

# Mst. Afroza Begum elected as Councilor in Rangpur City Corporation

Mst. Afroza Begum (Swity), a 24 years old woman leader of Grassroots Women Leaders Network (GWLNs), has been elected as Ward Councilor from 7, 8 and 9 No Wards in Rangpur City Corporation election held on 21 December 2017.

Mst. Afroza Begum has learnt about GWLN and Nagorik Uddyog from Mst. Sonali Begum, one of her maternal aunties, who attend in community mediation (Salish) and assist young girls and disadvantaged and marginalized victims getting access to justice. Moreover, she observed her auntie along with other women leaders are attending rallies, seminars and meetings, and conducting group discussion in village, an awareness raising session on women rights and gender particularly against child marriage and dowry, women inherited rights, importance of girls' education and domestic violence against girls and women.

She observed that villagers asked her aunt's support whenever they get in trouble, and people in the village respect her for her courage and works. In before Mst. Afroza Begum never had experienced that women is attending Salish and talking in favour of women and girls' victims. By inspiring from her auntie Mst. Afroza Begum inspired to be a woman leader and work against child marriage, dowry and hilla marriage<sup>1</sup>.

Once she met with Mst. Arifa Begum, a community mobilizer of Nagorik Uddyog, and expressed her interest to work for disadvantaged and marginalized people particularly women and girls victims. In consultation with other members, in 2013, Mst. Afroza Begum was enlisted as a member of GWLN of Topdhon union. At the very beginning she was so shy that she cannot speak and even mentioned her name in public place. Over the years she has been participating in skill enhancement trainings – including human rights, gender, community mediation, and family and domestic violence related laws – supported by Nagorik Uddyog, and attending rallies, human chains, seminars and meetings organized by GWLNs that uphold her leadership abilities. Moreover, being a member of GWLNs, she could able to improve her leadership capabilities, social belongings and relations of trust with GWLN members and community people, a sense of identity and values, and the capacity to organize her own.

Knowing her leadership ability her neighbors and other GWLNs members insist her to submit nomination paper as one of the word councilors from 7, 8 and 9 No. wards in Rangpur City Corporation election that held on 21 December 2017.

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<sup>1</sup> Hilla marriage can be translated in English to mean interim marriage. In rural village, as soon as a Muslim man utters the word talaq three times to his wife, he effectively divorce to his wife. Later if the man regrets it and wants to resume his marriage life, his divorced wife need to go into a Hilla marriage with another man. He can remarry to her former wife, only if her new husband divorced her.



When she starts her campaign and meeting with people in election, she was said that 'we need a councilor who would work for the disadvantaged and marginalized women, and girls and we know you are the right person who will work for us' by the inhabitants of her campaign area. Finally in election, she got 7,118 votes and elected as Ward Councilor from 7, 8 and 9 No. wards.

Mst. Afroza Begum was born in a very poor family. Her father was a rickshaw puller, and it was very difficult to him to feed a large family (five daughters and one son). Therefore, Mst. Afroza Begum was adapted by her maternal uncle when she was only three days old. After completed her secondary education, she married to Md. Antajul Islam without her family members consent, and that never accepted by uncle and parents. Afterwards, she becomes a mother of two daughters. At the very beginning when Mst. Afroza Begum starts to work with GWLNs, her husband did not take it easily. But, now she is encouraged by her husband to work for the disadvantaged and marginalized community people and even her husband and daughters are accept by family members.

Mst. Afroza Begum is the youngest woman Ward Councilor of City Corporations in Bangladesh. She said, 'GWLNs not only makes me a woman leader but also make me a Ward Councilor in Rangpur City Corporation. Now, I am very happy with my life, and I will keep continue to work with the most disadvantaged and marginalized people in Rangpur'.