave with pay, with the option of more unpaid leave. They allow women staff to bring children into the office or live with them in the field. The Activist Women's Organization allows its employees one hour break every day for children's school purposes or if they are sick. The goal of gender policy also is to prevent sexual harassment and make male staffers more gender-sensitive through training and discussion.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group is a member-based organization where all members are women and about 99 percent employees are female. We work for women. Hence, there is no discrimination against gender and we are concerned about our members and employees' rights and benefits. Therefore, we do not feel we need any separate gender policy (Shoheli Ahmed).

According to the president, all female and male employees enjoy the normal benefits that are set by the government for employees, for example, three months maternity leave and two weeks paternity leave, vacation, retirement. In contrast, the Activist Women's Organization strictly follows the gender policy in its central and center offices. It has few specific special benefits for its employees. For example, any coordinator or equivalent staff can use official vehicles during their field visits. However, in the Women's Union, only directors can use official vehicles, while sometimes coordinators can use them with special permission. Two other distinctive points about the Activist Women's Organization are that all female and male employees receive a maximum of one hour off from their daily regular office hours during children's sickness and for school purposes, and central and all center offices have separate restrooms for female and male employees. The Activist Women's Organization strictly follows the policy that a minimum of one third of its total employees must be male. On this point, the executive director said that even though the organization mainly works with and for women, if it only included women and isolated them from men, women's situation would be more vulnerable because they have to live in a patriarchal society that they are not yet able to change.

All four organizations have human resources management manuals. From different employees and different published documents, I found that every organization more or less follows such manuals; however, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League more strictly maintain their HR policies. According to its annual report "the Women's Rights League has been continuously upgrading and updating the human resource manual and strictly bounds

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within its developed HR policy. It believes Human Resources Management and Development is essential for best possible utilization of individual skills and intelligence for growth and development of the organization" (Annual Report 2008-09). There are no strict rules for reading the HR manuals. Nevertheless, management encourages employees and members to read it so that they know their responsibilities.

Each organization follows policy manuals to maintain their financial activities, as they must submit semi-annual and annual financial reports to the government and donors. They maintain accounts, bills, vouchers, cash books, and ledgers according to the guidelines of their financial manuals. The financial unit, or accounting section, produces financial reports of each project. Afterward, all the reports are submitted to the general committee for final approval and then to the donors. All financial reports have to be submitted to the government annually to renew organizational registrations.

Decision Making Points

Decision making can be either more centralized or more decentralized. Centralized/decentralized decision making refers to where decision making takes place and where the authority lies. This power could be in the hands of an individual or a group. Centralization refers to top-down arrangements for decision making. For example, if decision making takes place at the top of the organization by an individual or a group, and final decisions are directed to the bottom to follow, it is centralized. To the contrary, when decision making authority is not concentrated at the top level but is distributed among the different sectors and includes employees at multiple levels, it is referred to as decentralization. A major indicator of a centralized system is the degree of control a person or a group holds over the full decision

making process (Robbins 1990, p. 108). Rothschild and Whitt (1986) mention that the bureaucratic system uses centralized authority to gain social control, while the collectivist system refuses to legitimate the use of this process (p. 64).

The Women's Union has a more centralized process as all of its decisions are made by the members of the general committee and/or executive committee and the PMT. The central office in Dhaka makes and approves all policies, rules and regulations for the work stations all over the country. There is no direct involvement of lower level employees in decision making. Instead, such employees gather information and sometimes meet with upper management to update them on project activities.

Since the Women's Rights League did not provide any detailed information about its decision making or allow me to attend meetings, it is difficult to say whether this organization has a centralized or decentralized system. However, from the organizational chart it appears that like the Women's Union, all major decisions in the Women's Rights League are made in the central office by the executive committee and senior management group, which include executive directors and all project managers.

Compared to the Women's Union and Women's Rights League, the Activist Women's Organization has moderate centralization, a small number of employees, and all directors, project coordinators and training officers take part in initial discussion of a project. They also contribute to making the initial decisions with the executive director at the central office. Afterward, the general body and the executive committee make all final decisions, indicating a moderately centralized process. Still, the five center offices of the Activist Women's Organization have autonomy. Each conducts its own decision making for day-to-day activities and need based on the field situation and demand. Every center has a center manager who is the highest authority;

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yet all employees discuss and make initial decisions together, and the manager takes the final decision after discussing it with the central office.

Only the Anti-Discriminatory Group involves both primary and general members in its decision making, even though primary members have more limited rights than general members. This organization allows employees and volunteers in its regular discussions, and encourages them to provide their opinions. As the Anti-Discriminatory Group does not have any field offices, the centralization/decentralization process only works for the main office among groups and committees. All working groups make their project-related initial decisions after discussing with their group members. Afterward, the central coordination and executive committee discuss the final decisions with the members. In this sense, this organization is a decentralized organization.

Conclusion

Classical theory assumes that the best way to design organizations is a tall hierarchy with a narrow span of control, where managers are the supreme authority and should have tight control over their subordinates. On the other hand, neoclassical organizational theory argues that the best design for an organization is a flat hierarchy with a wide span of control because economic effectiveness and employee satisfaction should be the ultimate goal of an organization (Fontaine 2007, p. 17). Neoclassical theorists believe that the managers should rely more on the employees to make decisions, and these organizations are less rigid with fewer rules and regulations.

Even though the four organizations in this study are not for-profit organizations, organizational design is still similar. A more democratic participatory approach is closer to

"neoclassical" views and hierarchically controlled employee activities resemble the classical model. From the evidence of this study, the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization are closer to the neoclassical, while the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League more resemble the classical view.

No single conclusion can be drawn from the above discussion. It cannot be said that one organization that is more complex is also more formalized and has centralized decision making; no single organization was completely democratic or bureaucratic in nature and form. Instead, all of these structural dimensions varied. The organizational charts suggest that the Anti-Discriminatory Group has less hierarchy and less vertical-horizontal complexity, and the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League have more hierarchy and greater complexity. The Activist Women's Organization has moderate hierarchy and complexity.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group is less formal in its rules and regulations, policies, and recruitment, yet more complex in its membership processes. The other three organizations have simple and less complex membership processes but highly formalized policies, rules and regulations. If an organization is considered formalized when it has many lengthy written documents that are strictly followed, then the Anti-Discriminatory Group is in this category with a long constitution that is followed closely. None of these organizations has a purely centralized or decentralized decision making system. One organization is more/less centralized while another is more/less decentralized system. I found that the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization have more decentralized systems compared to the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League.

Organizational structural form might be conceived along a spectrum that is slightly modified from Rothschild and Whitt (1986, p. 71).

PD   Anti-Disc   Activist   H   Women   Right   B
             Group   Org   Union   League
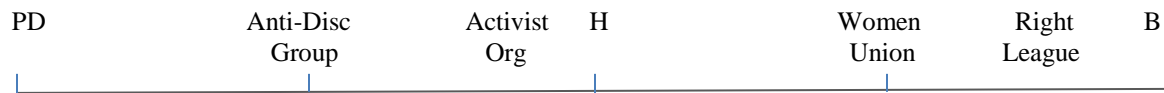
PD participatory democracy, H hybrid, and B bureaucracy

Figure 6: Range of Organizational Forms

Based on the three structural dimensions discussed here, the range of organizational forms shows that none of the organizations is either a participatory democracy or a bureaucracy. Instead, the Anti-Discriminatory Group tends toward the more democratic, while the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League are toward the bureaucratic end of the continuum.

Even though the Anti-Discriminatory Group has a complex membership process and a long constitution, this organization overall is less formal and hierarchical than the others. It allows members, employees and volunteers to attend and participate in discussions, giving it a more decentralized system. Therefore, the Anti-Discriminatory Group is more democratic in nature and it has a more democratic organizational structure. In contrast, the Women's Union has greater complexity, more formal rules and regulations, and a more centralized decision making system. Therefore, the Women's Union has a more hierarchical form.

The next chapter will explore the decision making process of the four organizations, including how each organization makes its major decisions, who plays active roles, and if the scope of a participation in decision making includes all members and employees. In addition, the chapter will discuss whether the organizational form affects the scope of participation.

Chapter Four

Decision Making Processes in the Four Organizations

The decision making process is an essential procedures for formal decision making and management of organizations. A decision is a choice between two or more alternatives. According to Zeleny (1982), the decision making process can be viewed as having three stages: pre-decision, decision, and post-decision. These stages are interdependent. The post-decision stage often overlaps with the pre-decision stage for the next decision (Zeleny 1982, p. 86). When the decision making process includes people from every level of an organization instead of a single person or a group of people, it is considered participatory decision making process, which is the central feature of this chapter.

In the past several decades, many nation-states have moved toward more democratic political systems, while many organizations have been interested in organizational democracy. Organizational democracy refers to members' and employees' participation in the processes of organizing and governance in an organization (Harrison and Freeman 2004, p. 49). Harrison and Freeman (2004) state that, if organizational actions, structures or decision making processes allow or increase the power of employees to participate in and influence the decisions of the organization, it can be considered a more democratic organization. On the other hand, if such actions, structures and processes tend to concentrate decision power in the hands of one person or a small group of people, it can be considered a more hierarchical and non-democratic organization (p. 49).

Participation is the heart of Pateman's theory of participatory democracy as well as Barber's strong democracy. Pateman emphasizes the importance of participatory democracy and

citizen involvement in decision making. The central assertion of the theory is that individual human beings are an important part of institutions. These two cannot be separated from each other. The development of psychological attitudes, independence, and a general competence for involvement in decision making are the key features of such democracy. This development is only possible through the process of participation (Pateman 1970, p. 42-43).

Pateman (1970) characterizes the participatory model as "one where maximum input (participation) is required, and where output includes not just policies (decisions) but also the development of the social and political capacities of each individual, so that there is 'feedback' from output to input" (p. 43). In this model, participatory democracy not only includes an individual's direct participation in the decision making process but also increases their social and political capacities. Participation is an ongoing process where an employee can participate from the beginning to the end of a project. It fosters a team approach in which the whole team shares the same goal. Based on available empirical evidence, the scope of participation in the workplace helps to develop workers' political efficacy (Pateman 1970, p. 53). If the structure of the workplace is authoritarian and hierarchical, there is limited chance for workers' active direct participation.

The advantages of participatory democracy in the workplaces are multifaceted. These advantages attract many organizations, especially non-profit, cooperatives, and NGOs to practice participatory democracy. Participatory democracy reduces workers' alienation, increases voice, and promotes autonomy, which helps to satisfy workers and foster commitment to the organization (Rothschild and Whitt, 1986; Harrison and Freeman, 2004). This form of democracy provides the opportunity to discuss and examine past ideas, current options and make new solutions based on consensus (Barber 2003). A participatory environment allows employees

from all levels to interact with management, obtain knowledge about organizational activities, and develop skills. Upper management often does not get involved with implementation activities at the ground level. As a result, it may be unaware of various difficulties confronting lower level employees. Participatory democracy allows people to discuss problems and find solutions that would be more effective.

Another advantage of participatory democracy in the workplace is that participation may help to develop the values and skills of citizenship. As people spend more of their daily lives in the workplace, the workplace could become a platform for employees to develop concerns for the common good and understanding of their rights and duties. They also could practice the individual attitudes and psychological qualities that are necessary for broader political democracy (Pateman 1970).

In the third chapter, I discussed the structural forms of the four organizations studied, and I stated that none is fully consistent with the "ideal types." In this chapter, I will discuss the decision making processes in the four organizations. I will explore which organizations involve its members and employees in decision making and promotes participatory democracy and which pursue hierarchical and bureaucratic systems of decision making. This chapter examines the propositions that more democratic organizations pursue participatory democracy and allow their members and employees from all levels to participate in decision making. In contrast, less democratic and hierarchical organizations keep decision making authority in the hands of a single or a small group of people.

A description of the decision making processes in each organization will help to show whether and how principles of democracy and accountability are built into the organizational culture.

Anti-Discriminatory Group

Weekly meetings and regular group discussions are the bases of this organization's programs and activities. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has four different entities that mainly operate the organization: the executive committee (EC), central coordination committee, project steering committee and project working groups. Having different committees and groups suggest that the Anti-Discriminatory Group has decentralized decision making systems. All committees and groups have their own responsibilities and decision making autonomy after discussion with their members. The members of the different committees and their responsibilities are described below to help in more fully understanding decision making.

Executive Committee

The Anti-Discriminatory Group is governed by an elected executive committee. It supervises administrative activities and compiles policies to operate the organization for two years. With a president, three secretaries, and a treasurer, this committee includes at least three members who have never served on the committee. The president cannot serve more than one term. No member can be an EC member for three consecutive terms to ensure all members' equal participation.

According to the constitution, the EC has supreme power over organizational operations after discussing with its members. The major responsibilities of the committee include monitoring all administrative activities, preparing all policies, selecting and approving projects, amending the constitution when necessary, appointing a central coordination committee and sub-committee, and reviewing and approving project budgets. EC members can fill any one vacant committee post with any general members. If there are two or more vacant positions, however, the EC must inform all general members and call for a special general meeting.

The main responsibilities of the president consist of presiding over all the EC and central coordination committee's meetings, supervising the activities of the EC members and discussing issues during the meetings so that nobody misuses their power, providing advice and suggestions to the EC and the central coordination committee members, and taking necessary initiatives to assure appropriate operation of organizational activities. The EC members meet four times a year, or whenever necessary. The executive committee mainly discusses the progress of projects, relevant and current national issues related to women, and organizational activities.

Central Coordination Committee

The EC appoints the members of the central coordination committee for two year terms. This committee is composed of a total of nine to 11 members to coordinate different activities and programs on a regular basis. This committee includes all new members who have not served on any committees before, and all new EC members. The president of the EC is the head of this committee. All project coordinators are also members of the central coordination committee. The central coordination committee members meet twice a month. The major duties of this committee included selecting representatives of the organization for various meetings and seminars, selecting participants for training, approving project budgets, assisting project working groups, approving and cancelling primary memberships, and arranging issue-based activities.

Project Working Group

The Anti-Discriminatory Group does different projects. These projects are coordinated by the members and paid employees, and guided by different working groups composed of three to seven members. The project working groups meet every three months. Different project coordinators mainly oversee their respective projects and maintain liaison among project activities, organizational members, the EC and the central coordination committee.

Project Steering Committee

This committee is composed of the president, project coordinators, a member from each working group, two members from the EC, and two general members. The responsibility of this committee is to oversee all project implementation.

Meetings

Members meet weekly in their office's meeting room. The meeting in the first week of every month is only for members. This monthly meeting is a discussion forum, and most of the members attend with an open agenda. The other three weekly meetings are open to anyone. Any interested person, students with academic purposes and others are welcome in these open meetings. Other than these weekly regular meetings, the Anti-Discriminatory Group has monthly, quarterly and annual meetings where it makes and approves all decisions for the organization. For all meetings, except the special general meeting, presence of more than half of the total members of that committee is necessary for a quorum[9]. For major decisions, two-thirds of the total members' agreement is necessary, indicating that this group's decision making process is based on majority agreement instead of consensus.

General Meeting

General meetings are held every two years, and all primary and general members must be present. Even though primary members do not have voting rights, they must attend to finalize other activities. Activities of this meeting include:

- Electing the members of the Executive Committee

- Approving the reports of the previous bi-annual general meeting

- Approving all annual reports, bi-annual budgets and accounts

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[9] Quorum means a minimum number of members required for a group to officially run meetings or to cast vote for making decisions.

- Finalizing and approving bi-annual plans

- Appointing auditors

- Approving or cancelling any sub-sections or making any amendment to the constitution if
  necessary

- Formatting different issues-based teams, project working groups and training teams.

Annual Discussion Meeting

At this meeting, members discuss all projects and activities and finance reports. All projects and
financial reports have to be submitted for discussion, correction and review. Members also
discuss, review and set the annual project implementation plans and future plans.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group has monthly staff meetings with the president. All paid
full time and part-time employees attend this meeting, where discuss administrative and financial
issues. If any issue raised needs to be discussed with the EC members, the president forwards it
to the executive committee to make a final decision.

Analysis

All committee and weekly meetings are held in the meeting room. The seating
arrangement in this group during meeting promotes equality. For example, everyone - even
guests - sits in a circle on the floor. There are mats on the floor and also chairs at the side of the
room if anyone needs or wants to sit on them. The circular seating arrangement indicates the
democratic and inclusive nature of the meetings. It also promotes equality and encourages equal
contributions as in this arrangement no one person has a power position and gets more attention
and everyone can see and hear each other.

All committee meetings are facilitated by their respective chairs or person in-charge; however, all monthly and weekly meetings are facilitated by a random member. Meeting facilitating encourages equal participation. This group makes a monthly chart of facilitators on a volunteer basis so that everyone can facilitate meetings and learn this process. Before starting the meetings, each person introduces herself or himself in case any new members or guests are attending. They do this introduction every week during the open meetings. Two log books are maintained for all meetings: an attendance book and an agenda and discussion minutes book. Everyone signs their name, affiliation, and contact information on the attendance log so that records can be kept and contact can be made if necessary.

All regular meetings have two parts: reading letters and announcements, and agenda-based discussions. During all meetings, one of the members takes the responsibility for keeping minutes. I found that all members are very comfortable with doing this task; no single person or a group of people is assigned the task. At the beginning, the facilitator or any other member reads letters and announcements. Afterward, they pass those to the appropriate person if any follow up is necessary. During the second part, members set meeting agendas and then start discussions. In a small group meeting all members sit closely so that everyone can hear each other clearly. During a larger group meeting, they use microphones and speakers. In all of the meetings that I observed the facilitator ensured that everyone who wished to speak on an issue had the opportunity to do so which is participatory and democratic. During the weekly open meetings, guests are also welcome to express their opinions, suggestions and advice on any issues. According to the current president, if any guest wishes, she/he can facilitate any open meeting.

The office and working environment in the Anti-Discriminatory Group are very informal and open. For example, the entire office is on one floor, which has three parts. These parts - a meeting room, a small library room, and work stations for members and employees - are separated by shelves and sliding glass doors. There is no separate room for any committee members, except a small space for the president and auditors. If necessary, any member or employee can use this space for work purposes. The majority of the space in the middle of the floor is for members' and employees' desks; these are open cubicles. Even though this open setting has less privacy, it promotes equality, sharing and sense of community. I found that the members and employees in this group discuss, communicate and share their thoughts more than did those in the Women's Union and Women's Rights League. Separate rooms and close cubicles sometimes limit and discourage people from communicating with others frequently. Almost every wall of the office of the Anti-Discriminatory Group is covered with different posters, banners, pictures and slogans related to various women issues. This shows the activist nature of the organization. The Group has a small number of full-time and part-time paid employees who mainly work in the administrative and financial sectors. These employees are not allowed to participate in any of the major decision making meetings; however, they are welcome in the weekly meetings and encouraged to attend all discussion forums or meetings.

The average time of all meetings is approximately two hours, which suggests the Anti-Discriminatory Group takes longer time to discuss before making decisions. Member-only monthly meetings normally take longer than open weekly meetings, as the former makes all major decisions after discussion. Member-only meetings sometimes take more than three hours. Other weekly meetings take an hour and half to two hours including the informal chatting at the beginning. The starting time of all weekly meetings is 5:30 p.m.; however, members wait 15 to

20 minutes before starting. Before the meetings are finished if any one needs to leave, they simply do so. Sometimes they inform the facilitator at the beginning and leave when it is time. Sometimes they wait until finishing one agenda item. Leaving a meeting without asking for permission does not indicate here that the members do not care about meetings. Instead, it indicates that there is no hierarchy and higher authority to dominate others. The organizational environment is very informal, and everyone enjoys freedom. On average, the attendance of members during the monthly member-only meetings is about 40-45, while during the open weekly meetings attendance is 15-20. According to the current president,

> As members contribute their volunteer time and all of us have other responsibilities, it is not possible for us to attend all meetings. Still, we try our best and try to attend major decision making meetings. Our organization is a democratic organization and we do not make any decision without discussing with the majority members. That's why all major meetings require more than half of the total members (Shoheli Ahmed).

The Anti-Discriminatory Group normally does not make any decisions about major organizational activities at the open meetings. If any issue is raised that needs to be discussed with the executive committee and/or other members, it is kept for member-only monthly meetings. When an issue or ongoing program needs members' reviews and suggestions, the facilitator, or any member who works in the project, explains briefly and offers discussion in the second half of the meeting. The other members give their opinions and suggestions and ask questions. During my observation, I found that most of the members listen attentively, take notes, discuss openly and do not hesitate to criticize regardless of their age, membership status, or seniority. For example, during an open weekly meeting, a member who was responsible for a health project presented her project for feedback and approval. After finishing the presentation, members asked questions and provided opinions. The responsible member provided answers and wrote down all feedback. During the discussion, two members disagreed with the use of a

particular medical term and its meaning, but the responsible member did not accept those. After a few minutes, when the conversation was getting heated, the facilitator stopped it and suggested to the presenter that, as it was a medical term and the project was for rural women, there was a chance to create confusion. Therefore, it would be better if she put an explanation with the term.

As noted earlier, Anti-Discriminatory Group decisions are based on majority agreement. It is neither fully consensus-based nor majority voting which completely ignores the opinion of a few members. Discussing continue as long as the majority of members in attendance are satisfied with a conclusion and the minorities do not feel completely ignored. Throughout the observation period, I found that members are not always happy with decisions. Few are dissatisfied, and sometimes they leave meetings without further conversation. Farhana Parvin said:

> We always try to satisfy each other and make solutions with the discussion. But, it is not possible for us to make everyone happy. Some members are unhappy with one issue and again they are happy with another. We argue, disagree and sometimes feel upset one day and then the next day, we forget everything. This is just like a family (Farhana Parvin).

The above comment suggests that the relationship among members and employees is very relaxed and friendly. This helps to make the decision making process more participatory and egalitarian.

The election process in this organization, though democratic, gives only general members voting rights. To elect the executive committee, the Anti-Discriminatory Group creates a three member election commission with a chief commissioner and two representatives from the general members who do not participate in the election. The election commission prepares a final list of nominees and voters a month in advance. The commission informs all the general members. The election is by secret ballot, with a one-person-one-vote process. A month before the election, the president, on behalf of the organization, sends an election notification mail to all

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members. Absent members can vote by email, mail, or fax by the announced time. The election commission tries to ensure a fair election; after voting ends, it counts votes and announces the results.

The seating arrangement, flexible starting time of meetings, rotation of facilitators, open discussion style, access of non-members to the weekly meetings, and democratic election process indicate that the Anti-Discriminatory Group has a supportive, inclusive, friendly, respectful, participatory and egalitarian atmosphere, and members are committed to mutual respect and concern for each other. All decisions are made by a majority of members. No single person or a group of members is more important than others in this organization. Members in this group disagree and fight over issues; yet they do not dominate or try to control discussions by fighting. Rather, they argue and sometimes discuss to reach the best decisions that is very democratic. The organizational chart (see Figure 2) in Chapter 3 also demonstrates that single group does not make all major decisions or rules the whole organization. Farhana Parvin comments that,

> There is no single person rule in our organization. Everyone is equal here and everyone can enjoy it. Everyone can give their opinion openly, even if it is not acceptable to others. However, in my opinion, there is a knowledge gap between senior and junior members. Senior members have more knowledge and experience than others. Therefore, obviously they can do a job more efficiently or provide opinions more wisely than others who do not have enough knowledge. Yet, if any members have knowledge and proper experience with any issues, it does not matter if she is senior or junior. She can contribute her expertise in any work, and everyone accepts it (Farhana Parvin).

Even though the organization's decision making process does not satisfy every member, it appears to be a democratic and empowering process, and it develops leadership. For example, the leadership rotates. One cannot be president more than once, and no member serves in the EC three consecutive times. This allows every member to get a chance to serve the organization in a leadership position. This rotation process helps knowledge to move from one person to another, which helps increase knowledge of all members. It also prevents the domination of a single

person or a small group of people. In addition, old and new members are voted in separately to ensure the entry of new members into the various committees.

Another important characteristic of members' direct and active involvement in the Anti-Discriminatory Group is that even though most of the members have their own expertise and they contribute this expertise to achieving organizational goal(s), they do not hold designated positions or rankings according to their specialization. Any member can get involved in any project. If a member wants, she can get involved in more than one project at the same time. All senior members provide support for junior members so that they receive appropriate training and knowledge. Junior members are also allowed to represent the organization at home and in abroad.

Yet, not all people can do work equally effectively. Sometimes educational and professional experience helps. For example, not all members of the Anti-Discriminatory Group are proficient in English, analytical writing, or presenting, or have expertise in law. Therefore, most of the presentations, especially in front of foreign people, are given by those members who spoke English well. Lawyers or those who have enough legal knowledge perform most legal activities.

From observations and interviews, I discovered a few constraints that the Anti-Discriminatory Group has to handle consistently. These constraints are common in many democratic organizations (Rothschild and Whitt 1986; Mansbridge 1980; Bordt 1997). For example, like many other collectivist organizations, its decision making process takes a long time. Sometimes, when an issue rises during the second week of a month, it has to wait two to three weeks until the first week of the next month for discussion with a majority of members and then make a final decision. Sometimes, decision making takes a long time, and very little time

remains to do the tasks or implement decisions. For instance, in December 2010, members

decided to arrange a workshop with the collaboration of other several organizations. However,

they could not start working until May of the following year. In May 2011, they met with other

partner organizations, and decided to hire a person to do the background research and prepare a

framework for the workshop that was planned in August 2011. Finally, they hired a person at the

end of June, and with the help of a group of members and a few volunteers, they were able to

arrange a two-day workshop at the end of August 2011. Since members did not have enough

time to gather all information, the quality of this workshop was not satisfactory to the

participators.

Another constraint is the lack of enthusiasm of some members and the loss of valuable

members. Sometimes disagreement makes members less enthusiastic, and they gradually

withdraw from organizational activities. For example, one of the founding members left the

Anti-Discriminatory Group when it became a formal organization and started to receive domestic

and foreign donations to run projects. Even though she is not an active member anymore, she

still contributes her expertise and knowledge when the organization needs them. Another loss

was in the late 1980s when the government invited two key members to be a part of an advisory

committee. A number of members disagreed with this as they believed their participation

extended legitimacy to the autocratic regime of that time. However, when the Anti-

Discriminatory Group finally agreed to join the committee after a long discussion, some of its

members withdrew their memberships. Sometimes members feel ignored, and they restrict

themselves from participating in discussion, even though they attend meetings.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group tries to resolve conflicts by mutual discussion.

Nevertheless, if it is not possible, the executive committee creates a two or three member

committee that talks with involved parties in an effort to solve the problem. Finally, this committee makes a report and submits it to the executive committee. Two members who have been working in this organization for more than five years said that even though the conflict resolution committee option exists, most of the time mutual discussion works to solve problems. As a result, they have never seen action by this committee and the turnover rate in the Group is almost zero.

Activist Women's Organization

The idea of the Activist Women's Organization and its formal formation as an organization were a group effort. Since its emergence, this organization has been working for grassroots women's rights and equality by engaging its beneficiaries through a "rights-based approach", rather than only providing services. The organization was founded and staffed mostly by activist members. It has two committees and a small group of employees at the central office in Dhaka as well as branches for operating activities. The two committees are the general body (GB) and executive committee (EC); employees include directors, coordinators, administrative and finance officers, center managers, and field officers. All members of the general body are volunteers. They elect the executive committee and approve activities for the organization that are presented by the executive committee. All positions from the executive director to the field-level officers are paid. They implement organizational activities with the direction and approval of the executive committee and general body.

Every committee and management team meets regularly throughout the year. For the general body and executive committee meetings, presence of one-third of the total members is necessary for a quorum and two-third for decision making. The decision making process is

majority agreement like the Anti-Discriminatory Group. But the Activist Women's Organization requires fewer members to be present. The Activist Organization then encourages less participation among members compared to the Anti-Discriminatory Group. Sometimes there could have some politics involved with quorum requirement. For example, some organization's quorum is defined to mean a fairly large representative group of voters and sometimes it is defined to mean a small, unrepresentative group, which allows the ruling group to continue to make their preferred decisions. During my research in four organizations I did not think about this politics as it seemed like these organizations did not have any quorum politics. For this reason I did not collect any information about it. My understanding was that since all members are volunteers in these organizations and not always available, they set quorum so that they could run meetings and take decisions with minimum members. If there is any politics it could be in the Anti-Discriminatory Group as it has a large number of members. I believe long-term involvement and a close observation could reveal this inside politics.

General Body

The general body has 34 members, all of whom are women. They pay annual fees to keep their membership. Members assemble in general meetings every two years to elect the executive committee. The major responsibilities of the general body include electing EC members, deciding increase or decrease the number of members, reviewing and approving the annual budgets and annual reports, amending the organizational Constitution and Declaration, setting policies, and making bi-annual plans. This body also discusses if the organization needs to hire more new employees and increase budgets for particular projects.

The Activist Women's Organization has an advisory group, which includes male members. According to the constitution, male members cannot be more than one-third of the

total number of group members, and they do not have votes. This advisory group provides suggestions, opinions and recommendations for the organization when requested by the general body.

Executive Committee

The Activist Women's Organization is governed by its executive committee, which consists of seven to 13 members. During this study period, a total of nine members were on this committee, which includes a chairperson, two vice chairpersons, a member secretary, a treasurer, and four members (Annual Report 2007-09). The chairperson is the constitutional chief of the organization. She chairs the EC meetings, general meetings, and other programs. The member secretary is the executive director, who is the primary founding member of this organization. The executive director is a paid position. The executive director submits reports, delegates, directs and supervises activities of different departments, and serves as liaison between the general and executive committee members and the staff of the central office. If any EC member is absent for three consecutive meetings without prior notice, her membership is canceled. The executive committee meets at least three times a year and more frequently when necessary.

The executive committee has the supreme authority to make any decision. The primary duties of this committee are planning, undertaking and implementing program activities, making policies, supervising organizational activities, amending the constitution, making any emergency decisions with the approval of the general committee, organizing special general meetings, forming temporary working groups for special activities, taking necessary disciplinary measures against members of the general body or executive committee, authorizing people to raise funds and manage financial activities, accepting and approving members' resignations, and appointing new members to vacant position(s). In addition, the executive committee reviews and approves

quarterly reports, makes and approves financial decisions to arrange any kind of workshops and seminars, approves training modules, makes administrative decisions, and handles employee promotions, salaries, and transfers. The EC makes all major decisions, while the general body approves only a few long-term activities for the organization. Even though the Activist Women's Organization has a moderate democratic organizational structure, its decision making are relatively hierarchical. For example, while the executive committee is the highest authority given by the general body; the branch managers are the lowest authority in the decision making processes with limited power.

This organization has a senior management team, consisting of the executive director, director, deputy director, three coordinators, and a training officer at the central office. The executive director is the head of this team. The team meets at least weekly. The Activist Women's Organization does not have a single designated person for each project. The management team performs many additional activities. For instance, a person who is responsible for monitoring and evaluation is also partially responsible for program implementation, documentation and publication. The deputy director also is responsible for advocacy and program implementation. The coordinators mainly work under the direct supervision of the executive director. Their responsibilities include identifying, designing, and making implementation plans for the projects; preparing reports and maintaining communication with the centers; visiting the field regularly; providing advice, information and necessary materials to the centers; monitoring projects; making and/or updating training manuals after consulting with the directors and executive director; and performing other day-to-day project-related activities. The branch managers also are accountable directly to the executive director, and they have limited decision making authority.

Analysis

The Activist Women's Organization has a very small number of employees compared to the other organizations studied here. Its central office has fewer than 20 employees, including administrative, finance, and office support staff. The executive committee is the supreme authority for organizational decision making. Although the general body mainly makes and approves all of the long-term decisions regarding the organization's goals, new projects and activities, big expenditures, and long-term work strategies, the executive committee makes all day- to-day and short-term decisions after discussion with committee members. In addition, the executive committee makes or approves almost all final decisions about projects, such as financial expenditures, hiring and firing of employees, increases in salaries, and decisions concerning advocacy, lobbying and protest. The executive committee makes decisions after discussion. Like the Anti-Discriminatory Group, decision making in this organization is not consensus-based, but more majority agreement. The committee does not meet in any specific time interval; nor does it have any specific starting time. Before arranging a meeting, a coordinator, on behalf of the executive director, contacts all EC members. Based on their availability, the executive director sets a meeting time.

All meetings, discussions and training at the central office are held in the conference room. I found that the seating arrangements during the executive committee and the employee meetings were different. During the EC meetings and discussion forum, the seating arrangement for members was a square-table, which is formal and promotes equal participation; and there were no separate or special seating positions or facilities for any of the executive members or the executive director. The environment and discussion style of the members' meetings are formal but participatory. The average meeting time is one hour, which suggests that this organization

likes to make quicker decisions than the Anti-Discriminatory Group. The executive director presides over executive committee meetings. At the beginning of the meetings, she presents the agendas and then starts discussion. Sometimes the executive director makes initial decisions after discussing with the senior management team, and suggests these decisions to the EC meeting for approval. If executive committee members approve, it can be considered a final decision. For this reason the meeting time is short. No employees are allowed to attend the EC meetings unless their presence is required. If any employees attend, they do not participate in the discussion. Only a coordinator attends to keep meeting minutes.

In contrast, the seating arrangement for staff meetings with the executive director is a rectangular-table setting. The executive director sits at the center on one of the longer sides of the table. This setting indicates the power position of the executive director. Even though the seating arrangement clearly highlights the authority of the executive director, the discussion is informal, participatory and interactive. The executive director encourages everyone to speak out and tries to create a friendly, discursive environment. I found that as this organization has a small number of employees and a flatter structure with a narrow span of control (see Chapter 3) the authoritative seating arrangement does not limit the scope of participation by employees during the meetings.

In interviews, almost all employees mentioned that the major decisions are made mainly by the general body and the executive committee, while decisions regarding everyday project activities are made by the management team headed by the executive director. The process of decision making is majority agreement after discussion. I found that decisions in the management team are mainly made by the executive director after discussing and reviewing all

the possibilities with the other directors, coordinators and operation officers. The executive

director is the ultimate authority for daily activities.

A picture of the decision making processes of the Activist Women's Organization can

find in a consultancy report on organizational development, which was conducted in 2007.

Decision making is based on discussion by the executive committee and the senior management

team. After decisions are made they are shared in the staff meetings. The annual planning

process is participatory where managers from all centers join in discussion at the central office.

Regarding the question of participation in decision making, almost all employees

answered that they have a wide scope of expressing their opinions and suggestions. One long

term employee, Rasheda Jaman said,

> I think we have a wide scope and freedom. Our ED always asks for our opinions
> and when we participate and provide our suggestions and opinions, she appreciates those.
> She, herself wants to know our opinion. With any issues we freely go to her and she also
> shares her opinions with us. Sometimes, few of us discuss an issue and make a decision
> without disturbing her. We only inform her what we are doing or going to do. Therefore,
> I would say we have freedom of work. Here, nobody pushes anyone and forces us to do
> certain works (Rasheda Jaman).

Another employee, Shipa Rahman did not fully agree,

> We always discuss before making a decision even with a minor issue. As a
> position holder every supervisor and manager has authority to make certain decisions.
> We have a constitution, different policies, and manuals. Based on these, we can make a
> few decisions by ourselves. However, there is a hidden trick. For example, it could be
> that top management sets their mindset before with an issue and then allows us to
> participate and provide opinions in the decision making process. But, ultimately
> management tries to finalize the decision, which is pre-set, through logics or adjustments.
> From the outside, it shows that there is scope, yet it is only a show. This is the negative
> part of the democracy in my opinion; however, this practice could be everywhere (Shipa
> Rahman).

She also mentioned that since employees are the ones performing activities, without their

involvement it is rarely possible to achieve good outcomes. Ms. Rahman said all of the activities

are interrelated. Board members make plans and set strategies. Employees follow and implement

those plans in the field. Again, employees prepare annual reports based on project activities, and later board members review and approve these.

From employees' interviews and my observation, I found that the executive director and employees are aware of everyone's active involvement in organizational activities; however, because of limited resources everyone's participation is not possible. This organization emphasizes the free flow of information and technology among members and employees. For example, the director, Rafiq Ahmed stated that it would be expensive as well as time consuming if the central office asked all of the center employees to attend all decision making meetings. However, sometimes representatives from each center attend the meetings. Therefore, when any decisions are made, the central office immediately disseminates information via email, mail, or phone call to inform the centers. Also, when center offices make decisions, the center managers inform the main office.

Throughout this study, I did not witness any serious conflicts among members or employees; nevertheless, disagreements, debates, and expressed dissatisfaction were common. During staff meetings, they discussed various issues with the executive director, and sometimes discussions became heated. I understood that employees normally do not express clearly their frustration and disagreement in front of others during such the meetings. Instead, they sometimes discuss these later with closer one. This suggests that the workplace environment is not as open as employees described.

However, employees said they did not hold their dissatisfactions for long periods. Rasheda Jaman noted:

> Most of the employees at this moment have been working here together for a long time. Therefore, even though we argue and disagree all the time, we do not keep it in our hearts. For a moment we feel sad and angry. However, we solve any problems with discussion. Actually this organization is just like a family. We know each other and the

way we think and work. We care for each other. We have good relations also outside work. Therefore, we do not normally face any serious problems (Rasheda Jaman).

According to several employees, however, even though employees do not normally experience serious conflicts, there is hidden gender conflict inside the organization. They believe that sometimes male employees try to control the discussions and influence decisions. Even though this organization is very gender sensitive and everyone follows the gender policy very strictly by everyone, a few employees believe that some male employees indirectly try to dominate others. Because of male employees' sophisticated behavior and indirect approaches, it is difficult to expose this perceived domination in front of everyone. Throughout this study, I did not notice any kind of dominating attitudes among the male employees. It could be male employees were careful not to show their superiority attitude in front of me. Otherwise, as men occupied most of the senior and supervisory positions - for example, the director, the position directly under the executive director; - four out of six center managers; administrative officers; and the majority of accounts officers, they have more authority and involvement than many female staffers. This could make some female employees behave they are less important and more vulnerable.

The executive director observed that as the society is still male-dominated and her organization is not isolated from the society, it is not possible to completely stop male domination. Still, she behaves that her organization always works to minimize any kind of gender discriminatory attitudes by following a strict gender policy and by discussing this with all employees. She also mentioned that women's involvement and raising their consciousness alone are not enough for women's development in this patriarchal society. Therefore, male involvement and changes in their mindsets also are necessary. For this reason, the Activist Women's Organization had a regular discussion session with male spouses, but due to lack of

funds, it had to stop this activity. The executive director hoped to start such awareness sessions again in the future.

The conflict resolution process in the Activist Women's Organization is the same as that in the Anti-Discriminatory Group. If conflict arises, first the members or employees try to resolve it through mutual discussion. If this process does not work, the executive director forms a three or four member committee. This committee talks with the parties and investigates the causes. Afterward, it prepares a report and submits it to the executive committee. The executive committee makes a final decisions based on the committee's report.

The Activist Women's Organization likes to have external evaluator assess its activities and progress. Afterward, based on the evaluation report, the organization prepares its future strategic plan and staff development plan and takes other necessary initiatives to achieve its targeted objectives. This type of evaluation opens discussion opportunities for employees and grass-roots beneficiaries. I found, however, that sometimes participants' responses are pre-set and controlled by the committee members and upper ranking employees, which is not participatory democratic practice. For example, an external evaluation took place at the grassroots level in 2011 during my field work. The evaluators talked with many beneficiaries and sometimes it seemed that their responses were pre-set because participants' responses were all positive. A few of them talked like they knew about questions and memorized possible answers. In 2007, the Activities Women's Organization arranged an evaluation by an external consulting team for an assessment of the organizational development in the entire organization. This assessment included all stakeholders, members of the executive committee, executive director, senior employees from the central office, center managers and selected employees from the centers. This process was done through workshops, participation, discussions, dialogue with

senior staff, and feedback from the executive director and executive members (Evaluation Report 2007). After finishing the evaluation, the consulting teams provided recommendations to improve several areas of organizational activities; staff capacity building, project monitoring and evaluation, administrative activities and other related areas.

The executive members and executive director are very close to the staff at the central office, which helps to increase communication and information flow. In every seminar, workshop, human chain or rally at least one member actively participates. Almost all members are familiar with the employees who work at the central office. Employees also have access to any of the executive members. As the members of the executive committee do not visit the field offices regularly, they are not as familiar with the staff in field offices. Nevertheless, when employees from the different centers come to the central office for meetings or training, they meet with members who are available. The executive director said that even though she does maintain liaison between the committee members and the office staff, she prefers that the employees also maintain contact with the members so that staff have access to the committees, which narrows the distance between members and staff. This attitude of the highest authority provides the opportunities of involvement to employees.

Women's Union

The Women's Union is mainly governed and operated by three groups of people: the general body, executive committee and Program Management Team (PMT). The general body is the highest authority, while PMT is the lowest level of management authority, including only the upper-ranked employees. These groups meet regularly and make decisions for the organization. Since the Women's Union works all over the country, it has field offices at the district level. The

field staff do not have any decision making authority. The central office in Dhaka makes all decisions for the field offices, suggesting that the Women's Union has centralized decision making systems under the control of the central office.

General Body

The Women's Union is governed by a 35-member general body, which is the supreme authority. The body elects members for the executive committee, approves all policies, reviews and approves the progress of projects and approves all annual financial reports, which the executive committee prepares. The general body meets annually and approves changes to the constitution. Two-thirds of the total members must be present to hold such meetings.

Executive Committee

The Women's Union is governed by an 11-member executive committee, whose members are elected in two years terms. The committee has a president, general secretary, vice president and treasurer. Presidency is occupied by the founding member, and it is a permanent position. Other board members are elected by the general body. The executive committee meets every three months, and it makes policies and approves annual plans, budgets, and all financial and project progress reports. This committee also monitors the activities of project employee, and financial updates according to the HR and financial policies. The executive committee also needs two-thirds of its members to hold official meetings.

Project Management Team

The Project Management Team (PMT) includes all of the directors and program coordinators. It is led by the executive director and is accountable to the executive committee. The PMT supervises the regular activities and progress of projects and submits updates to the executive committee. The PMT meets once a week and discusses project updates. This team

makes decisions for day-to-day project implementation and about field activities. The director of

finance and administration and the coordinators scrutinize all financial reports and take actions in

the case of irregularities.

In addition to the PMT meeting, all project employees meet weekly with the president to

discuss project activities. The executive director supervises all projects, and she is accountable to

the executive committee. With a narrow span of control, each project director leads a Project

Implementation Team (PIT) and holds PIT meetings at the end of every month. To ensure

effective supervision and coordination, a number of coordination meetings at different levels of

the project are conducted, indicating strict control of authority. These include regular weekly

sharing sessions at the field level, monthly coordination meetings at the district level, and

quarterly project coordination meetings at the central level. All of these meetings are to update

employees. In addition, project coordinators at the central office conduct regular periodic

meetings and inform their supervisors.

A monitoring and evaluation unit works to monitor program activities that the executive

director supervises. The monitoring unit produces quarterly, semi-annual and annual reports that

assess qualitative and quantitative progress. These reports are regularly sent to project heads, the

PMT, the executive committee, donors, related government offices, and others.

Analysis

The central office environment is relatively informal, even though it is bureaucratic. The

three program coordinators share a room, while assistant coordinators have separate work

stations in an open cubicle. The central office is in a four-story building that is rented. The first

floor is for the administrative and finance section. The president's and the executive director's

rooms and a meeting space are on the second floor. All project directors have separate rooms on the third floor. The fourth floor is for project coordinators. This office setting shows the division of position, responsibility, and authority. It limits access of lower-ranked employees to the upper-ranked staffers.

The majority of the walls in all of the floors are covered with various posters, banners, leaflets and other organizational activities, exhibiting the organization's advocacy and activism. The majority of the administrative and finance employees are male, while the majority of project employees are female. According to the executive director, the organization has been unable to hire many qualified women for administration and finance positions. Even though the Women's Union is an activist organization, the majority of its employees do not have activist backgrounds; still, all seem very comfortable with their responsibilities as everybody has designated tasks. Employees have to follow regular office hours; however, most of them work longer hours to finish or work on assigned duties. Often employees are required to participate in rallies, human chains or protests, even on weekends without compensation.

I found that the Women's Union depends heavily on various policies to make decisions and operate organizational activities, and it has highly formalized rules and regulations which is considered the characteristics of bureaucracy (Rothschild and Whitt 1986). For example, the Women's Union carries out all of its management activities according to the constitution, human resources policy, financial manual, operational manual, gender policy, and other ad hoc policies, rules, and regulations. The executive director emphasized the importance of the policies during her interview. Members of the general body and executive committee as well as field level staffers must follow these policies. The executive director also mentioned that policies are democratic as these are equally applicable for all and ensure members' and employees' freedom,

rights, gender equality, and other democratic opportunities. She believes that any organization with appropriate democratic policies, could work autonomously.

Even though the executive director said that the Women's Union has been creating more policies and strengthening existing policies to reduce inequality and promote more freedom of work, I found that no policy exists for the lower-ranked employees like coordinators, assistant coordinators or field officers to make decisions. Instead, the policies describe the way lower-ranked employees should work, follow instructions from upper management and maintain the chain of command. Lower-ranked employees do not have any decision making authority without asking the directors or the executive director.

From observations, document review and interviews, I also found that decision making in this organization is very centralized. All major decisions are made and approved by the general board and the executive committee based on majority agreement after discussion. The general body is the highest authority to approve policies and all major long term decisions, while the executive committee makes policies, plans, and approves all project related activities according to the policies. The PMT does not make any major decisions except on day-to-day projects and organizational activities. It mainly discusses project updates and upcoming activities that should be done by the organization. This team helps the executive committee to make decisions by gathering information, finding options, and suggesting opportunities. The executive director approves and makes all decisions for day-to-day activities after consulting with the president. Only the directors and the coordinators make up the management team; yet they do not have authority to make any major decisions without informing and discussing them with the executive director and/or the president.

The monitoring and reporting process indicates that the Women's Union has a strict top-down supervision system and chain of command, which is an important feature of bureaucracy. All employees as well as the executive director are accountable to the president who is the top authority in the central office. The president is accountable to the executive committee; however, she plays an important role to make and approve decisions in the executive committee. Weekly field visits by program officers and meetings with the field organizers are the key methods of supervision at the field level.

Another supervision and project management tracking tool the PMT uses is regular reporting. The reporting process is bottom-up, and all field level employees and assistant coordinators are accountable to the PMT, which reports to the executive committee. Field officers report weekly to program officers about activities and performance, and program officers submit monthly performance reports to the monitoring team. Then, the monitoring team at the central office compiles the reports after scrutiny and sends them to the program assistant coordinators every month. Next, the PMT take steps to run the activities according to the project design after consulting with the executive director and the president. In addition, quarterly progress reports are required to be prepared to keep donors updated on the achievements of projects and activities. Program coordinators are responsible for the quarterly reports. Finance and administration coordinators are responsible for the quarterly financial reports.

Compared to the Anti-discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization, meetings in the Women's Union are less participatory and more bureaucratic. For example, the seating arrangement includes a long rectangular table with a chair at the head of the table for the president, which indicates that the central authority is in the hands of the president. As the Women's Union did not allow me to observe all meetings, based on two executive meetings, I

found that among 11 members, only three or four contributed most of the time. At the beginning of the meeting, the executive director announced the meeting agenda, and with the permission of the president, they started discussing each issue on the agenda individually. The decisions were made through majority agreement, with no noticeable debate, argument or disagreement. This seemed to me that decisions had been discussed and settled by the active members before arranging the meeting. During the meeting, members formally approved decisions by majority vote. The vice-president and the general secretary along with the president were more active in providing information, leading the discussion and making initial decision. The meeting time was around an hour. It did not use any attendance log, but the executive director kept brief meeting minutes.

PMT meetings differ from the executive meetings. PMT meetings take place in the project staff's working area on the third floor. This group works as a team; still, I found there is a clear sign of authority of the executive director. There is no formal seating arrangement or meeting starting system. Normally, project coordinators update their projects at the beginning of the meetings and then discuss ongoing and upcoming activities. Everyone speaks and there is no debate in this group. During a meeting, even though a coordinator was not happy with an issue, she did not argue with others or express her dissatisfaction in front of the executive director. Rather, after the meeting she showed her frustration in front of a few of her co-workers. The average meeting time of this group is 45 to 50 minutes. All of the members of this team are comfortable in expressing their opinions; however, they seem very conscious of their positions. There is no majority agreement for decision making. Based on PMT discussion and updates, the executive director and the president make final decisions about daily activities and preliminary decisions for other activities that require approval from the executive committee.

The limited or lack of involvement of junior employees suggests less participatory decision making. Junior employees are less involved than senior employees. Even though the assistant coordinators, training officers, legal officers and other central office employees frequently visit the field, have contact with field employees, prepare reports and keep upper management updated, they do not participate in any decision making meetings. These junior employees work in the Program Implementation Team (PIT) under the supervision of PMT. They follow the instructions and decisions made by upper management.

The working environment in the Women's Union is friendly; however, both senior and junior employees seemed cautious around the executive director and the president. For example, during a PMT meeting, an assistant coordinator, who was not a part of the meeting, was hesitant to go to lunch in case the executive director needed anything from her. She waited until the meeting was finished. A senior, upper ranked employee was not comfortable in giving me an interview. When I asked about the organizational decision making process and employees' scope of participation, she hesitated and requested that I talk first with the upper management. Moreover, when I asked for a document from a project employee or human resource officer, they always asked the executive director first. This hesitation indicates that the organization has a more hierarchical working environment, and employees are dominated by the executive director.

The office setting, meeting arrangements, dependence on policies, strict supervision, reporting system, authority of upper management, cautious behavior and hesitation to provide information indicate that this organization is bureaucratic in nature, and its members and employees do not have a wide scope of participation in decision making. The communication between board members and employees is limited; lower ranked employees do not have easy access to members of the general or executive committees. The executive director or

administrative officer normally contacts committee members for meetings or other purposes. All projects are supervised by the executive director, and she must be informed of all activities. The working environment and the relations among employees, as well as with the president and the executive director are friendly. Even though most of the employees of the administrative, finance, and monitoring and evaluation units are male, I found no evidence of open gender conflict.

Women's Rights League

The Women's Rights League did not allow me to attend any of its regular employee or board members' meetings, so it was not possible for me to observe its decision making process. This organization only allowed me to review a few documents, talk with a few employees and observe limited activities. The given reason for this restriction was its ongoing restructuring process and internal evaluation. My contact person in this organization, who provided me with some information about the organizational structure and activities, said:

> After 20 years of operation, we are shifting our emphasis from provision of training and capacity building to supporting independent actions by providing mentoring and advice and guiding movements. Thus, the focus of our organization's intervention will move from individual beneficiaries to collective group's actions of organization, engagement from human capital to social capital (Jabed Kamal).

Like the other three organizations, the Women's Rights League has a general board, an executive committee, and a senior management team. It is governed mainly by its general body, comprised of 21 members. The board elects a seven member executive committee for two-year terms. The executive committee is headed by a chairperson who oversees policy formulation and decision making. The general body approves all final decisions, which are made by the executive committee.

This organization is administered on a program to program basis under the guidance and leadership of the executive director, with the support of the following units: finance, administration, human resource management and development, communication and documentation, monitoring and evaluation, research, and training and advocacy cells (Annual Report 2008-09). Managers are responsible for each unit. According to the interview participants, the general body meets annually and approves all of the annual reports, budgets and financial expenditures, and other organizational decisions that the executive committee submits. The executive committee meets every three months and makes all project-related decisions. From responses to the interview questionnaires, I found that the League's decision making process is majority agreement like other three organizations. Three participants responded that all decisions are made by the executive committee and the senior management team, which is very similar to the Women's Union.

Like the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union, the executive director of the Women's Rights League makes initial decisions for projects and then discusses them with the executive committee for the final decision. At the same time, the executive director has the authority to make all day-to-day decisions after consulting with directors and managers. The line of accountability for program management begins at the central office and ends at the field level. All projects are directly supervised by the executive director who reports to the executive committee. A senior program coordinator manages each project with the supervision of the manager who is responsible for project implementation. Associate program coordinators and senior program coordinators report to the project manager. The project managers then report to their respective directors. (Annual Report 2008-09). The document review and limited

observation indicate that lower-ranked employees do not participate directly in decision making. Instead, they mainly follow instructions from the upper authority.

A group of accounting staffers assists the head of finance in his day to day work. This group is responsible for coordinating and maintaining the financial management system. The director and the manager of administration, with other support staff, help to maintain administrative activities. A program support unit provides operational and technical assistance for all project implementation activities. The support units coordinate and provide support in training, research, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and documentation of all organizational activities (Annual Report 2007-08). The monitoring, evaluation, advocacy, documentation, and publication activities operate under the direct supervision of the executive director.

From my limited observation I found that the environment of this organization is bureaucratic in nature and more male-dominated compared to the other three organizations. Even though I was told that the majority of the employees are female, I found that men occupied a majority of the positions of director, managers and senior program coordinator. The executive director and most of the managers have separate offices, and they keep their doors closed, which limits easy access. The Women's Rights League has a separate conference and meeting room just beside the office of the executive director, which has a rectangular table. The seating arrangement during meetings appears similar to the Women's Union, authoritative and formal. The employees were not comfortable talking with me. Before responding to any of my inquiries, they asked their superior officer or the executive director for permission. This organization has a performance management system, which is an integral part of its human resource management manual. This system promotes communication between employees and their line managers so that they can understand each other's expectations. In addition, the Women's Rights League

practices employee performance evaluation regularly to keep employees' performance records, again a very formalized practice.

Conclusion

The four organizations' structural forms and participatory approaches have several similarities as well as differences. The structural form of an organization affects the scope of its members' and employees' participation in the decision making process. More decentralized decision making, fewer organizational layers, and greater direct access to meetings by all levels of employees motivate and allow employees to contribute to the decisions that affect the entire organization. Fontaine (2006) finds that most theories of motivation do not rely completely on monetary incentives. Instead, for inspiration, they emphasize opportunities for autonomous decision making, greater personal responsibilities, direct contributions to the major activities, and a sense of accomplishment (p.19). Employees' participation is important for any organization, and it is related to organizational structure.

None of the four organizations has a fully consensus-based decision making system. Decision making processes included majority agreement after discussion. Nevertheless, the involvement of members and employees in decision making varies. Only members in the Anti-Discriminatory Group consult and make all final decisions; while members in the other three organizations consult and discuss with employees before making decisions as these depend heavily on paid employees. Among employees in the Activist Women's Organization, Women's Union and Women's Rights League, only upper-ranked employees have limited decision making power over day-to-day activities. The lower-ranked employees gather information and assist their superiors in making decisions.

Another difference between the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the other three organizations is the position of the executive director. The founder of the organization occupies the position of the executive director in the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. In contrast, the Anti-Discriminatory Group does not have an executive director. The members of the general body elect an executive committee for two-year terms. Its founder is a regular general member and plays a role like other members. The executive director in the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League works as a paid employee and maintains liaison between members and employees. She makes initial decisions before forwarding them to the executive committee or the general body for approval. All employees are accountable and subordinate to the executive director. Occupants of this position often restrict direct communication between employees and the members. As I described earlier, the relations between the executive director and other employees in the Activist Women's Organization are friendly and open. As a result, employees have easy access to her, which allows them a wide scope of participation. In contrast, in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League, the executive director plays an authoritative role, which often restricted the scope of employees' direct involvement in decision making.

All organizations make two types of decisions. The first is longer-term organization-related decisions such as creating an annual plan and budget, making policies, amending constitution, changing goals and objectives, increasing or decreasing board and/or committee members, and finding opportunities for new projects and funding. The shorter-term or day-to-day project-related decisions include project planning, implementation, employee hiring or firing, and budget allocation for project activities.

Most of the longer-term decisions in all four organizations are made at general meetings by a majority of the general members with the assistance of the executive committees. The percentage of the majority agreement varies. Even though the Anti-Discriminatory Group, which I found more democratic in structure, and the Women's Union, which is less democratic, require two-third members' agreement to make final decisions, the pattern and environment of the discussion, members' participation, and the role of leaders and facilitators in the Women's Union are less democratic and participatory than the Anti-Discriminatory Group. Members in the Anti-Discriminatory Group appear to be more involved, active, enthusiastic and well-informed about their organization.

Decisions on shorter-term project-related and day-to-day issues in the Anti-Discriminatory Group are more decentralized, including more members. The executive committee and individual project working groups make most of these decisions. In contrast, in the other three organizations, this process is very centralized. All shorter term decisions are made by the executive committees and the executive directors with the help of senior management teams. In the Activist Women's Organization the managers of the branch offices have limited decision making authority, but they inform the head office before making any final decision. Lower-ranked employees are not directly involved with decision making or any organizational changes. I found many employees who have been working more than five years do not have knowledge about the organization outside of their designated projects.

Evidence also shows that the four organizations have more or less democratic environments. They practice democracy in their organizations by implementing a voting system, majority agreement, discussion before making decisions, and members' and employees' involvement in decision making. However, none of these organizations has an "ideal type" direct

participatory approach; rather, they are closer to having representative democracy. Only the Anti-Discriminatory Group has a formal election process every two years to select its executive committee. It promotes equal participation by rotating committee members, ensuring the entry of new members, and limiting the number of terms served. In this way new leadership can emerge, and the domination of single individuals is restrained. The other three organizations have informal election processes, and rotation is not mandatory. If members want, any person can hold any position in the executive committee multiple times or as long as she can serve. For example, in the Activist Women's Organization one person served as chairperson for almost 10 years and the same executive committee has been working consecutively for two terms (2010-2012 and 2012-2014) (Activist Women's Organization's Website). This process limits the scope of members' participation in decision making.

Participation of members and employees in decision making varies. The board and committee members make and/or approve all decisions and participate actively at the final decision making stage, while a few upper-ranked employees help make the final decisions. Most of the employees mainly participate at the pre-decision making (information gathering) and post-decision making (implementation) stages. However, the degree of their participation is low. Table 3 is a 'participation ladder' created by the Norwegian Refugee Council (2008), which shows the degrees of participation at the organizational level.

Degree of Participation	Definition
Ownership	Members' and Employees' control of decision making
Interactive	Members are wholly involved in decision making with other actors
Functional	Members or Employees fulfill only a particular role with limited decision making power (For example, making a proposal, then management makes a final decision and supervises the project)
Consultation	Employees are asked for their opinions about projects, but their opinions have limited influence in decision-making.
Information Gathering & Transfer	Information is gathered for a project but employees are not involved in the resulting discussions that inform decisions.
Material Motivation	Employees receive cash in return for their services

Table 3: Participation Ladder

Source: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2008

In the ladder, "ownership" indicates the highest level of participation by members and employees; and material motivation suggests no participation, and employees work for monetary reward and follow the direction of the management.

Based on this ladder, the pattern of participation in the four organizations could be one of four types: interactive, functional, consultative, and information gathering and transfer. As all four organizations are non-governmental and non-profit, there are no shareholders or owners. Rather, ownership is interpreted here as full control of decision making by members and employees. Neither the members nor the employees in any of the four organizations entirely control the whole decision making process; members participate more actively in decision making, while employees have more limited power. Therefore, none of these four organizations has an "ideal type" participatory democratic decision making process.

Differences in the degree of participation appeared among members and employees in all four organizations. Members' participation lies at the interactive stage of the participation ladder. The participation of upper-ranked employees (executive director, director, manager, and coordinator) places them at the upper-middle location of the ladder, which includes functional and consultation in which they have limited decision making power. Lower-ranked employees (assistant coordinator, officer, field staff) are mainly involved in the information gathering and transfer stages. They gather necessary information regarding initial problems, identify resources to develop alternatives, and provide information to upper-ranked employees to make initial decisions.

Members and employees had three levels of engagement in decision making and organizational activities: high-level active participation, limited participation, and involvement only. Here, "limited participation" means members and/or employees have limited involvement in decision making. "Involvement only" means that people follow the instructions of their superiors, and gather required information to make decisions, but they do not take part in decision making or try to influence it. In all four organizations, members have wide, active, and direct participation, and upper-ranked employees have more limited participation. On the other hand, lower-ranked employees and non-member paid staff in the Anti-Discriminatory Group can be classified as "involvement only".

The scope of members' and employees' participation in each organization varies. Members of the Anti-Discriminatory Group have a wider scope of participation than those in the other three organizations. The former organization allows all of its primary and general members to participate in and influence all decision making meetings. It also has fewer layers of authority and decentralized decision making where different working groups and committees are

responsible for their own decisions; it is governed and operated predominantly by its members. All members of the Anti-Discriminatory Group work from initial information gathering to final decision making according to their interest, knowledge and expertise. Limited voting rights and the opportunity to serve on committees are for the primary and paid-staff members in this group. However, these members have a direct participation scope in decision making. The only people designated for information gathering and transfer and organizational operation are non-member, paid employees. They work without authority of independent decision, and they are not allowed to participate in decision making. Nevertheless, they can attend all discussion forums, workshops, and members' weekly meetings to provide their opinions. Therefore, it could be said the Anti-Discriminatory Group is a generally democratic and participatory organization, and it is also more participatory than the other three organizations.

The Activist Women's Organization is a moderately participatory democratic organization because it has a flat management structure and a small group of employees without any permanently designated job titles. It has a semi-decentralized decision making system. It has separate branches, and every branch manager has limited decision making power for his/her branch. Members are wholly involved in decision making. Nevertheless, the degree of participation of the employees in this organization lies in the middle of the participation ladder. All employees work from the information gathering to the functional levels. They help the executive director to make initial decisions and sometimes influence the decision. Employees express their opinions openly, discuss with members, facilitate meetings, and have limited power of decision making.

The participatory working environments in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization allow members and employees to feel they are significant parts

of the organizations, allow open spaces to express their personal and social problems, and help to increase knowledge and grow leadership skills. As a result, members see their organizations like a family where they work with different issues, share their thoughts with each other, discuss, argue, respect each other, and have informal relationships. Members and employees are more passionate and attached to the organizations than those in the Women's Union and Women's Right League. I found that a majority of the members attending a meeting of the Anti-Discriminatory Group participate in the discussion, while only a few were active and others performed supportive roles in the Women's Union. As the Anti-Discriminatory Group is open and easy to access for any outsider, more people are getting involved with it, and turnover is lower than in the Women's Union. A few employees have been working in the Activist Women's Organization for more than 15 years. They were with the organization even during its crisis period and often worked without full pay. In contrast, during my research two experienced upper-ranked employees of the Women's Union left because of the organization's uncertain financial future.

Employee participation in the Women's Union lies in the lower half of the participation ladder. Members make all major decisions, while the executive director and the president play a strong role in initial decision making. From my observation, even upper-ranked employees participate in initial decision making, but they have only limited scope of making or influencing decisions. In the Activist Women's Organization upper-ranked employees have limited decision making power. In the Women's Union this group has even more limited power. The executive director consults and discusses with employees; however, she makes many decisions after consulting with the president. This additional layer of authority limits the scope of employee participation in decision making. The upper-ranked employees function more as a consulting

group than active participants. The lower-ranked employees mainly follow the instructions of upper management.

The participation by employees in the Women's Rights League is similar to that in the Women's Union; however, their opportunity for participation in decision making is greater than the upper-ranked staff of the Women's Union. The role of League employees lies more in the middle of the participation ladder. On the other hand, the involvement of lower-ranked employees is the same as in the Women's Union. This group only works to gather information, visit the field, write reports and implement project activities. They do not participate in making any major decisions, and they cannot directly influence them.

Overall, all types of members in the four organizations have a wider scope of participation, while only upper-ranked employees have limited participation opportunities. In contrast, lower-ranked employees are involved only, and they cannot influence decisions. They play an important role in the pre-and post-decision making stages by gathering information and implementing plans under the direction of members and upper-ranked employees. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has a more participatory democratic system and allows all members to join decision making. The Activist Women's Organization as well as the Women's Rights League have a moderate participatory approach, as employees also play an important role in decision making. In contrast, the Women's Union has a less participatory democracy. This organization has a narrow scope of participation for its employees. Members, the president, and the executive director play strong roles in making decisions, which limits the opportunities of employees.

The next chapter will discuss the initiatives of the women's empowerment process in an organization, and if these various types of structural forms and decision making processes have

any influence on the process. This chapter also will consider whether an organizations'

empowerment process has any impact on the lives of its members and employees.

Chapter Five

Empowerment Practice in the Women's Organizations in Bangladesh

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India said, "You can tell the condition of a greater nation by looking at the status of its women" (Khare 2004). Even though this statement can be applied to every country, when it refers to South Asian women, the picture is more accurate than in many other countries. Unfortunately, the status of women is much lower than men in every sphere of life. Though language, religion, culture, economy and political condition are different in South Asian countries, women's position in the society is almost the same. South Asian society is patriarchal, which influences all aspects of women's lives and deny women the enjoyment of equal rights along with men. In this society, women are one of the most vulnerable groups. Violence against women is predominant in both public and private domain. The constitutions of most South Asian countries grant women equal rights with men, but women's lives are shaped by customs that are centuries old. Almost all countries have ratified CEDAW and expressed their commitment to promote the status of women but slow progress has been made (Chaudhury 2008, p. 17).

Women are neglected in their personal lives, education, work, property rights and decision making, and they have less institutional power and fewer privileges than men. Women are considered "second-class citizen[s]" (Adeleye-Fayemi 2000, p. 11). Women's participation in decision making is often not allowed in the domestic, political and economic sphere. The male-dominated capitalist society subjugates women and tries to keep them in the household. Women, especially in rural areas, lack self-confidence due to their lack of education, knowledge

of rights, and cultural restrictions that forbid them from participating in decision making along with men.

Women in most of the South Asian countries are the poorest of the poor. Women's participation in economic activities remains unvalued even though these activities are essential for household's survival and well-being. Most of women's work remains non-economic activities that are statistically not counted as economic activities. These works have no monetary value and recognition. For example, according to the report of Asian Development Bank (2001) in Bangladesh more than three quarters of employed women of 15 years and above are found to be involved in unpaid household work, less than a tenth are self-employed and about six percent contract workers (Islam and Sultana 2006 p. 61). According to the Gender Development Index of UNDP in 2013, Bangladesh ranked 93 among 136 countries with an estimated earned income (PPP[10] US$) $1284 for females and $2467 for males while India ranked 125 with a wider income gap ($1628 for females and $5974 for males). Income gaps in Pakistan are the worst in South Asia. Pakistan is ranked 129 with incomes of $1005 for women and $4676 for man (Global Gender Gap Report 2013, p. 51).

Low levels of female education is common in South Asia. In large part because of lack of education compared to men, most women are not aware of their rights. According to the Gender Development Index 2013 the female literacy rate in Bangladesh was 53 percent, for men it was 62 percent (for those aged 15 and above). In India this rate was 51 percent for females and 75 percent for males. The female literacy rate in Pakistan was very low, only 40 percent, while for men it was 69 percent (Global Gender Gap Report 2013, p. 54). One of the main reasons for this lower women's literacy rate is that they drop out before starting secondary school. This rate is

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[10] PPP or Purchasing Power Parity means, $ 1 has the same purchasing power in the domestic economy as $ 1 has in the US

higher in rural area compare to urban. The number of female students is very poor in higher and technical education.

South Asia has the largest number of female leaders who have been leading national major parties and also heading of the nations. Even though women occupy most of the parties' highest positions, the condition of women at large is very different. Even though recently women are participating in the national level, in South Asia women always face obstacles in participating and advancing to higher levels in partisan politics due to lack of financial resources, skill, experience, patronage and information (Jahan 1995; Mohsin 2012). In Muslim countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan Purdah (cover) is a symbol of the domestic dichotomy, which creates obstacles for women to work widely in public sphere. Islamic political parties are one of the vital constrain on feminist groups and women's movements that work for women's equality and empowerment. Women's representation in parliament is very low in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan: 20 percent in Bangladesh and Pakistan, and 11 percent in India (Global Gender Gap Report, 2013, p. 60). The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)[11] showed that South Asian women's access to economic, social and political opportunities rank the lowest in the world (Global Gender Gap Report, 2013). (See Table 4)

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[11] This index, developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), quantitatively measures the empowerment of women on a country-by-country basis. The index measures gender inequality in three key areas: a) power over economic resources based on earned income: b) access to professional opportunities and participation in economic decision-making; and c) access to political opportunities and participation in political decision-making. It measures women's participation in political and economic life and in decision-making positions such as the number of parliamentary seats and the number of professional and managerial jobs held by women. The greater the gender disparity, the lower the GEM.

Country	Overall Rank (Total 136 Countries)	Economic Participation	Education	Political Empowerment
Bangladesh	75	121	115	7
India	101	124	120	9
Pakistan	135	135	129	64
Sri Lanka	55	109	48	30
Nepal	121	116	130	41
Maldives	97	99	1	101
Australia	24	13	1	43
China	69	62	81	59
Thailand	65	50	78	89

Table: 4 Gender gaps in selected South Asian countries and few others

Source: Global Gender Gap Report, 2013

Besides social, economic and political issues, women and young girls in South Asia often experienced violence from family to national level including rape and sexual abuse, trafficking and prostitution, domestic violence, dowry-related death and psychological abuse. These kinds of violence are not only common in less educated families in the rural and urban areas but also sometimes happen to well educated women. Violence against women remains largely unreported because victims feel shame, insecurity and face lengthy legal procedures. Therefore, to reduce all kinds of discrimination against women and ensure women's equal and human rights, in South Asia many women's organizations work for women's social, economic, and political empowerment.

The focus of this chapter is women's empowerment at the organizational level. It describes how a more democratic participatory organizational structure is related to the empowerment process of organizational members and employees. 'Empowerment' has become one of the most widely used development terms, which specially relates to women and other disadvantaged groups in society. However, researchers have no common definition of empowerment. The empowerment of women can refer to different things in different contexts depending on who is using the term, and for what purposes. This chapter acknowledges different researchers' definitions of empowerment and examines the different empowerment processes in the four women's organizations and research participants' understanding of empowerment. It analyzes how different organizations' empowerment activities try to promote members' and employees' empowerment and raise their sense of efficacy.

Definitions of Empowerment

Empowerment is a continuum that ultimately can lead people to changes, making empowerment a process of change. As Stromquist (1995) describes, "Empowerment is a continuum process to change the distribution of power both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society" (p.8). She claims that empowerment has four components: cognitive, psychological, economic, and political (p.8). The cognitive component is about women's own understanding and knowledge of their subordination and the reasons for this condition. The psychological component consists of the development of women's self-confidence and belief that they can improve their condition. The economic component refers to women's ability to engage in income generating activities that allow them to act more

autonomously and to access material resources such as cash and property. The political component indicates women's ability to organize and mobilize for change.

Empowerment is a process of gaining the ability to make choices for one's own benefit. Another dimension of empowerment can be found in the definition by Johnson (1994): "Women's empowerment involves gaining a voice, having mobility and establishing a public presence. Although women can empower themselves by obtaining some form of control over different aspects of their daily lives, empowerment also suggests the need to gain some control over power structures, or to change them" (p.148).

From a feminist perspective Batliwala (1994) defines empowerment as "…a process which must enable women to discover new possibilities, new options … a growing repertoire of choices … to independently struggle for changes in their material conditions of existence, their personal lives and their treatment in the public sphere … The process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power" (p. 130). Bennett (2002) describes empowerment as "the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them" (cited in Malhotra et al. 2002, p. 7).

In Pakistan Shirkat Gah (1999) emphasizes self-confidence for empowerment and believes women's empowerment and social justice are interdependent. She defines empowerment as "self-confidence, self-awareness and self-reliance, freedom to decide and act for oneself with regards to education, marriage, mobility and economic activity and the ability to create new options and choices" (cited in Mumtaz 2010, p 236).

From all of these definitions, it is clear that the central feature of empowerment is having not only the power or ability to make choices, but also a combination of power, control over

choices, and ability to change one's quality of live. This change can be in an individual's

personal life, family, and social and public sphere. People can be empowered individually as

well as collectively. Through the empowerment process women can increase their self-esteem,

confidence, knowledge, autonomy, decision making power, and access to and control of

resources. They might gradually challenge and eliminate all discrimination and subordinations

against them. Nevertheless, empowerment may vary from woman to woman depending on their

age, class, personal values, local culture and circumstance.

Another significant study of women's empowerment is Kabeer (1999). She emphasizes

three dimensions of empowerment: resources, agency and achievement (p.3). Kabeer defines

"resources" not only as material, but also human and social resources that help to increase the

ability to practice the power of choice. Even though much research highlights that the indication

of empowerment is access to resources, this does not mean that only having access of resources

is enough for empowerment. Rather, control and ownership over resources and decision making

power are vital for empowerment.

"Agency" is the ability to define and make choices from various alternatives and act to

achieve the choices, even when facing difficult situations. Kabeer observes that women

themselves are the agents of their own changes. Hence, if women do not act and participate

actively in the change process, they would be only recipients of any change and not empowered

by it (Kabeer 1999). For empowerment, women's decision making agency is important. In

addition, agency can be in the form of "bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation,

supervision and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and

analysis" (Kabeer 2001, p. 3). The last dimension, "achievement", is the outcome of choices. It

indicates that with resources and agency, one could be able to achieve her desired choices that lead her to an empowered life. Achievement can have direct or indirect effects in one's life.

From Stromquist's and Kabeer's various empowerment dimensions, it is clear that to be empowered women need psychological changes, self-confidence, feelings of their own ability, and acceptance of being an active agent for change in their lives. As women are neglected and subordinated from their families to the state levels, they need to be empowered at every point where they are involved. They need appropriate education, knowledge, awareness, active participation, democratic, egalitarian and inclusive environment, and support from family, society and state to go through the empowerment process. This process helps women to increase their self-confidence, self-esteem, psychological sense of personal control, knowledge of rights, equality, the ability to make appropriate decisions, and the overall ability to change the conditions and quality of life.

At the organizational level, empowerment refers to providing employees power to make decisions. By applying interrelated three keys -- sharing information, developing autonomy via boundaries, and replacing hierarchy with self-managed teams -- an organization can promote empowerment among its employees (Blanchard et al. 1999). Without appropriate information people cannot act responsibly and make proper decisions. Information sharing is the "lifeblood" (Randolph and Sashik 2002) of empowerment. Autonomy allows people to act freely, which creates the possibility of having creative ideas, enhancing capacity to deal with difficulties, building leadership and becoming empowered. The replacement of hierarchy with self-managed teams allows people to make their own decisions for their team or group. The collective application of knowledge and skills often can produce more effective decisions to solve problems.

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This research is concerned with the democratic and participatory collective efforts of women at the organizational level, which in turn could promote empowerment and increase a sense of efficacy in their families, communities and country. Before starting the main discussion of study participants, a brief explanation of the importance of democracy and direct participation for women's empowerment is necessary.

Equality and freedom are at the heart of any form of democracy. More democratic systems allow women to exercise their rights equally, express their opinions without fear, and participate directly in decision making. In addition, a bureaucratic system is more likely a dominating power structure which creates hierarchy and gender division (Ferguson 1984). Hierarchy can reinforce class differences between men and women, superiors and subordinates, and bottom and top positions. In many contemporary societies, men's work is considered as responsible, prestigious and important for the economy. Men's roles are at the top level, while women's work is considered lower-level, as they perform both productive and reproductive roles (Acker 1990). Women do not get equal opportunities if they are unable or unwilling to perform like men in the bureaucratic workplace. In many parts of the world the characteristics associated with effective management styles are more often related to men than women. Women are considered "the first to be fired and the last hired" (Mcmahoan 2002). Women typically manage household responsibilities and economic activities with little or no appreciation. Therefore, for effective empowerment, women should create a more egalitarian, non-discriminatory, and participatory workplace that is only possible in a more democratic environment. The term "democracy" is mostly associated with a governance system at the national level. However, for women's empowerment, a democratic environment should prevail not only in national and other governments, but also the governance of organizations.

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Women's direct participation in decision making from the family to the state levels is crucial, as women are also active agents of a society. Women should be involved in the entire decision process from problem identification to the implementation of solutions and future assessment. Participatory democracy involves all participants in decision making to make collective decisions for their common good. Direct participation promotes inclusion, which is crucial for women's empowerment. Even though many forms of democracy promote greater equality, participatory democracy in principle allows every member an equal and effective opportunity for discussion and to express their ideas. Through this collective discussion, an individual member becomes a member of a greater community. In this system, a single group of people cannot dominate others. Direct participatory decision making helps women to develop skills and allows them to express their opinions, which can generate more creative ideas. Collective work in a democratic system helps to generate the feeling among members that they are part of a community (Schenck-Hamlin et al. 2008). At the organizational level, an individual can learn leadership skills that could help her/him to participate at the national level. This chapter examines the proposition that more democratic and participatory organizational decision making processes and working environment promote more women's empowerment and raise women's sense of efficacy at every stage of their lives.

Empowerment Processes in Women's Organizations

No one can teach or provide self-confidence, self-esteem or power of choice to others. Rather one must provide the environment where these can be developed. Empowerment arguably cannot be developed among recipients who only receive benefit from others without getting involved with the process. To be empowered, women need active participation. The agency of

women and their direct participation in changing their conditions are vital for women's empowerment. Many women's NGOs, cooperatives, grassroots organizations, advocacy organizations, and other collective and development organizations are working all over the world to provide women with platforms where they can develop necessary capacities for empowerment. The four women's organizations in this research work for women's social, political, and economic empowerment. They have a large number of grassroots female beneficiaries whom these organizations help to empower and change the quality of their lives. As mentioned before, most of the women's organizations in Bangladesh are concerned with the empowerment of poor women, while they often do not give attention to their own members and employees who work for the empowerment of others. This chapter focuses on the empowerment initiatives for those inside people, who make and implement plans, policies, and decisions for the empowerment of their beneficiaries. It also discusses the impact of women's organizational involvement on their personal, family, social and political lives.

It is well known that empowerment is difficult to measure. Rappaport (1991) mentioned that "Empowerment is like obscenity, you don't know how to define it but you know it when you see it" (cited in Strandberg 2002). The empowerment process helps women to become confident, and self-dependent, and to gain the ability to act autonomously. Therefore, empowered women are different from others. Empowerment can vary in amount and nature and be achieved at various stages of a woman's life. For example, a woman could have access to resources or economic activities that make her economically empowered; yet, she might not have control over her earnings. From research on various indicators of women's empowerment in Bangladesh, Biswas and Kabir (2004) found evidence on 11 indicators of empowerment: mobility, decision

making power, contribution to family income, reproductive rights, autonomy[12], ownership of

household assets, freedom from domination, awareness, participation in public protests and

political campaigns, exposure to information, and participation in development programs (p. 65).

In the context of Bangladesh, if a woman has physical mobility without restriction,

income, household decision making power, access to assets and control over them, and

reproductive rights she is empowered. Sometimes, especially in rural areas, education,

participation in community and political activities, and awareness of rights and equality are

ignored. In addition, in urban society educated and economically independent women are

considered by the society to be empowered, even though they are not socially and politically

empowered, and they might not have complete autonomy and decision making power in their

personal, social and/or political lives. Therefore, it is important to find if these better educated,

more independent urban women are empowered in their family lives as well as psychologically,

socially, and politically and whether their involvement with a women's organization has had any

impact on their perceived empowerment. Before examining the relationship of organizational

involvement and women's empowerment, I will describe the various empowerment processes in

the four organizations.

Understanding of Empowerment among Participants

The participants in the four organizations have similar understandings of empowerment.

A majority of the participants define women's empowerment as women's freedom; the ability to

make a decision and implement it within the family; pursuing economic activities; having equal

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[12] Autonomy here refers to independence. Autonomy is the power to make decisions without seeking permission of others. In the context of women's empowerment, women autonomy is typically defined as the ability of women to make choices and decisions independently within the household. It facilitates access to material resources such as food, land, income and other forms of wealth, and social resources such as knowledge, power, and prestige within the family and community.

rights within the family, society and the state; and having access to financial resources. All participants' understanding of empowerment fit into Kabeer's (2001) three dimensions: resources, agency and achievement. However, financial and material resources received more emphasis than the other two dimensions.

Two participants (both members and employees) defined empowerment in detail. For example, Shoheli Ahmed said that when a woman is able to enjoy her rights equally as a full citizen like others, she would be empowered. She explained that women in Bangladesh have to face various norms, values, and attitudes in the public and private spheres. Also, many traditional laws and customs create obstacles for them to enjoy equal rights and freedom and to act as citizens. Therefore, traditional and discriminatory norms, attitudes and laws against women must be changed for women's empowerment. Shoheli Ahmed's comment indicates a need for legal reformation and change of society's mindset to provide a more equal society for women where women can develop, practice and enjoy their empowerment. Democratic practice could help to ensure equality and freedom which are necessary for women's empowerment. Another participant, Ruby Haq, said that the meaning of empowerment is relative and depends on the position of a person. She defined empowerment as nothing but freedom of thought, expression, decision making power and the ability to implement one's own decisions.

Although all participants were comfortable with the word empowerment, Fahmida Hasan disagreed with the traditional meaning of empowerment and expressed that no one can provide empowerment to others. It is a matter of achievement. She prefers the word 'empowered' instead of 'empowerment' and believes that empowerment is "subjective and grounded on individualism." She said that the working approach to empowerment in women's organizations

is a "structurally imposed top-down process" by others that has a few limited meanings; through these fixed criteria women's empowerment is not possible.

Different people's perspectives of empowerment vary. Fahmida Hasan emphasized women's agency, freedom from restrictions, and ability to work from one's own position. She said that for empowering women, the women's movement and women's organizations need autonomy from all foreign dependence. Dependency creates powerlessness, and powerless people could not help others to become empowered. Therefore, Ms. Hasan said, women's organizations that are working for women's empowerment should create separate autonomous bodies in their organizations that would not depend on outside funds. An autonomous fund allows the organizations to work on any issue independently. The reality behind Fahmida Hasan's comment is that most of the women's organizations are financially dependent on foreign funds. The women's organizations make proposals and pursue strategies according to donors' interests and sometimes do not take other initiatives that are even related to women's issues.

According to the participants, for women's empowerment women need economic freedom; proper education; equal opportunity; democratic environments and practices at the family, workplace, society and state levels; equality; a discrimination-free society; freedom of movement; self-confidence; conceptual clarity about empowerment and autonomy; cooperation in the family; willingness to consider women as citizens and overall as human beings. Even though I found that participants believe economic independence is one of the most necessary criteria for women's empowerment, after serious domestic violence against a well-educated and financially empowered university faculty member in Bangladesh, the concept of economic freedom alone for empowerment has been questioned. It is understood that economic solvency alone is not enough for women's freedom from all forms of discrimination. Rather, women need

to understand their own conditions, be aware of their rights, and raise their voices when it is necessary. That means women need cognitive and psychological empowerment. Also, men should change their traditional mindsets about women's position in the society, be aware of equal rights and consider women as equal human beings.

None of these participants mentioned direct participation of women in decision making, although they highlighted the ability to make decisions as indicating women's agency. As chapter four examined, participation can be direct or indirect through representation, and sometimes participation is active as well as passive. Active participation is vital for a person's empowerment. The Beijing Platform for Action (POA) (1995) highlights the importance of participation and defines empowerment as "women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life through a full and equal share in economic, social, cultural and political decision making" (UNDP 1996, cited by Mumtaz 2010, p. 236).

Empowering Activities in the Organizations

Before starting field work in the four organizations, I expected that these organizations undertook different initiatives to empower beneficiary women at the grassroots level as well as members and employees at the organizational level. From participant observation, interviews and document review I found that these organizations mainly practice activities of social, economic and political empowerment for the beneficiaries. By comparison these organizations have two programs for members and employees: staff capacity building so that employees become more effective in their jobs, and increasing knowledge and awareness about women's condition in the society, rights and the importance of self-confidence. None of these organizations has any specific empowerment program for members or employees. Here, I consider the second program as members' and employees' cognitive and psychological empowerment.

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Based on observation, document review, and interviews with members and employees, I found that for raising awareness, increasing knowledge of and understanding about women's issues, and helping to change mindsets, these organizations arrange discussion forums, seminars, workshops, and training on various women's issues for their members and employees. In contrast, regular meetings and training on projects and administrative management, such as proposal and report writing, monitoring and evaluation, and computer skills, focus on skill and capacity development. For example, the Anti-Discriminatory Group mainly emphasizes awareness raising, and learning, understanding and capacity building through training at home and abroad, conferences, workshops, seminars and discussion forums on many current issues.

The discussion forum is an important group activity in the Anti-Discriminatory Group that I did not find in any other organization. The forum includes almost any issue related to women and gender, organizational activities, advocacy, protest, policy reforms, governance, and management. This forum is open for all members and employees. It does not have a set time; therefore, members have the freedom to continue dialogues about the topics that interested them most. These regular discussion forums gives relatively quiet members another outlet for sharing ideas. The members and employees exchange information, ideas, opinion and suggestions about relevant issues. Each time a group of two or three members volunteer to select a topic for the forum, inform all members and employees, arrange and facilitate the entire forum activities. This empowering initiative evidently is helping members and employees to increase their psychological empowerment. I found that members and employees in this group are more aware of current issues and organizational activities outside of its projects than those in other organizations.

In the Activist Women's Organization, various training sessions and workshops are arranged for different projects where employees from other organizations also participate. This organization uses workshops for both empowerment and staff's capacity building. In these workshops different training modules are developed and followed. In the early stage of this organization, training materials for grassroots training were used from other organizations, and employees were sent to other organizations for appropriate training. Later, it started to develop its own training materials, and the senior management personnel and external trainers facilitated different training sessions.

The workshop is another important activity of the Anti-Discriminatory Group for discussing, learning, sharing and increasing knowledge on an issue. This group believes that the workshop is a space for women to increase their learning, understanding, knowledge, and leadership skills. In workshops, women can share their thoughts and problems with each other and explore solutions after discussing. A publication of one member, Shahana Rahman, describes the workshop activities:

> …we try to provide participants with a variety of skills that will strengthen their self-confidence in the public domain, such as chairing sessions (a function normally monopolized by men), taking responsibility for devising cultural events… … above all, we use workshops to give them a place to be themselves – the selves they have not been allowed to be… …the cultural sessions provide them with a space to sing, dance, recite poetry and generally express the imaginative side of themselves (2003, p 50).

The Anti-Discriminatory Group arranges its own workshops for its members and employees more frequently than other organizations. Sometimes, it collaborates with other like-minded organizations, and invites members and employees from other organizations. The members from this group also try to attend different national and international workshops if there is any opportunity.

The Activist Women's Organization arranges annual collaborative workshops for its members and employees from different levels for evaluation and input from the field. This workshop is designed more for assessment of organizational activities and staff capacity building than for learning and empowering. The participants in these workshops include grassroots beneficiary leaders, field office staff representatives, central office staff, and sometimes members. According to a strategic plan report, a participatory approach is followed in these workshops (Report 2008-2012). Staff and beneficiaries from field share their thoughts, problems, and requirements. Based on need, members, senior management team and outside consultants make strategic plans for future.

While the Anti-Discriminatory Group arranges frequent workshops and the Activist Women's Organization arranges annual workshops to develop knowledge and skill, and to assess needs; the Women's Union does not have any workshop activities for its members and employees. During my research, a coordinator and an assistant coordinator of the Women's Union attended workshops that were arranged by other organizations. This organization sometimes arranges workshops with different union leaders, activists, and civil society. The president facilitates such workshops and only members of the organization can participate.

In all four organizations training is considered an important tool for staff's capacity development rather than for increasing staff's personal knowledge, skills, awareness and learning. For instance, the Women's Rights League believes training is a prerequisite for achieving organizational vision, mission, and strategy (Annual Report 2007-08). The Activist Women's Organization mainly arranges training based on need assessment. Based on this assessment, employees' capacity development initiatives take place. In addition, it focuses on the capacity building of employees and program partners. Regular updates of training modules and

arranging training courses are key initiatives. Employees participate in a number of training courses, which are organized by their own organization, government, and non- government organizations.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group uses training both for capacity building and promoting empowerment. It has a few staff development training emphases report writing, computer training, and language skills, both in Bangla and English for writing quality reports and publications. Training for empowerment mainly focuses on equal rights, violence against women, reproductive rights, women's health, and legal rights. Training in the other organizations at home and abroad are attended by the members and employees based on availability and particular need. When appropriate training related to women and gender issues takes place at home or abroad, members and employees of the Anti-Discriminatory Group can participate and represent their organization. After returning from training, the trained person shares her knowledge with other members in regular meetings or sometimes arranges a workshop to train others.

Since three of the organizations (the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League) have grassroots activities, they have similar staff development training for employees. These include Training of Trainers (ToTs) on women's rights and equality, legal rights, group formation and facilitation, communication, team building, micro-credit systems and management, and administrative and finance management. The Women's Union emphasizes institutional capacity building. It believes the success of any organization is influenced by the capacity of its staff (Annual Report 2006-07). In order to increase its institutional and staff capacity, this organization recruits staffers based on academic background and professional skills.

Participation is important for empowerment. A wide range of scope of participation by members and employees is found in the Anti-Discriminatory Group. From interviews and observation, I found that in addition to providing opportunities for attending training and meetings, the organization helps its members and employees to increase their abilities by providing equal participation in groups, meetings, workshops and forums. For example, any member (old or new, senior or junior) can be a part of any project or more than one project at any time according to their interests. However, they should ensure the group that they are able to provide enough time to the project before taking any responsibility. This organization also ensures all members and employees' equal rights, all members' entrance in the committees through election, opportunities to attend international training and workshops, and leadership building.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group believes that having equal rights is the primary condition for empowerment. Therefore, a democratic environment, equal opportunity for everyone, leadership rotation; participation in meetings, workshops, and discussion forums; fewer rigid rules and regulations; cooperation; respect for each other's opinions; and knowledge and information sharing are the main activities that help and promote women's empowerment in this organization. The organization seems to always be conscious of its members and employees' personal, family, and social needs; hence, it allows flexible work schedules.

Abeda Islam, a long-term member, shares these beliefs. She said the Anti-Discriminatory Group not only empowers its members and employees, but also helps others by giving them the opportunity to join its meetings and activities as volunteers. She also said that many women who are not members or employees of the organization, after attending meetings and workshops, they become leaders in their own communities and educate other women about their rights. Ms. Islam

mentioned a sex worker who regularly attended this group's meetings and afterward became a leader in her own community.

Participatory approaches are followed in the training sessions of the Activist Women's Organization. After finishing a unit, the facilitator forms small groups and provides a problem. Each group discusses, solves and then presents its findings. In this organization all central office staff and representatives from the branches attend the training. Senior members of the management team and sometimes hired trainers facilitate the sessions. Afterward, the representatives share their learning with other staff by arranging sessions at their designated branches. Through participation and facilitation of various training sessions, members and employees can learn more about women's development and empowerment, which helps them to increase their knowledge and understanding.

While the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization provide wide participation to members and employees, this research did not find any noticeable scope of employee participation in the Women's Union. The executive director believes that through providing a democratic and gender friendly environment, and equal rights and equal opportunities through various policies, this organization helps to increase empowerment of its members and employees. However, the reality is that employees in this organization do not have equal opportunity of participation. As chapter 4 describes, even upper-ranked employees have limited authority and participation opportunities. The second highest authority in the organization, the executive director, believes that since all of its members and employees have education and sources of income, they already are financially empowered, and they are also aware of their rights. Her organization helps them to increase and improve their capacity so that they can work more effectively and help grassroots women. It suggests that this organization

emphasizes the organizational skill and institutional capacity building of its employees rather than their personal empowerment.

The Women's Union considers the campaign as a very essential tool for awareness raising. One of the important activities of the awareness raising component is leadership development training. This training is only for grassroots beneficiary women, not for employees. The Union hires consultants to develop training manuals. Based on these manuals, training or field officers and occasionally trainers from other relevant organizations train grassroots women. Thus, the employees do not have the opportunity to develop leadership skills. A clear division of labor is found in the Women's Union. For example, lower-ranked employees could not facilitate seminars, workshops or meetings, or represent the organization. Generally, members and upper-ranking employees attend, represent the organization and have opportunities to facilitate dialogue meetings, consultation meetings, and national seminars where they discuss gender issues. The Women's Union organizes many rallies and human chains to protest discrimination against women and increase awareness. Mainly field and lower-ranked employees of the central office attend these gatherings, while one or two members and sometimes the president participate in these activities.

On the other hand, according to the participants, the Women's Rights League helps them to increase their capacity and empowerment through providing training, equal rights, and a democratic working environment. Even though the female participants responded that they have scope of active participation in the training and decision making meetings, the existence of a large number of male employees in upper-ranked positions is not consistence with their claims as a majority of female employees mainly work in the lower level of management. My observations indicate as well that such women do not have much freedom to talk with the outsiders.

Except for the Anti-Discriminatory Group, other three organizations emphasize gender policies, equal rights through policies, and affirmative action for women's empowerment. The Activist Women's Organization takes affirmative action for promoting women in management positions and other organizational areas. Sajeda Chowdhury, a member of the Women's Union, said that besides training, meetings, and equal implementation of policies, the Union practices affirmative action in recruitment, leave, promotion, posting, dismissal, pay and other material benefits such as transport facilities, infrastructural benefits, staff development, and work load. The executive director of the Women's Rights League, Nilufar Akter, also emphasized equal rights and affirmative action. She highlighted as well a flexible and friendly working environment, which is common in all four organizations. Akter said that, as her organization works for women's empowerment, employees are aware of their own rights compared to other organizations, and they can use their enhanced knowledge in their personal lives. However, I found that these organizations sometimes do not apply the affirmative action policy during recruitment or promotion of female employees to the upper management level. Instead, they prefer employees with more education, work experience and professionalism. For this reason, men occupy the majority of upper-ranked positions.

Another means of enhancing skills for members and employees is the opportunity for publication, which is found especially in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization. Interviews indicated that members and even employees from all levels can publish their own work in the organizations' journals. Two founding members along with a few senior members in the Anti-Discriminatory Group, the executive directors of the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Rights League, and the president and an executive committee member of the Women's Union have their own academic and non-academic

publications in various national and international journals and conferences as well as in their respective organizations' journals. All publish regularly in various newspapers, websites and blogs. In addition, the director, deputy director and almost all project coordinators in the Activist Women's Organization have published in the organization's monthly journal. On the other hand, the employees in the Women's Union do not have this opportunity, even in the organization's journal. Rather, a few lower-ranked employees assist others in publishing their writings without being named as co-authors. Sometimes employees write while upper-ranked people only edit and publish under their own name. This is a clear indication of discrimination.

Empowerment Indicators in Participants' Lives

The discussion of the empowerment processes in the organizations suggests that all have gender training, workshops, seminars, discussion, and campaigns on gender rights and women's issues for their members and employees as well as for beneficiaries. They have other activities for employees that mainly emphasize staff skill development such as report writing, project management, computer training, and administrative and accounting training. A few empowering activities were found in the Anti-Discriminatory Group that are not available in the other three organizations such as leadership rotation, opportunities to serve in leadership positions, and facilitating meetings, and the presence of a discussion forum with various ongoing topics to enhance the knowledge of members and employees. Only members and a few upper-ranked employees in the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union, and the Women's Rights League have the opportunity to participate in foreign tours or to attend seminars and workshops.

Based on Biswas and Kabir's (2003) 11 empowerment indicators, all research participants reported having empowerment elements in their lives, such as mobility and autonomy, exposure to information, awareness of their rights, financial independence and

education. In this sense, these women are economically empowered. Interviews indicated that almost all participants have access to assets; however, most of them have joint ownership with their spouses. All have decision making authority; yet, most of the day-to-day small purchases and expenditure-related decisions are made by the wife, while larger purchases and child-related decisions are made jointly. The indication of hierarchy of the male member in household decision making is found from the participants' interviews; nonetheless, no sign of domination was found. For example, a participant, Nazma Akhter in the Women's Union, mentioned that sometimes her husband tells her to quit her job and be the one to stay at home when their children become sick or house-maids are not available. Another participant, Munia Haq in the Activist Women's Organization, said that due to the distance from her house to the office, her in-laws sometimes have told her to change jobs. These women are economically empowered, and they have autonomy in decision making; yet, since these women live in a patriarchal society, a traditional mindset is still visible in many educated and more progressive households, especially in the context of child rearing, mobility and physical security.

To the question of spending their own incomes, all participants responded that they have full freedom to do so. Most of the participants mentioned that they mainly spend their income jointly with their husbands for the household, children, and themselves. They never ask their husbands before spending their own income. There is no fixed area where they solely spend. A few participants who are single, separated, or divorced, mainly make all decisions themselves; yet, sometimes their families and friends play important roles in their lives by providing suggestions and support, criticizing and praising their activities.

A woman's reproductive rights is an important indicator of her personal empowerment. According to the participants, everybody has reproductive rights. With their husbands they

discuss family planning and when and how many children they want. None of them faces any kind of domination; however, a few mentioned that sometimes they have to follow strict family traditions such as having more than one child, preferring boys, and giving more time to the family that mainly reflect society and culture.

Selection of a job indicates whether a woman has freedom to choose her career according to her own preferences and how comfortable she feels in doing so. I found that all of the participants had such freedom, and they feel comfortable working in a women's organization. A majority of participants from the Women's Union and Women's Rights League said that there were no special reasons for getting a job in these specific kinds of organizations. They mainly were looking for a job and got one. In contrast, all participants from the Anti-Discriminatory Group and a few from the Activist Women's Organization said that they joined these organizations out of passion for working for something different for women. As these organizations are pioneers on women's issues and have very good reputations, they continue their involvement. These two types of answers could suggest that women from the Women's Union and Women's Rights League are not as passionate and interested in working in an women's organization as those in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Organization. However, in the context of Bangladesh job market, people cannot always secure a desired job. Sometimes they need to adjust to the circumstances.

All participants mentioned that they have to visit the field at least once a month for two or three days, and they do not have face problems from their families. A few participants who have children expressed that sometimes they face difficulties maintaining child care; however, as field visits are a part of their job, their families understand and cooperate.

All participants expressed that they are very comfortable in their current job and do not want to change, unless they find positions in an international organization or positions with higher salaries. To the question about their choice of employment, a majority of women answered that they would prefer any job in the NGO sector because they have work experience, the working environment in this sector is more gender friendly and flexible than the for-profit sector, NGOs work for good causes, and sometimes it is easier for women to find jobs in the sector. A few participants also wished to work in banks or schools because they believe these also are gender-friendly workplaces in Bangladesh.

An interesting difference emerged in participants' involvement with development work in addition to their current jobs and political activities in their personal lives. I probed this point as an indicator of participants' social and political empowerment and found that members and employees in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization are more socially involved than those in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. As all of these women work for women's development and political empowerment, they participate in protests, campaigns, and development programs that are part of their jobs. Nevertheless, a majority of members and employees in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and a majority of members and especially central office employees in the Activist Women's Organization actively participate in public protests and in workshops, seminars, and discussion forums outside of their jobs. They said they always protest against any social discrimination against women and others when they find it in their society. These women also are active members of other organizations.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group is a non-partisan organization, and its members are prohibited from engaging in any direct partisan activities during their membership so that members' affiliation with a party could not affect organizational values and objectives.

Nonetheless, this group does not restrict any member's personal political views and beliefs. Every member and employee has the freedom to support any political party, but only in their personal lives. Still, the Anti-Discriminatory Group is one of the pioneer women's organizations that works for women's political empowerment and demands direct election and increased seats in the Parliament. From the interviews and group meetings, I found that all members are aware of party politics, and they support anything "progressive" for everyone. A large number of members in this group are involved with other organizations, for example, in human rights, development, advocacy, culture, and research. Most of the participants mentioned that membership in the Anti-Discriminatory Group encourages and helps them to engage with other organizations and build networks.

In contrast, the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union are mainly associated with a partisan political view. The Activist Women's Organization was founded and is staffed by activist members of a student organizations and women's and cultural movements. Even though during the period of this research only three participants had backgrounds in student politics, at the beginning of this organization the majority of members and employees had affiliations with such partisan politics. A majority of core members and employees in the central office are affiliated with other organizations. On the other hand, even though a student leader founded the Women's Union, currently it does not have many members or employees with partisan political backgrounds. Also, a majority of employees of this organization are not affiliated with any other organizations. This organization neither encourages its employees to get involved with other organizations nor recruits people with activist backgrounds. Rather, it prefers good educational backgrounds, previous work experience, and professionalism for more effectiveness at work.

To the question of voting in national elections, all participants answered that they had voted last time. All participants from the Anti-Discriminatory Group, three participants and the founder from the Activist Women's Organization, two participants and the executive director from the Women's Union and two participants from the Women's Rights League said very confidently that they decided themselves whom they would vote for, but they always discussed electoral issues with their spouses, friends and co-workers. In contrast, other participants expressed that they discussed mainly with spouses; however, they made their own choices, and nobody influenced them.

Participants' responses to my questions about empowerment in their personal, social and political lives may have elicited socially desirable responses, for example, when I asked about reproductive rights, freedom to choose career or voting in national elections, all participants replied positively. In part this reflected that most of the participants knew about my research topic and the responses I might have been looking for;   they also may have given answers that made them look good. As I could not observe participants' personal lives, it was not possible for me to verify their responses directly. In this case I had to rely on information provided by participants themselves. However, I was aware of this potential bias and tried to counter it by noting how confidently and comfortably participants were in providing their responses. Moreover, I cross checked information from informal conversation to minimize this bias.

Analysis

Before starting the field work I expected that since the four women's organizations in this research are well known and evidently successful in empowering grassroots women, their empowerment processes would be broad and include their members and employees. I also

expected that these organizations would have specific empowerment initiatives for their own people. However, in reality I found that none has any specific empowering program for members and employees. Instead, all four organizations more or less emphasize their staff development programs that mainly help to increase members' and employees' skills, efficiencies and effectiveness in achieving organizational goals. These organizations are empowering their employees economically through providing employment opportunity that gives them financial freedom.

I also found that the members and employees had certain levels of empowerment (based on Biswas and Kabir's 11 indicators) before they joined these organizations; however, the degree of empowerment varied. For example, the majority of core members were more empowered than the majority of employees in all four organizations, especially in mobility, decision making, autonomy, freedom of domination, awareness, exposure to information, participation in political issues and involvement in the development program. Senior members in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and upper-ranked employees in the other three organizations are more empowered than the junior members and the lower-ranked employees in the areas of organizational decision making power, autonomy, awareness, freedom of domination, exposure to information, participation in political issues and involvement in the development program. Again, members and employees in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and Activist Women's Organization are more empowered than the Women's Union and Women's Rights League based on the 11 indicators. However, all members in all four organizations are relatively similarly empowered.

I categorized participants in the Anti-Discriminatory Group as senior-junior based on how long they had been members, as this organization does not classify its members as senior-junior based on responsibilities, age, or education. On the other hand, the other three

organizations – the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League - do not have such senior-junior distinctions among their members; rather they have designated senior-junior employees according to their responsibilities, which are categorized by education and work experience rather than age or job tenure. It is fairly common in all organizations that more senior people are in upper-ranked positions because of their work experience and sometimes education, while the more junior are in lower positions. In the Anti-Discriminatory Group, even though all members and employees are formally equal and have the opportunity to become more empowered persons through various processes, highly educated members have greater exposure to information and opportunities for participation, and they are better able to represent themselves than less educated members. These members play a vital role during network building at the national and international levels. Here, educational qualification, which is surely an important requirement of empowerment, separates these members and helps them to act as more empowered women than others. In the other three organizations, members and upper-ranked employees mainly get opportunities for foreign training and direct participation in national and international seminars and workshops. They also provide training in other organizations that help them to enhance their skills, knowledge, capacity and self-confidence and become more empowered people.

Overall, core members are highly educated, and they formed and governed their organizations; they are already empowered, which has led them to create platforms for other women. As upper-ranked employees have work experience, help members to govern organizations, make decisions, and have more opportunities for participation compared to lower-ranked employees, they also are more empowered than other employees. At the same time, as the members and employees in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's

Organization have more opportunities of participation to enhance knowledge, understanding, and self-confidence as well as skills and capacity compared to those in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League, those in the former two organizations are more empowered than their colleagues in latter two organizations.

During the interviews, I asked all participants if they noticed any differences in their personal, family, social or political lives after joining their respective organizations. Their answers indicated that they have had major changes in their awareness of women's rights and positions in society, understanding of women's conditions, inner feelings and mindsets that could be indicators of psychological empowerment. They did not report any significant change in their household decision making, autonomy, freedom of movement, or reproductive rights. The evidence shows that a few members of the Anti-Discriminatory Group have had major changes in their lives after joining this organization. For example, Farhana Parvin and Sonia Sultana both had struggled in their marriages for more than five years, but could not make any decisions after thinking about society, family, reputation, and children's future. They said that even though they were educated and financially independent women, they did not have the courage and confidence to go against social norms and customs. After joining the Anti-Discriminatory Group they found a space for themselves where they could share and discuss with other women. Working in different projects on gender, participating in many seminars, workshops and training at home and abroad, and getting opportunities to represent the organization, they also came to realize their inner strength, ability to deal with multiple problems, and ways they can solve problems. They also said that support from other members, open discussion about everyone's problems, and positive attitudes are important parts of the changes that they have found in their organization. This change also was identified profoundly in the interviews with several male employees. Even

though male participants' responses might be socially desirable responses, five male interviewees from different organizations said that their understandings of equal rights, ways of thinking about and seeing women and their conditions in the society, and mindsets about social norms and customs had changed after joining the women's organizations.

This research finds that education and employment are two important elements that empowered these women before they join their current organizations. A majority of core members of these four organizations have at least an undergraduate degree from a public college or university, while a few have doctoral degrees from abroad. A majority of them are employed in public, private, non-profit, research, academic and other organizations. In addition, the founders of these organizations and a few members are very well-known in the society for their work. Members are highly confident, aware and progressive. In contrast, paid employees have undergraduate degrees at the minimum, and most of the upper-ranked employees have post-graduate degrees with long-term work experience. Highly educated and experienced members and employees have more knowledge and more access to information that helped them to become empowered women before joining the organizations. Afterward, various empowerment activities in the organization further help them to enhance their empowerment.

Another element is previous or current affiliation with similar or other organizations. From the interviews, I found that women who had previous or current affiliations with any other organization as a member or an employee, appeared more empowered than those who did not have any association. In this case, the participants in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization are more likely to be affiliated with like-minded or other organizations than those in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. The former are more confident, aware and socially involved. Moreover, a few members and upper-ranked

employees of the Women's Union are associated with cultural and development organizations besides their current jobs, while only two employee participants in the Women's Rights League had been previously affiliated with a women's organization. This indicates that although these women have some degree of economic and psychological empowerment, they are not fully socially and politically empowered. A majority of lower-ranked employees also had not have affiliations with other organizations in the past, and they do not have any connections currently other than their job. These participants are mainly in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League. The reasons could include these employees' younger ages, family obligations, less time after paid job, and lack of personal interest and encouragement from current organizations.

The reasons behind different patterns of empowerment between the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization, and the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League could be different organizational objectives, beliefs, work strategies, work areas, types of members and employees, and management systems. For example, the Anti-Discriminatory Group is a membership-based organization, governed and operated predominantly by the members; it believes in open discussion, equal participation, and voluntary activities, and it works through networking. As a result, members are more engaged with direct organizational activities. This organization has a wide range of opportunities for research, workshops, and seminars on women's condition in the society and state. On the other hand, the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League have a small group of members who govern the organization; yet, for operating, they depend on paid employees who mainly work by following rules and regulations that are created by members. In

these organizations, staff's capacity building opportunities are designed more to increase employees' work capacity than to be empowering.

The Activist Women's Organization is different from the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League as it believes in flat management structures and volunteer work. Also, it prefers employees who have activist backgrounds and clear passion for working for women and other deprived people. For this reason, employees are involved "progressive" activities. They start their work with this organization through volunteering, which builds more attachment with the organization. The organization has few members and employees who have been working there for more than 15 years. Even though these women were aware, vocal, and socially active before they joined the organization, their current affiliation helps them to be more confident, aware, experienced, and knowledgeable.

In addition, the core working areas of the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization are women's social, political and economic empowerment. A few of these organizations' activities include enhancing women's political and legal rights and reproductive health, and stopping violence against women, which are very relevant to all women. Members and employees can find connections between their work and their own lives. In contrast, the Women's Union and Women's Rights League mainly work for women in the informal sector, which include emphases on labor's rights, law reformation, and others that are not always directly relevant to employees' lives. In addition, a majority of employees do not have any previous involvement with activism, and they mainly joined these organizations for employment without necessarily having any passion for working with women's development. Their working tasks are often not very relevant to their personal lives. Therefore, previous

affiliation with an organization, passion for working with women's issues and employee recruitment criteria appear to be also connected with the empowerment of employees.

Family background and friends also influenced the women's increased sense of efficacy and empowerment. Members and employees who have "family and friends" connections with partisan politics, activism, and previous working experience in the NGO sector are more likely to be affiliated with party membership, progressive activities and organizations in addition to their jobs. I found that most of the members in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization have either family backgrounds or connection with activism and advocacy work or friends who introduced them to this field. Although members and a few employees in the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League also have family and friend connections or personal passion for working with women, most of the employees joined the women's organization for a job.

In sum, affiliation with an organization or working in a women's organization basically has little influence on educated and employed urban women who gain empowerment from family, educational institutions, previous work experience or connections with others. Organizational involvement, training sessions, awareness building and other processes make immediate and noticeable differences in the lives of women who did not have much power in the first place, such as rural women or lower socio-economic or less literate women. As Kabeer (1999) mentions, empowerment is connected with disempowerment. Development of empowerment indicators through various means is more visible and easy to locate in a person who is deprived, vulnerable and disempowered in the first place. For this reason, the organizations here have been largely successful at the grassroots level. With their empowerment processes, thousands of women are becoming economically, socially and even politically

empowered who did not even come out from their households before joining a women's

organization. The empowerment process is more noticeable and easily measured in the lives of

the powerless. However, I also found that a more democratic organizational structure and a more

participatory approach in an organization increase knowledge and understanding of its members

and employees, and changes their mindsets about traditional social norm and customs by

providing more opportunities to participate in awareness raising and knowledge increasing

training, workshops, discussion forums, campaign and leadership building skills that help them

to enhance their physiological, social and political empowerment.

Chapter Six

Conclusions

The NGO sector in Bangladesh constitutes a dynamic entity, which is recognized internationally for its vast and effective development approaches in the areas of micro-credit, empowerment of women, capacity building of the poor, education, health, and social mobilization. Some of these organizations use advocacy as a strategy to influence governmental policies and decisions, shift priorities, and inform, engage and mobilize people to press more effective policy implementation.

The four organizations in this research practice many advocacy activities including campaigns, public speaking, rallies, seminars, research and publications to influence policies to promote women's social, economic and political empowerment. This dissertation research examined the structural forms and decision making processes of organizations, and their initiatives to promote women's empowerment in the lives of their members and employees. Much research has suggested that many women's organizations prefer non-hierarchical structural forms and participatory collective decision making processes that allow participation by members and employees from all levels. Therefore, I expected that women's NGOs in Bangladesh, which are part of broader women's movements, would be democratic and participatory in nature and would promote empowerment in their members and employees as well as grassroots beneficiaries. The research focused on the organizations' structural forms, decision making process and empowerment initiatives for their members and employees. This concluding chapter briefly reviews the overall findings, explores the possible future research areas, examines organizations' impact on women's lives, and explores the implication of this

research for non-profit, participatory decision making and women's empowerment. Finally, this research recommends some possible approaches for organizations.

Overview of Findings

This research used a multi-case study design for collecting data. I selected four women's NGOs located in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. All four organizations were mid-sized, at least twenty years old, governed by a group of female members, and focused on women's empowerment. Using interviews, participant observation, and document review, this research tried to find which organizations had more participatory democratic forms and decision making processes, and whether and how these promoted empowerment and increased a sense of efficacy among members and employees. Before starting the research, I thought I would find that some of the organizations were less-hierarchical, democratic and participatory in nature and others had more bureaucratic structures and decision processes. I also expected that all of the organizations would promote equality and empowerment among their members and employees; however, the organizations with more participatory democracy would promote greater equality, participation, and empowerment, which in turn would help women to become more empowered in their lives compared to those in organizations with greater bureaucracy.

After examining four organizations based on Rothschild and Whitt's (1986) eight characteristics of "ideal type" organizations, I found that none of these organizations was purely democratic or bureaucratic; rather, they varied in the degree of democracy and participation. To tap organizational structure, I consolidated Rothschild and Whitt's (1986) eight characteristics into three dimensions: complexity, formalization, and center of decision making. Based on these dimensions, the Anti-Discriminatory Group was more democratic than the other three

organizations; the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League were identified as the least democratic of the four, and the Activist Women's Organization was moderately democratic.

I also found that all four organizations have informal hierarchies. Supported by observation of meetings and examination of documents, I found informal hierarchy between the senior and junior members and staff, longer (old) and shorter (new) members, highly educated and less educated members, and male and female employees. Senior, highly educated members and employees in all organizations are more active, vocal, and play important roles in governing and operating the organizations. In the Anti-Discriminatory Group, senior, longer tenured and highly educated members sometimes influence the decision making by ignoring or arguing with junior or new members. In addition, a knowledge gap between highly educated and experienced and less educated members and employees also is evidence of informal hierarchy.

The second focus of the research was the decision making processes of the four organizations, seeking which had participatory systems that included members and employees from all levels. I expected that a more democratic organization would have a more participatory process. I found that the Anti-Discriminatory Group was more democratic than the other three organizations; as a result I thought it would have a more decentralized participatory decision making process, while the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League would have more centralized systems. Even though the hypothesis was supported, none of these had direct participatory democracy. Instead, all had a representative democracy with formal and informal election processes and selection of a representative group.

In addition, not all members and employees in the four organizations have same scope of participation in the decision making process. Comparatively, the Anti-Discriminatory Group has a more participatory process than the others; nevertheless, it does not allow its paid employees to

participate in decision making as it is operated predominately by its members. In the other three organizations – the Activist Women's Organization, the Women's Union and the Women's Rights League -- members are the supreme authority in decision making. Employees have the opportunity to participate in decision making but they have limited or no power of influence on it. Members and employees are free to express their opinions and provide suggestions in all four organizations; yet, the importance of those opinions varies. The Anti-Discriminatory Group accentuates voluntary work and provides greater participation and other opportunities to its non-beneficiary volunteer members than to members who also are paid employees. For this reason, members with monetary incentive do not have voting rights, and they cannot be a part of the executive committee.

No purely democratic and participatory organization emerged. All of the organizations have more or less hierarchical structures, vertical and horizontal complexity, written rules and regulations, boards and committees of small groups of people who make major decisions, preference for professionalism, dependence on paid employees who have limited or no authority, emphases on rank and position instead of ability and expertise, and knowledge and information gaps. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has a more participatory democratic decision making process than the other three organizations, and the Activist Women's organization has a moderately participatory decision process. The Women's Union has a more hierarchical organizational structure and a less participatory decision making process than the other three organizations. Finally, the Women's Rights League has a more hierarchical structure, like the Women's Union, but more moderate participatory decision making as its upper-ranked employees participate more in decision making than those in the Women's Union. The Women's Rights League is more male-dominated than the other three organizations.

The third area of inquiry was if a democratic form and participatory environment helped to promote empowerment and increased efficacy among members and employees. Based on Stromquist's (1995) four components of empowerment and Biswas and Kabir's (2004) 11 indicators of empowerment, I found that members and employees already had a certain degree of empowerment before becoming involved with their current organizations. Even though I could not find any significant direct effect of empowering initiatives on the participants' family, social and political lives, all four organizations evidenced cognitive and psychological empowerment of members and employees. In addition, through employment these organizations are providing economic empowerment of their employees. Through different training and organizational activities, individuals' understanding and knowledge regarding gender equality, rights, and empowerment have been increasing, and their ways of thinking evidently have been changing. For example, participants report that they are able to make decisions in their personal lives; they are more active, vocal and engaged in the society; male participants say they share their responsibilities with their wives. The personal and family lives of members and employees in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization appear to be closely related to the organizations. They discuss family problems with each other to find solutions. The Activist Women's Organization has a discussion session with employees' spouses to increase their awareness and to try to change their traditional mindsets regarding gender relations.

After examining these three areas, I found relationships between organizational structure, internal decision making processes, and raising women's sense of efficacy and empowerment. However, the impact of an organization's structure and internal environment do not have an equal effect on all of the components of empowerment. Instead, the evidence shows it has a significant effect on cognitive and psychological components. The more democratic

organizational systems allow women to participate in various levels of organizational activities, which in turn helps to increase knowledge, awareness, self-confidence, and skills. On the other hand, a less democratic and more hierarchical system has limited opportunities for its employees. This system is characterized by division of labor and subordinates who only follow the rules and instructions from the top management without knowing about all of the organization's activities. Even though such organizations provide considerable numbers of training and capacity building programs for members and employees, these mostly help employees to increase effectiveness in their jobs, but do not promote empowerment and are not relevant to other parts of their lives. However, it should be remembered that women's empowerment is the primary goal of these organizations, and they evidently ignore their own female members.

The research also identified several similarities among the four organizations. These included having boards and committees, constitutions and written rules, routine activities, majority agreement to make decisions, members' authority to make all major decisions, wide scope of participation for members (though more limited for employees), an emphasis on activism, project-based activities; highly dependence on donors, friendly relations among members and employees, and lack of proficiency in the English language and technology among female members and employees. The reasons behind such similarities could be the organizations' similar objectives, vision, inception period, working areas, targeted population, pattern of activities, and roots in the women's movement. Governmental rules requiring an executive committee and a written constitution could be another reason. For example, NGOs are required to register with the department of social welfare to get the status of a non-profit organization and with the NGO Affairs Bureau in order to receive foreign funds. For the purposes of registration and to ensure organization's accountability, the government requires the

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presence of an executive committee with a president, general secretary and a treasurer. Every NGO has to renew its registration annually or biannually through the submission of an updated constitution and various forms with the signatures of the members of the executive committee. However, more democratic organizations put less emphasis on the committee and the constitution, while less democratic organizations follow these more closely.

The Anti-Discriminatory Group was quite different from the other three organizations on several dimensions. The Anti-Discriminatory Group has lesser amounts of hierarchy, fewer formal policies, less dependence on paid employees, less preference for male employees, and less professionalism. Members and employees do not have any direct party affiliations. It has more engagement of its members, employees, outsiders, and volunteers. Also, this group has mandatory member rotation, leadership building activities, and designed to enhance knowledge and understanding of women's conditions.

Even though this dissertation research offers valuable insights into organizational structure, decision making process, and their initiatives of empowerment, it has several limitations. The most important one was limited accessibility to observe members' decision making meetings, to interview with members and employees, and to review documents. Before starting the research, I assumed that being a native student researcher would make it easier for me to gain accessibility. Even though access to the head of the organizations was relatively easy, getting permission to work in the organizations was difficult in two organizations. In the Women's Union, which I found was less democratic in nature, the executive director and the president would not allow me inside the organization as I did not have any personal reference and my research was not funded by any known national or international program. Both the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union permitted my research in exchange for

my involvement with organizational tasks such as translating success stories of the grassroots beneficiaries from Bengali to English, gathering and compiling organizational success stories from different newspapers, compiling project summaries for the upcoming annual report, and contributing my work experience to the organization's blog. In contrast, the Women's Rights League first denied me access; however, after several office visits and phone requests, this organization allowed very limited access for interviews with the executive director and a few senior employees, and for document review of the organization's history, organogram and annual reports.

I had limited access to members' meetings in the Activist Women's Organization and the Women's Union, while the scope of observation of any meeting, organizational activities and interviews were limited in the Women's Rights League. The Activist Women's Organization provided me all requested documents and a work station, but allowed limited access to the executive members' meeting only to observe the starting part of a meeting that included updates of ongoing projects, upcoming organizational activities, and members' opinions about these. Afterward, I had to leave before starting to discuss major issues. Even though the Women's Union allowed me to observe two members' meetings, these meetings did not involve making any decision. One of these meetings were specially arranged to discuss the organization's 20 year anniversary program.

My access to documents such as constitutions, project plans, and meeting minutes also was restricted. I had to seek permission from the executive director for the documents and then the administrative officer allowed me to review them. A final limitation was the general lack of interaction with people at the Women's Rights League. Employees were not comfortable talking with me. Therefore, I had to depend on their responses in the open-ended questionnaire.

Possible Future Research Areas

This qualitative research of four women's advocacy organizations in Bangladesh is an exploratory study and thus more valuable for hypothesis generation than for hypothesis testing. Future research could be conducted for hypothesis testing in different organizations with more cases and a larger sample of participants. Collection of information from more organizations would yield more robust generalization about outcomes. This research included exclusively women organizations in Bangladesh to explore whether and how these organizations are empowering women. It would be interesting as well to find out what happens in other nation-states and situations where more male members and employees work with women in Bangladesh.

Another possible future research topic could compare the impacts of organizational structure, decision making and empowerment processes on the lives of its members and employees in mixed-sex organizations with those of women-only organizations. This would enable us to differentiate women's participation in different domains. Moreover, the cases in this research were from urban areas where women are relatively more educated, independent and empowered. Extending sample collection to rural areas would be important in future research.

Organizations' Impact on Women's lives

This research found that members and employees had certain levels of empowerment before they become involved with their current organizations, including mobility, autonomy, economic freedom, awareness, decision making power in the family, and some power to make choices for their own benefits and to overcome discrimination and traditional subjugation. They gained this empowerment from previous engagement with other organizations, including

educational institutions, student organizations, party membership, and various jobs. Examples of a woman's complete transformation from disempowerment to empowerment after being involved with a women's organization only can be found at the grassroots level where women had not been involved any organization.

The impact of NGOs' activities on the lives of millions of grassroots women in Bangladesh is significant. Many women have reduced their economic dependence, increased their mobility, and gained decision making power in the family while involved with various NGOs. Many women have benefited from increasing their knowledge, awareness of their rights and changing the ways they view the world. Changing a woman's economic status by assisting her in getting income generating activities is a quick effect of an NGO's interventions. On the other hand, through discussions, training, campaign, meetings and other activities increasing their awareness, changing their mindsets and helping them to enhance their self-confidence takes longer time and potentially has longer term effects.

Empowerment is a continuum process of change. This change can be from disempowered to empowered or from less empowered to more empowered. Kabeer (1999, 2001) argued that this change can occur along a number of different but interrelated dimensions such as resources, agency and achievements. Resources and agency together help a person move toward transforming their lives and becoming an empowered person. As the empowerment process is on-going and very difficult to measure, it is challenging to identify an end point to the process. Therefore, gaining empowerment is the achievement of conditions of exercising agency in the future. This research found that participants' current involvement with organizations, and the scope of their direct participation in organizational activities including empowering training played a significant role in increasing cognitive and psychological empowerment; the latter

includes increase knowledge and awareness of women's rights, equality, health, social status; changes in traditional mindsets; and growth of more self-confidence. These are the conditions of practicing women's agency to change their lives and becoming empowered or more empowered. For instance, a few participants mentioned that even though they were educated, confident and financially independent women, they had traditional mindsets that included viewing men as the "bread-winner" of a family, child-rearing as solely a woman's responsibility, or the belief that women should not get separated or divorced. However, after becoming involved with a woman's organization, receiving training, and working closely with women's issues, these participants began to recognize inequality, discrimination and ignorance in the family, society and the state. They now are more capable of raising their voices against discrimination and making their own decisions based on circumstances.

I found a noticeable impact of the organizations' empowerment initiatives in the interviews with male participants. They said that after becoming involved with the women's organization and working on women issues, their understanding of many gender issues and the importance of the equal rights for women's empowerment has changed; gradually their traditional mindsets have also changed. For example, before they thought household chores and raising children were mainly responsibilities of women or reserved seats for women in public transportation are not necessary as women demand for equal rights. Now they share responsibilities and try to take care of household chores equally with their wives and understand the vulnerable condition of women in the society. So, they try to leave their seats for women in a crowded bus if there is no empty reserved seat left. They also mentioned that they are now aware of the vulnerable situation of women in this patriarchal society which they had ignored before.

The organizational structure and the degree of involvement of members and employees within an organization can have a major impact on increasing women's self-confidence, becoming more psychologically empowered, and becoming more involved in the community and the outside world. However, this impact varies. For example, the more democratic and inclusive decision making processes of the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization allow a wider scope of participation to members and employees, ranging from identifying a problem to finding and implementing solutions. After joining and interacting with other women activists, the members and employees realized their own ability to deal with multiple problems, and found courage to handle personal struggles and ways they can solve problems.

In addition, even though members and employees in the more participatory democratic organizations work on different projects, they have knowledge about every project. If necessary, any member and employee can work for any project. Members and employees of these organizations have greater knowledge about the organization's structure, members, boards, projects and field activities compared to those in the less democratic and more centralized Women's Union and Women's Rights League. For example, two participants from the Women's Union, who have been working in this organization for more than five years as assistant coordinators, could not answer questions about how many members the organization has on the general board or how many employees work in their own projects. The reasons for this may include a limited scope of participation, greater distance between board members and employees, lack of information flow, and the particular division of labor.

Members and employees of the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization are more aware and socially involved if they find any discrimination in the society

compared to those in the Women's Union and Women's Rights League. Also, participants from the former organizations are more involved with other organizations and networking.

For Blanchard and his associates (1999), three interrelated keys - shared information, autonomy via boundaries, and replacement of hierarchy with self-managed teams - are similar to several characteristics of a democratic participatory system: free flows of information, autonomous decentralized decision making processes, non-hierarchical structures and collective team work. These "keys" were present in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and the Activist Women's Organization. These two organizations, then, have empowering organizational structures that can support raising female members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment in every sphere of their lives. As participants were previously empowered, the impact of organizational empowering initiatives on their lives is not very distinguishable. Even though this research could not find any strong influence of organization's structure and decision making processes on the members' and employees' social, economic and political empowerment, evidence was found that more participatory democratic organizational structure and decision making processes enhance members' and employees' psychological and cognitive empowerment.

Implications of the Research

There is no doubt that the NGO sector plays very significant role in Bangladesh in helping improve conditions of the poor and marginalized people. Even though NGOs are associated with the poor and powerless groups, this sector has established itself strongly because of its non-profit status, development agendas, empowerment initiatives, and advocacy role with the help of external financial support. In Bangladesh it is estimated that around 90 percent of the

country's population receiving benefits direct from about 45,000 different types of NGOs (Ahmed and Potter 2006). As a result, the networks of NGOs at the grassroots level are more important than government services. NGO activities are very significant in the areas of micro-credit, human rights, gender equality and women's empowerment, the physical environment and sustainable development.

Women's organizations in Bangladesh are the institutional form of the women's movement, and they have played an important role in creating spaces for women and helping them to raise their voices. The four advocacy organizations in this research campaign to raise awareness and put pressure on the government to change policies, ensure women's equal rights, and address issues such as violence against women, health and women's participation in politics. Although these women's organizations advocate change in government policy; they also pursue various activities to promote grassroots women's as well as its members' and employees' psychological, social, political and economic empowerment. It is an important part of the activism of these women's groups that they offer spaces for women to discuss their problems as well as solidarity and support to deal with them. With the assistance of women's organizations in various projects, women are becoming economically empowered, more aware of the reasons behind their present conditions, and more organized, self-confident and powerful in their lives. Many of those in women's organizations believe that increased awareness and collective action can transform gender and social relations. This transformation can start from individual awareness and ultimately lead to wider social transformation. For this reason, women's organizations work for increasing women's personal experiences and awareness as well as their social and economic empowerment. In addition, women's organizations have gained respect

from the government due to their advocacy, campaigns and strong public connections (Fahmida Hasan's interview).

I conducted this research to enhance academic and public knowledge and to reduce the lack of research about participatory democratic organizational structure and women's empowerment in Bangladesh. The findings of this research may help more democratic women's organizations to identify their prospects to be more democratic and promote empowerment by providing more participatory and equal workplaces. In contrast, organizations with more bureaucratic structures, but beliefs in democracy and women's equality, might gradually change their bureaucratic settings and become more democratic. Among the lessons learned from this research is that except for the Anti-Discriminatory Group the other three organizations mainly emphasize the capacity building of their employees rather than their empowerment.

All of these organizations consider women's status and position regardless of their class, race, or religion by using concepts of discrimination, inequality, and exploitation. Therefore, they provide platforms for women to gain ability and change their conditions. However, the women's organizations appear to be mainly concerned about grassroots women while ignoring their own members and employees. This research may draw the attention of the founders and members of organizations to pay greater attention to the empowerment of their members and employees who play significant roles in and are integral parts of the organizations.

From this study I found that more democratic organizational structure and participatory decision making processes increase members' and employees' sense of efficacy and especially psychological and cognitive empowerment. I found evidence that members and employees of the democratic participatory organizations are more aware, confident, knowledgeable, and have a stronger sense of belonging to the organization. Since the objective of any women's organization

is to promote women's development and empowerment; therefore, based on the findings of this study I can say it is important for the women's organizations to have more democratic organizational structures and participatory decision making processes.

Recommendations

The findings of the research suggest some possible approaches for organizations in Bangladesh that wish to create more democratic and participatory workplaces and raise members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment. In the NGO sector, it is not easy to create fully participatory democratic decision making since the founding members or different committees and boards of a group of volunteer members often keep decision making power in their hands, while paid employees are hired to operate organizational activities. The exercise of participatory democracy is sometimes fully possible in cooperatives and in self-help and equal shareholding member-based groups as these organizations are mainly operated by its members for their own benefits, and they possess power to reject any kind of bureaucracy. Even so, if executive members in an NGO all eager to build a more democratic participatory workplace, they could slowly reduce their hierarchical structures, widen span of control, and include employees in decision making processes. The committee members or founders can still define the direction, set the objectives, and help others to make decisions for organization. In this way, NGOs could become more empowering participatory workplaces with the guidance of members.

Women's organizations mainly work to ensure women's equal rights and their advancement in every sphere of their lives. The founding and core members of these organizations need to realize that organizational structure might be more democratic and participatory in order to promote empowerment and provide a space where women can develop

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their capacity and skills. Organization authorities should remember that they cannot provide empowerment to anyone. Instead, women's organizations offer the facilities to disempowered or less empowered people to gain capabilities to become empowered, and participation is necessary for that. Theorists Oxaal and Baden (1997) suggest that "participation and empowerment are the two sides of the same coin" (cited in Mohsin 2010, p. 21). This suggests that any hierarchical form should be at least complemented by a democratic system.

Decentralization of decision making with autonomy is another important criterion for democracy and empowerment at the organizational level. Most organizations have many projects, branches, and divisions. If decision making distributes to all parts of an organization, members and employees at all levels could get involved, which would help them to increase their sense of belonging to the organization and reduce alienation. Blanchard and his associates (1999) found that "autonomy within boundaries" is more appropriate where members and employees could easily identify their particular responsibilities and did not have to worry about interfering with others' issues. Project groups, working groups, or teams with certain responsibilities could be boundaries within which a group or a team can perform autonomously. For example, members of different project working groups in the Anti-Discriminatory Group and center managers in the Activist Women's Organization have limited decision making autonomy for their respective groups and centers. These could be examples for the other organizations.

Constitutions, policies, manuals, and rules and regulations are important and often necessary for an organization to operate its activities and to maintain relations with other bureaucratic organizations such as government agencies, donors and the for-profit sector. Often rigid rules and regulations discourage people from contributing thoughts and ideas. However,

written rules and regulations also can be used mostly as guidelines instead of decision making or organization operating manuals.

Organizations should arrange more discussion sessions and participatory workshops for their members and employees in which they can talk openly about their personal, professional, social, economic and political problems and find solutions. Discussion forums and workshops could be places where members and employees can share information. These participatory approaches are likely to promote the formation of new ideas, opinions, and interests and help to increase knowledge, closer relationships and trust, and feelings of belonging among members and employees. They will realize that they also are valuable parts of their organizations rather than just workers. Face-to-face discussions help to eliminate confusion and misunderstanding; increase information flow, and ensure more participatory decision making and democratic accountability.

This research found that members and employees of the comparatively less democratic organizations are not involved as volunteers with other like-minded or development organizations outside of their jobs. Their organizations also do not encourage them to do so. Affiliation with other organizations may help to increase network, social and relationship skills that are important for NGO workers as they mainly work with grassroots people. Volunteering also can help to enhance knowledge about other organizations, experience, motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem as well as generate new ideas. Women's organizations, therefore, should encourage their members and employees to engage in volunteer work and also make opportunities for others to get involved with their own organizations.

As in many economic systems and organizations, a very common understanding is that decision making and information possession are the responsibility of owner(s) or members,

while employees' main job is to carry out the decisions. Owner(s), members and upper management need to realize that to achieve organizational goals, members and employees both make significant contributions. Even though paid staff have monetary incentives, many employees in this sector work out of commitment and dedication to the organization's goals. In addition, empowerment processes in the grassroots level operate mainly through the employees. Lack of involvement of employees in decision making processes could affect the decisions that are made for the grassroots. For that reason, owners, members and upper management need to change the view that they are the only decision makers, and allow a wider scope of participation by employees. On the other hand, greater autonomy and more decentralized decision making often frighten employees and make them reluctant to take on more responsibilities. Members and employees should work as a team. A slow process is important to adapt to such change. The opportunity for direct participation in decision making will help to create more trust, cooperation, and motivation and also increase information flow and sharing. Employees may become more attached to the organization when members and employees work as a team. All members and employees then might realize that the responsibility for any success or failure is not that of a group or individual; instead, it is a collective responsibility.

This research found that none of the organizations is purely democratic or bureaucratic. These organizations are mostly a combination of these two types. In the context of Bangladesh's NGO sector it is not completely possible to create an ideal type organization. For this reason, organizations could shift their efforts to create a hybrid organizational structure emphasizing the characteristics of democratic form, for example, Bordt's (1997) pragmatic collective organization. In this type of organization the core elements of collective organizations remain intact. This organization is similar to collective organizations because it has collective decision

making authority and few distinctions among job positions. In contrast, pragmatic collectives are like bureaucracy as it has less normative incentives, less shared beliefs and time, and more formal decision making (Bordt 1997, p. 44).

The organizations in this research take different initiatives including awareness raising, skills and capacity building, and training on political education to empower the grassroots women as well as their members and employees. However, not all of the organizations provide the same opportunities to members and employees to participate directly in decision making. Hence, this research has found that a few participants from more democratic organizations are more empowered than those from less democratic organizations. In this manner, organizational structure and working environment have an impact on raising female members' and employees' sense of efficacy and empowerment in their lives.

However, this research cannot generalize from only four cases about the impact of organizational structure and active participation opportunities on the lives of female members and employees. Not only this number of cases limited but it was not possible to observe and examine empowerment indicators in the personal lives of members and employees. Many other factors -- education, previous work experience, family background, age, culture, and societal structure -- have strong influences on women's lives that help or hinder them becoming more empowered. However, this research can claim that there is definitely organizational impact on members' and employees' psychology that helps to increase their sense of efficacy and empowerment through increasing awareness, knowledge, self-confidence and self-esteem. Members and employees mentioned that in spite of being educated and aware women, they were not fully conscious about women's status and condition in the society. Many also mentioned they thought that as their family is educated, they would be aware of women's equality and freedom.

However, after joining a women's organization, they began to see many issues in society from a point of view that they had not noticed before. Their knowledge and awareness are increasing and their understanding and traditional mindsets are changing. Increased knowledge and changing views are helping them to become more confident and empowered. They are becoming better able to raise their voices, fight to achieve equal rights, and abolish all forms of discrimination and inequality against women from their own as well as other women's lives. It probably would not be possible if they did not have sufficient participation opportunities, learning, work opportunity and shared knowledge in these organizations. Only a democratic and inclusive organization allows its members and employees from all levels to participate widely in organizational activities. For these reasons, democratic organizational form and participatory decision making is an appropriate system of organizational management.

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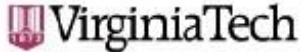
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IRB Approval Letter

VirginiaTech

MEMORANDUM

DATE:	February 18, 2013
TO:	Karen Hult, Mahin Khan
FROM:	Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)
PROTOCOL TITLE:	Organizational Democracy and Women’s Empowerment: Women’s organizations in Bangladesh
IRB NUMBER:	11-261

Effective February 16, 2013, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the Continuing Review request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 6,7
Protocol Approval Date:	March 7, 2013
Protocol Expiration Date:	March 6, 2014
Continuing Review Due Date*:	February 20, 2014

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

**Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects
Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Research Project: Organizational Democracy and Women's Empowerment: An Examination of Four Advocacy Organizations in Bangladesh

Principal Investigator: Mahin Khan, Planning, Governance and Globalization, SPIA Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The primary purpose of this study is to explore whether and how women's non-governmental organizations [NGOs] in developing countries like Bangladesh (where society is male dominated and democracy is always not engrained) promote women's empowerment and equality in their families, communities and political lives The study examines how NGOs' organizational structure and internal decision-making processes may help them in achieving these goals. Members who have been involved for various lengths of time are included and compared. Organizations' member lists or directories are used to select possible interview respondednts. 10 participants from each organization will be interviewed for a total 40 participants. All participants are women. participants will be three different: volunteer members, recipient members, and paid staffers.

II. Procedures

I am willing to take part in the above-mentioned interview. I am aware that my participation in this interview will involve sharing with the interviewer my experiences and understanding of this organization's activity and its procedure to promote gender development and women empowerment and effect of the organization of my family, community and political life. A semi-structured open-ended questionnaire will be used for the interview and a voice tape recorder will be used to record. This interview will take no more than 45 minute.

III. Risks

I have been informed that the risks associated with participating in this study are minimal.

IV. Benefits

I understand that no promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage me to participate. I am aware that the data collected from me during this study will be used for scholarly purposes: in my dissertation and in academic papers. Benefits to society include increase in knowledge about women's organizations in Bangladesh, their activities and most importantly whether and how these organizations work to achieve the empowerment of women. New findings about women's organizations may be gained and new research areas could be opened.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

I am aware that my identity, and that of any individuals whom I mention, will be known only to the above principal investigator and her committee members. I understand that the above-mentioned interview will be audiotape recorded and later transcribed. When transcribing the taped interview, the principal investigator will use pseudonyms (i.e., false names) for my name and for the names of any other individuals whom I mention. If this transcribed interview is used for the above-mentioned academic purposes, these pseudonyms will also be used in preparing a written report of the study. Any details in the taped interview that could identify me or any individuals whom I mention will also be altered during the transcription process. The principal investigator and her four committee members will be the only persons with access to the tape recorded interview and it will be stored securely. I am also aware that it is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view this study's collected data for auditing purposes.

The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

VI. Compensation

I am aware that I will not receive any form of compensation for participating in this study.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. If I choose to withdraw from the study, any information about me and any data that I have provided will be destroyed.

VIII. Participant's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities: to participate in a one-one-one interview of no more than 45 minutes, as described in Section II above.

IX. Participant's Permission

I have read and understand the *Informed Consent* and the conditions of this study. I have had all of my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

_____ Date _____

Signature of Participant

_____

Printed Name

_____ Date _____

Signature of Principal Investigator

_____

Printed Name

Observation Indicators

Organizational Structure and Decision Making

Indicators of how democratic and egalitarian OR not democratic an organization is:

➢ Structure of organization:
- Does it have any board? How many on boards?
- Who has powers on board?
- How do people get on the board (appointment forever or is it elected from the membership, with set terms and then others are elected?)
- Does membership on board rotate?

  No board may be considered most democratic.

➢ Formal rules and regulations:
- What type of written rules?
- What type of policies?

➢ Decision-Making:
- Where do most decisions take place?
- Who is involved in making decisions?
- Who is eligible to attend decision-making meetings?
- Are all members considered equal for purposes of decision-making?
- Is there a hierarchy? (on board vs. general membership)
- Are employees also involved in decision making?
- Are volunteers involved in decision-making?
- Of those eligible to attend, what proportions show up?
- Of those who attend, what % speaks up?
- How free do people seem to be to speak up in the group?

➢ How often do the decision making meetings take place?

➢ How they follow certain routines?

  More often, more democratic

➢ Upon observing a few decisions, how are decision taken?
- Vote with majority rules?

- Is it 'modified consensus' that is talk openly until 'consensus' seems to emerge which requires more than majority but not necessarily unanimity.
- Do they talk the issue out, no matter how long it takes, until modified consensus emerges?

Just vote and go even with slim majority (not very democratic)

➢ Is there any hierarchy in this group, either in the decision making process or in the jobs that people do or in how people are compensated or respected?
- What they do to support this hierarchy OR to prevent hierarchy from developing?

➢ **Respect and Norms**
- Does the group appear to encourage and respect every member's views or just some?
- Has the group developed norms of listening and taking into account everyone's views?

➢ Is there an informal pecking order with perhaps the founder or any oligarchy deciding everything, or are there norms that encourage and expect everyone to speak up and expect consensus-based decisions?

➢ What is the relationship between staff members, Board members and volunteers?

➢ **Conflict Resolve**
- Observe a few conflicts within the group where decision making gets heated.
- Do they fight openly? If so who wins?
- How do these get resolved?
- How much time was involved, who was involved, what was the process.
- How did people express their view? How did the group deal with disagreement?

If always the same winners, then they have oligarchic control (not democratic)

➢ If all come down to what one person or oligarchy want, not very democratic

➢ Do they have any common resource pools like cars, food or anything that they shared?

➢ **Resource Dependency**
- What was the approximate budget size or revenue (annually) that this group took in?
- What were their main sources of funding/revenue?
  - o Government?

         o   Foreign donors?
         o   Private donors?
         o   Foundations?
         o   Self-contributions?
         o   Customers/clients?

- Members' and employees' satisfaction with their sources or funding or was this a subject of contention?

➢ **Level of Professionalization:**
- How many people are on the <u>paid</u> staff of this organization?
- How many female and male staff?
- In what ways, do they rely on their paid staff and to do what?
- What are the staff recruitment criterions?

➢ Any outside influence on the structure of organization
- Government
- Donors
- Culture of society

Interview Questionnaires

Interview Questions for Members and Employees:

Name:

Position:

Organizational

1. How long have you been with this organization?
2. Before joining here were you involved with any other organization?
3. What brought you in this organization?
4. What kind of responsibility do you have in day to day life in this organization?
5. How do you feel to work/get involve with this organization? What makes you feel like this?
6. What kind of rules and regulations you have to follow in day to day life?
7. How do you feel about these rules?
8. How many people are in the executive committee/board? How many people are in your project?
9. Who makes final decisions? How it make major decision?
10. What is the scope of your participation in any decision making?
11. Do you feel any type of difference in your life because of your involvement with this organization? If yes, explain what is that?

Family Life:

1. What was your last large purchase or family expenditure? When was that and whose idea was that?
2. How did you get to the final decision? Please explain as detail as you can.
3. How do you take day to day life expenditure decision?
4. Who mainly pays the household bills?
5. Do you have any children? If yes, how many and how old are they?
6. How do you decide which school/college/educational institution would be good for your children?
7. How does your involvement with this organization related to your family life?
8. Do you face any problem in your family because of your involvement in this organization?
9. Do you feel any type of difference in your life after involving with this organization?

Work Life

1. (For members only) Are you involved with any kind of economic activities that means do you have any job right now? If no, is there any reason not to have a job?
   If yes, what is that? How long have you been doing this job?
2. What is the reason of choosing this kind of job?
3. Do you have to travel outside of city or outside of country for your job? If yes, how frequently? How does your family feel about this traveling?
4. Please tell me about your feeling with your job?
5. How easy would it be to change your occupation if you want to?

Civic Engagement:

1. Could you tell me if there is any social club, group, school governing body, committee, cooperative or other association in your community?
2. Are you a member of any of these? If yes, how long have you been with this group?
3. Why do you involve with this group?
4. What kind of responsibility do you have in this group?
5. How involved do you feel in these decision-making processes within your community?
6. Is there any relation between your organization and community involvement? If yes, what is this?
7. Does this organizational involvement help you to involve with other organizations
8. During vote in an election, whom do you decide with when choosing which candidate to support?
9. Do you feel any difference before and after joining with this community/social group?

➢ In your opinion, what do you mean by women's empowerment?
➢ What is necessary for empowerment?
➢ What is your organization doing to empower its members and employees?

Appendix E

Interview Guidelines for Organization's Founders/Leaders

1. Please describe the context, purpose and founding of this organization or effort.

2. How important is it for your organization to having a small group of members' committee or a board?

3. What is the understanding of this organization with 'democracy'? How is your organization practicing democracy in the organizational level?

4. What do you mean by 'women's empowerment'? What components are necessary for the empowerment of members and employees in an organization?

5. What are your organization's initiatives to empower its female members and employees?

6. Do you think democratic structure and working environment of an organization is related to women's empowerment?

7. If yes, why and how these two related?

8. How does your organization promote equality in the organization among members and employees?

9. Donors are important for any NGO. How is your organization's relation with its donors? How do you handle donors' conditions?

10. Please tell me how is your relation with the government?

11. Please evaluate briefly your organization's initiatives of achieving its goal(s)?