

## Community Development in Sri Lanka

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### Objectives of the paper

1. Define Community Development
2. Explain Community Development in Sri Lankan Context
3. Develop a Conceptual Framework for Community Development

### Definition of Community Development

The need for community development is widely recognized but there is an inconsistency in the definition, usage and general understanding of what community development represents.

The word 'community' comes from the Latin 'Communis' meaning public, shared by all or many. German Sociologist, Ferdinand Tonnies in his work, *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* in 1887 perceived community to be a tighter and more cohesive entity within the context of the larger society, due to the presence of a 'Unity of Will'. He added that family and kinship were the perfect expression of community but that other shared characteristics, such as place or belief, could also result in community. ( Tonnies, ] 887: 22)

One might find a large amount of literature that deals with the notion of community. However, it is pertinent to refer to Community Social Psychologists, Garcia, Giuliani and Wiesenfeld for their definitions of community for the purpose of the present paper. They have cited nine definitions of community and one of them reads as follows:

A group of people that shares a common territory, a set of common resources and a common culture, that interact frequently, and that considers themselves as part of a social group

From these definitions they draw two major characteristics of community, i.e.

- a. structural characteristics i.e. people and physical environment and
- b. functional characteristics as a result of structural patterning such as social networks generated in everyday community life. (Garcia, et al. 1999: 727)

Development is a fairly elusive and ambiguous concept that assumed different meanings depending on the context in which it is used.

However, the concept of development, generally, implies a positive change in specific direction. Ideas and concepts do not occur in a vacuum but are products of the social, cultural and historical events surrounding them.

It is not intended to discuss Evolutionary theory, Modernization theory, dependency theory etc. with regard to development theories in this paper.

After the Second World War, some of the development thinkers equate development with economic growth and indicators such as Gross National product and per capita income were used to measure it. In this context, Economic Stage theory of Rostow (1960) and the capital formation and vicious circle concepts developed by Ragner Nurkse (1952) were important. However, it was in 1969 that Dudley Seers finally broke the growth fetishism of development theory. Deverlopment, he argued, was a social phenomenon that involved more than increasing percapita income. Development means, in Seer's opinion, eliminating poverty, unemployment and inequality as well.

Later it was recognized that development is a broader concept that encompasses not only economic development but also social, cultural and political development and it should be future oriented and sustainable.

Therefore, **Community Development** means improving the quality of peoples' lives and expanding their ability to shape their own futures through improving their access to opportunities to better themselves. (Soubbotina & Sheram, 2000, World Bank) In this context it is necessary for them to 'involve more equitable education, job opportunities, greater gender equality, better health and nutrition, cleaner more sustainable natural environment, a more impartial judicial and legal system as well as broader civil and political freedom. The Copenhagen Declaration (March, 1995, p.42) while restating some of the determinants of the above outcomes, introduces others, such as the presence of democratic institutions, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, increased and equal opportunities, the rule of law, promotion of respect for cultural diversity and rights of the people belonging to minorities, and an active involvement of civil society.' (Wanigatane: 2003: 12)

Strategies that have adopted for community development are varied. However, the modern thinking on strategies for community development focuses on the idea that development must come from the people themselves. In this context human resource development is a means as well as objective of the development process. Most common strategy in this area is participatory development where people themselves identify their problems and find solutions for them. The literature reveals empowerment of people at the grass root level, social mobilization, down-up planning process and conscientization for the improvement of life of the poor people of the community.

## **Community Development in Sri Lankan Context**

Sri Lanka's achievements in community development are well known. In several dimensions -such as universal primary enrollment, gender equality, infant and maternal mortality - the country is well above the level of most of the developing countries. However, there are a lot of economic, social and political problems that confront the Society at large in Sri Lanka. A large number of people live under the poverty line, youth unemployment are very high and cost of living is unbearable at present.

Most important problem that the country faces is the ethnic conflict in the North and East.

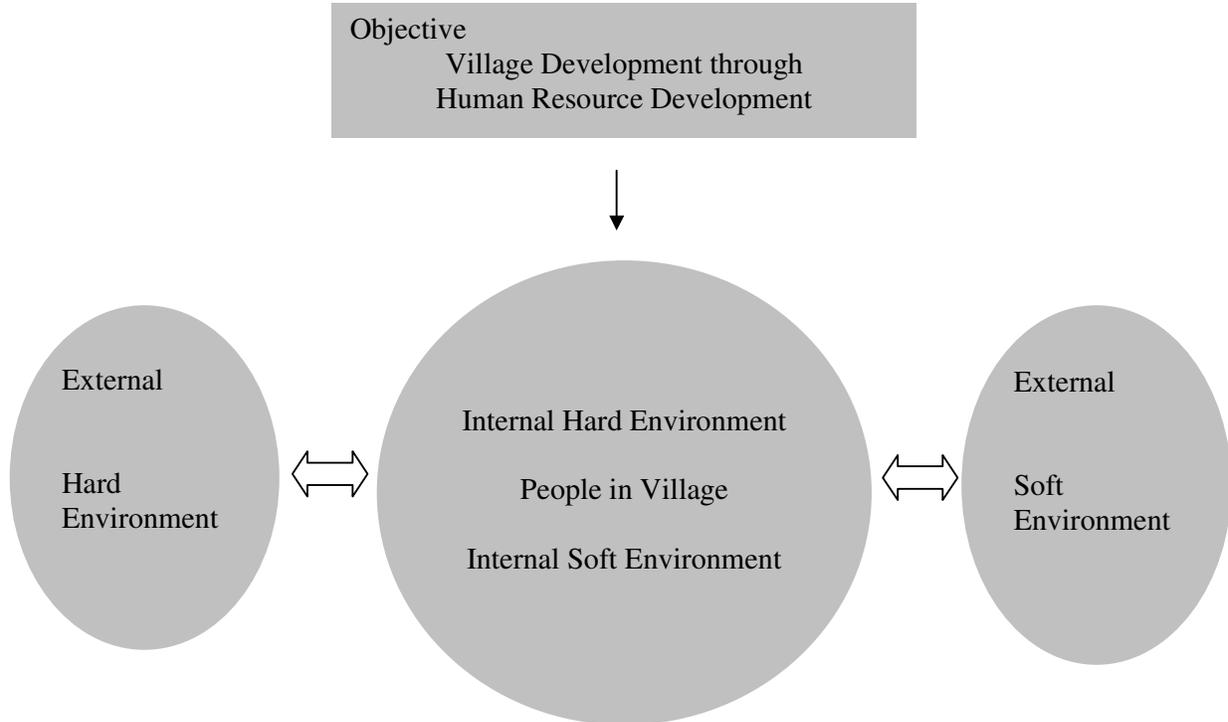
Sri Lanka is a multi - ethnic, multi religious and multi cultural country with a population of 19 million. It consists of 74 percent of Sinhalese, 12.6 percent of Sri Lankan Tamil, 7 percent of Moor and 5.5 percent of Indian Tamil. In terms of religion, the majority population belongs to Buddhism, followed by Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

In Sri Lanka, community development is considered as the development of rural poor as in other developing countries. More than 70 percent of the population lives in rural area in Sri Lanka and they mostly live on agriculture. In the rural sector, the majority are small landholders who have limited access to modern production inputs and who are often not aware of the ways of improving the agricultural production and productivity. They are most often in debt, and thus seek off-farm or non-farm employment to supplement farming income. The most disadvantaged group is the landless who have no assets except their unskilled labour and live on the margins of subsistence. Another major vulnerable group is women who have few assets and even few rights. The labour of all these people is assigned to produce income for the family's survival. (Dissanayake, 2001: 1) It is reasonable to add the people in the plantation sector and residents in slums and shanties into this category where the living standard of people is well below the national standard of the country and the services such education, health and the infrastructure facilities are inferior compared to other areas.

There are many attempts by government, non-government and private institutions to develop the various aspects of rural people and people living in the plantation areas during last few decades. Out of these interventions, the most significant development was the introduction of universal adult franchise in 1931 which empowered the people and promoted them to articulate their needs through their representatives. After the independence the government policies in education, health, welfare and land also helped to promote economic and social development in the country. The non-government organizations and private institutions also contributed to the economic and social welfare of the rural people in the country during the last few decades. Among the N.G.O programmes, total social transformation through Sarvodaya programmes made huge contribution in the development of rural people in Sri Lanka. The World Bank recent report revealed an attempt by Janasakthi Bank Sangam organized by the Women Development Federation in Hambanthota for alleviation of the poverty through empowerment of women in the area. It is an outstanding fact that the participants of this programme are confined to females of the low income families and at the moment there are 32, 000 women in the organization. This organization demonstrates that with sufficient motivation, women are capable of initiating action to improve their economic and social status through self determination (Hewavitharana)

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### Conceptual Model Community Development at Village Level in Sri Lanka



Main Concept for the above model is taken from the following Source University of Colombo and Japan international Cooperation Agency (JICA) Joint Study Project on Participatory Development (Dissanayake, 2000)

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