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NGO POLITICS IN SRI LANKA

Local Government
and Development

Indi Ruwangi Akurugoda



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macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-58585-7 ISBN 978-3-319-58586-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-58586-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017948296

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Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

*To my dearest Amma and Thaththa
for
your endless love, care and affection
the great courage and strength you have given;
your sacrifice to fulfil my dreams*

PREFACE

The gap in the literature on NGO politics in Sri Lanka is a major reason for this book. The book, therefore, contributes by filling these gaps in the scholarship on NGO involvement in local government and local development, and in clarifying the activities of NGOs in the Sri Lankan context.

This book is also motivated by a concern to examine the accuracy of criticisms by anti-colonial nationalist critics of NGO activity, especially foreign-originated and foreign-funded NGOs that work in Sri Lanka. These critics have portrayed NGOs as imperial agents who continue Western colonial influences. This book examines the roots of these anti-colonial criticisms and examines whether they represent a genuine refutation of foreign aid and NGO involvement, or whether they voice the hidden agendas of political actors. The book, therefore, reveals insights around the Sri Lankan policy debate on NGO involvement, local government and local development.

A further reason for this book originates from the background and interests of this author. Being raised in a rural community in Sri Lanka led the writer to observe and experience first-hand the many difficulties facing communities. While years have passed, and governments changed, the situation in rural communities and the lives of the people have not improved. People have voted during elections, but they do not seem to have looked back to determine whether their political representatives have addressed their needs. The links between the government, especially local government, and the people have remained weak.

The opportunities to study and teach in the University of Colombo in the capital city of Sri Lanka, and then to teach in the University of Ruhuna in the southern province provided a means of experiencing the differences between the people who live in cities and those who live in villages. Despite where they live, large parts of the Sri Lankan population have been neglected and their needs have gone unaddressed by successive governments.

Working as a researcher in a tsunami housing support project conducted by the well-known German organisation (GTZ) provided this writer with the opportunity to identify the capacities, abilities and potential of foreign aid, and foreign-originated and foreign-funded NGOs to make a positive change for the many Sri Lankan people. At the local level, the attitudes of people have been very positive to the foreign aid and towards the personnel in the field. Opportunities to visit many tsunami and war-affected areas in Sri Lanka and to talk with people who experienced the consequences of the tsunami and the war have proved advantageous to this book. Many large-scale construction projects were taking place in these areas, and people voiced complaints about the way they had been neglected by central, provincial and local governments while these projects were being pursued. This raised questions in the writer's mind about the outcomes of the central government's large-scale projects which were conducted under the name of 'development'. It was evident to the writer that the actual needs of the people in these areas were not being addressed and that many were made much worse off as a result of the big 'development' being pursued by the central government.

This background maps the reasons behind this book which seeks to identify how to address the needs of the people who have been disadvantaged, underprivileged and neglected, and to assess the contribution NGOs make to improving local development and providing support for local government in building its capacity to act effectively and contribute.

This book is mainly for an academic audience consisting of university lecturers, university (undergraduate and postgraduate) students, NGO/INGO officials, civil society activists, policy planners, social and policy researchers and public administrators. In examining how and why local communities have been neglected in the Sri Lankan development initiatives, and in assessing the actual and potential contribution of NGOs to local government in Sri Lanka, this book consists of the following substantive chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the background and objectives of the book towards identifying how to address the development needs of the people in a context of strongly centralised government power structures using the NGO potential.

The various roles of NGOs in post-colonial societies have been analysed in chap. 2. The chapter presents a multiple theoretical framework related to post-colonial situations, government-NGO relations, and the interactions of NGOs in policy processes.

Chapter 3 sets out to review the history of NGO involvement in Sri Lanka. It discusses the ambiguities related to the term 'NGOs' in the Sri Lankan context, identifies reasons for the lack of clarity about NGO data and assesses the implications of the different forms of relations between NGOs and the Sri Lankan government. This chapter explores the criticisms of Sinhala nationalist parties and groups that have portrayed NGOs as imperial agents.

Chapter 4 presents on local development and people's participation, and investigates the ways in which local government is affected by national and provincial politics. This chapter investigates differences in the ways in which central government and local government identify development, and looks at how the results of central government-controlled large-scale construction projects affect the local people.

Chapter 5 outlines a number of problems in Sri Lankan local government and assesses the proposals for solutions. The chapter investigates ways to address local-level problems and the potential of NGOs to provide solutions.

A number of centrally-led NGO projects at the local level have been analysed in chap. 6. This chapter identifies as a special issue the large amounts of foreign aid and significant support from NGOs which flowed into Sri Lanka to assist in recovery in the post-tsunami and post-war situations. The chapter explores how the effects of this support have shaped the Sri Lankan government's behaviour towards foreign aid and NGOs.

Chapter 7 investigates NGO involvement at the local level, and highlights collaborative local government-NGO relations which support and promote local development. These locally-led projects are assessed in terms of the ways in which the NGOs are involved at the local level, whether their project aims to match local needs, and to what extent such aims have been fulfilled.

Chapter 8 concludes by providing an overall analysis. It assesses the contribution being made, and which is still to be made, of NGOs in serving to strengthen and enhance local government's role in addressing the needs of communities and promoting effective local development.

Baddegama
Sri Lanka

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book, *NGO Politics in Sri Lanka: Local Government and Development*, is an edited and shortened version of my Ph.D. thesis that I completed in 2014 at the Department of Political Science and Public Policy, University of Waikato, New Zealand. I owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Alan Simpson and Dr. Patrick Barrett, my Ph.D. supervisors, for their continuous assistance. I greatly appreciate the valuable guidance and enthusiastic encouragement you have given me.

I specially thank Dr. Raewyn Emmett, Jillene Bydder and Frances Douch for their enormous support.

I would like to acknowledge the academic and administrative staff of the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka for the helpful support they gave.

I gratefully appreciate all participants of the foundation research of this book for spending their precious time sharing ideas and providing information. Special thanks to the staff of Parliament library and Social Scientists' Association (SSA) for their great assistance and encouragement of this research. My sincere acknowledgement is extended to Mr. Ranjith Perera for his kind and friendly assistance every time I needed help. Special thanks should be given to the Tamil translators for their help in translating Tamil medium interviews and documents. I express my great appreciation to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato for giving the ethics approval for my research.

I express my great appreciation to Palgrave Macmillan, the publisher of this book, and to the editors, Alina Yurova and Ben Bailey for their guidance and assistance throughout the publishing process.

I greatly acknowledge my colleagues, friends and relations for their varied support. I sincerely appreciate the enormous help you extended to me.

I owe my deepest acknowledgement to my beloved parents for the great encouragement and strength which has been given. Your love, care, affection and sacrifice have strengthened me and lessened difficulties.

Lastly, I wish to thank all who have supported me in every respect towards the successful completion of this book. Thank you.

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Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the background and objectives of the book. The book seeks to identify how to address the needs of the people who have been disadvantaged, underprivileged and neglected in a context of strongly centralised government power structures, and to assess the contribution NGOs make to improving local development and providing support for local government in building its capacity to act effectively and contribute. The book highlights the issues related to local government and local development in Sri Lanka, especially during the post-tsunami and post-war period, and explores the role of NGOs as innovative policy actors and development partners.

Keywords Local development · Local government · Sri Lanka
Post-tsunami · Post-war

Since obtaining independence in 1948, there have been several attempts by post-independence rulers to alter the forms of government to better align with Sri Lankan social structures. Most of these attempts, however, have not been successful and the political power structures have remained strongly centralised. Governments and national leaders have tended to reinforce such power structures, with provincial and local levels of government playing a marginal role. In this context, the needs of local communities are not being addressed and there is very little support or encouragement for local government to do so.

This book draws attention to two major events which have shaped and strengthened the centralising tendencies, and which shows trends that can be used positively to prevent the negative implications of centralisation at the local level. The first is the tsunami disaster on 26th December 2004 which affected the entire northern, eastern and southern coastline and a part of the western coast in Sri Lanka. It is estimated that more than 30,000 lives were lost and almost 500,000 people made homeless.¹ During the post-tsunami period, international donors contributed significant funds to aid recovery and reconstruction. Donor commitments for the post-tsunami aid were estimated at US\$2 billion.² Large amounts of foreign aid and the involvement of large numbers of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were new issues in Sri Lanka at that time. There were no adequate government mechanisms at national, provincial or local levels to manage and distribute foreign aid and NGO support. This provided impetus for the central government to take control of the entire foreign aid management and distribution,³ and saw central government increasingly impose limitations and restrictions on foreign aid and NGOs.⁴

The second major event is the end of the war between the Sri Lankan government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The war had been fought for nearly 30 years and ended in May 2009 with a government victory. Significant foreign aid and NGO involvement in Sri Lanka were recorded from the post-war period.⁵ The Central government has controlled and used foreign aid, and directed NGOs towards reconstruction and infrastructure development projects with little or no regard for local government preferences and existing social and economic needs, especially within local communities.⁶

During the post-tsunami and post-war period, despite facing restrictions and constraints by the central government, some NGOs began to be involved directly with local communities. This involvement and their contributions revealed the potential for NGOs to address the multiple needs at the local level. The long background of failure by central

¹VNG International, “LOGO South”.

²Sri Lanka State Terrorism, “Sri Lanka’s Tsunami Aid”.

³See Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance—2005 & Future Plans—2006*.

⁴See Brochard, “New Regulations”.

⁵Kadrigamar, “Second Wave”.

⁶Sri Lanka State Terrorism, “Sri Lanka’s Tsunami Aid”.

government to introduce genuine decentralisation and local government reforms, centralised power structures, the centralised management of foreign aid processes, and the recent contributions of NGOs at the local level suggest that if NGOs were involved directly in local government and local development, there would be more progress than could be achieved by simply relying on central government. This book, therefore, pays particular attention to the involvement of NGOs at the local level by investigating the ways in which the NGOs working in the Sri Lankan context are able to contribute to building the capabilities and capacities of local government as they support local development and as they seek to respond to the needs of local communities.

As 80% of the Sri Lankan population lives in rural areas, there is no doubt that this major rural population has the potential to play a decisive role in the election of governments. But they have been politically neglected. This population is more likely to suffer from poverty⁷ and a lack of facilities in health, sanitation, education, water, electricity, transport, access to free media, means of income generation and many others. The first objective of this book, therefore, is to establish how and why the rural population has been neglected.

The second objective of the book is to determine the views of the national, provincial and local political representatives and administrative officials, officials attached to NGOs, and the representatives of community-based organisations (CBOs). In this way, the issues of local government and local development, and the potential for NGOs to involve in providing solutions will be addressed.

This book maps the current local government in Sri Lanka in terms of its powers and functions, funding and staffing, and its politico-administrative relations. Here the aim is to investigate and compare the legal procedures and their practical implementation in the field of local government. This is the third objective of this book.

This book mainly focuses on the NGO contribution at the local level towards supporting local development and responding to the needs of local communities. The book's fourth objective is to assess the views of officials attached to NGOs regarding their involvement and contributions, and given the views of political representatives and administrative officials on completed and on-going NGO projects, examine the local-level effects of such projects.

⁷Bandara, "Rural Poverty".

Where NGOs can directly connect with the local level, especially with local government and local communities, there will be a positive contribution to local development. The fifth objective is to outline the ways in which local government has been, and can be, connected to NGOs and people in ways which promote local government and local development.

This book is based on a research that included 46 respondents, including 22 national, provincial and local political representatives. There were 17 national, provincial and local administrative officials, six officials attached to NGOs, and one CBO representative. Of the 46 respondents, six were women and two were Buddhist priests. The lesser amount of female respondents also reflects the male dominated social and political context of Sri Lanka.

The research used the mixed method approach relying more heavily on qualitative methods, especially on the case study approach. Sri Lankan local government was selected as the single case, and the southern and eastern provincial councils were selected as the embedded units. From the two provinces, 12 local government bodies were selected. Primary and secondary data were collected using a variety of sources such as unstructured and semi-structured interviews, observation, and documents and archives. The interviews aimed to obtain the respondents' views of the local government and local development and the contributions of NGOs. During this research, construction projects and other areas were observed in the southern and eastern provinces, together with the routines of government offices. The study of documents and archival data was undertaken to supplement the information acquired by interviews and observations. Secondary data for this research include governmental and non-governmental documents such as constitutions, acts, gazettes, circulars, commission reports, sessional papers, annual reports, project reports and progress reports. Books, journals, newspapers and certain websites were also used as secondary sources of data.

The field research was conducted in two phases. The first was carried out from May to September 2011 in the selected local government areas by interviewing local government representatives, local administrative officials, CBO representatives and officials of the area offices of NGOs. The second phase was carried out from June to September 2012 when national and provincial political representatives and administrative officials were interviewed, together with officials of the country offices of NGOs. The collected data was organised manually into categories on the basis of themes, concepts, or similar features. This thematic and conceptual analysis went beyond description to critical interpretation.

As will be discussed in the following chapters, certain legal powers have been allocated to local government in Sri Lanka by several legislative documents. But such powers are not exercised for various reasons. First, the extensive centralised powers of the central government prevent local government from acting as a self-governing body. Second, most local government representatives do not have sufficient knowledge about their powers. Third, local government lacks the capabilities, capacities and resources to enhance local development towards responding to the needs of local communities. This book finds that NGOs have the knowledge and resources to build the capabilities and capacities of local government to support local development. The next chapter reviews the theoretical framework of this book through analysing post-colonial situations and the impact of NGOs on local government and local development, government—NGO relations and NGO interactions in policy processes.

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NGOs and Their Potential in Post-colonial Societies

Abstract This chapter sets out and analyses the roles of NGOs in post-colonial contexts towards understanding the extent to which NGOs act as facilitators of local development; the extent to which NGOs strengthen the local policy processes by encouraging people's participation; the possibilities of collaboration between NGOs and government in designing and implementing policies and programmes; and the possibilities of NGOs to act as intermediaries in networking between national, provincial and local government and the people. The chapter sets out the theoretical framework and the main arguments of the book through exploring post-colonial theory, government-NGO relations and policy network theory.

Keywords Local development · People's participation · Post-colonial theory · Government-NGO relations · Policy network theory

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan politics occur within the context of a unitary state structure where power is concentrated at the centre. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within Sri Lanka have tended to be viewed by nationalists as imperial agents and threats to the sovereignty of the country. Therefore, in the contemporary Sri Lankan setting, the role played by NGOs in promoting social and economic development is both political and controversial.

After the tsunami disaster of December 2004, and with the end of war in May 2009, large amounts of foreign aid flowed into Sri Lanka for relief, reconstruction and rehabilitation. With central government overseeing the administration of this aid, its role in controlling the direction of social and economic development has increased significantly, while provincial and local government have had less influence. The aid, resources and technologies of the NGOs have typically been used for the government's large-scale construction projects¹ under the name of 'reconstruction and infrastructure development projects'. As this has happened, the aspirations and needs of the local communities have been neglected.²

Despite these centralising tendencies, NGOs have played an important role in supporting local government and local development through addressing the needs of local communities and stressing the development of human resources over physical infrastructure,³ and have influenced central government decisions on local policy, supporting the implementation of local policy effectively, and encouraging people's participation in the local policy process. This chapter reviews a group of theories related to post-colonial societies and assesses the impact of NGOs on local government and local development.

2.2 POST-COLONIAL SOCIETIES AND NGOS

The history of colonialism changed the economic, political, social and cultural structures of many colonised countries, leaving them with no chance of returning to their pre-colonial states. However, this has not meant that former colonies have lost their old social structures or have fully adopted new colonial structures. Instead, many former colonised countries are left with complex arrangements, a hybrid of new colonial settings and old societal structures.

Since 1505 Sri Lanka had been under Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial rule for more than four centuries. Sri Lankan pre-colonial

¹Large-scale construction projects include the reconstruction and infrastructure development projects such as roads, highways, bridges, airports, harbours, government buildings, tourist hotels, factories and sports complexes. These projects are mostly foreign-funded and controlled fully or partly by the central government.

²See ACDI-CIDA, "Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme".

³Kleymeyer, *Cultural Expression and Grassroots Development*, 4–6.

society was characterised by much complexity, arising from the many different ethnic, religious and caste systems and the existence of many related cultures. When colonial social and political structures were introduced into this environment, the complexities associated with governing only increased. For example, when the colonial rulers promoted Western religions, a considerable number of Buddhist and Hindu adherents converted to Christianity, while those who remained as Buddhists imitated the new Protestant system of education and started Buddhist schools aimed at competing with Catholic schools. It was within the context of such complexities that colonial administrative and governing structures were established and the traditional society transformed.

Following independence in 1948, the ruling power shifted from colonial masters to post-colonial rulers who have since been faced with the need to address the enduring complexities resulting from the history of colonialism. The multiple layers of colonial and pre-colonial social, political and economic structures have left post-independence rulers facing many difficulties. For example, with the British education system and the temple-based, ancient Buddhist education system (*Piriven*), both have remained and co exist. Alongside the British-based system of administration and government, ethnic, religious, caste and social class hierarchies have remained. Additionally, alongside an export-oriented economy designed to meet the needs of former colonial powers, the pre-colonial, traditional agricultural system remains. And while the indigenous cultures have been combined with and influenced by Western culture, those cultures have not been demonstrably altered.

A complicating factor is that post-independence rulers have had to continue to depend on former colonial masters, especially in the area of the economy. This dependency has provided a path for NGOs to become involved in the development problems facing Sri Lanka. The growing involvement of NGOs, however, has been criticised by anti-colonial nationalists in Sri Lanka. Some of their arguments can be found in post-colonial theory. This theory offers a set of ideas that help identify and explain the difficulties of governing in a post-independence environment.

2.2.1 *Addressing Post-colonial Complexities*

The term ‘post-colonial’ refers to a period after the end of colonialism and the experiences of countries formerly under the control of the

Western/European colonial powers. It focuses on the impact of colonial acquisition and control⁴ over resources, territories and cultures.

As colonialism has taken many forms and has many histories, decolonisation has been similarly multiform and complex.⁵ In another way, the experience of a new sovereignty typically encouraged the development of a post-colonial culture which radically revised the ethos and ideologies of the colonial state.⁶ Post-colonial also specifies a transformed historical situation, and the cultural formations that have arisen in response to changed political circumstances, in the former colonial power.⁷ It identifies that there is a continuation of colonialism, albeit through different or new politico-economic, socio-cultural relationships of the former colonies.

Post-colonial theory seeks to understand and explain these post-colonial situations. It is used for analysing the many strategies by which colonised societies have engaged imperial discourse, and for studying the ways in which many of those strategies are shared by colonised societies, re-emerging in very different political and cultural circumstances.⁸ This theory and criticism represents an attempt to investigate the complex and deeply fraught dynamics of modern Western colonialism and anti-colonial resistance, and the ongoing significance of the colonial encounter for people's lives both in the West and elsewhere.⁹ Post-colonial theory formulates its critique around the social histories, cultural differences and the political discrimination practised and normalised by colonial and imperial machineries.¹⁰ This theory provides a framework which encourages former colonies to utilise, strengthen and develop the resources of their own histories and political and intellectual traditions.¹¹ When national sovereignty or independence was finally achieved, countries moved from colonial to apparently autonomous, post-colonial status and in many ways, this represented only a beginning, a relatively minor move from direct to indirect rule, a shift from colonial rule and domination

⁴Childs and Williams, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory*, 1, 10.

⁵Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory*, 203.

⁶Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 57.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ashcroft, *Post-colonial Transformation*, 7.

⁹Prasad, "The Gaze of the Other," 5.

¹⁰Rukundwa and Aarde, "The Formation of Postcolonial Theory".

¹¹Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 66.

to a position, not so much of independence, as in-dependence.¹² Post-colonial theory recognises, therefore, that although formerly colonised territories gained their political sovereignty, they remained subject to the effective control of the major world powers, which constituted the same group as the former imperial powers.¹³ Such economic dependency on international organisations (IOs) and on former colonial powers has been identified by neo-colonial critics as a new form of colonialism.

The critique of neo-colonialism which focuses on aid programmes argues that the economic object of neo-colonialism has been to keep the living standards of the less developed countries depressed in the interests of the colonial masters. In this way, ‘aid’ to a former colony is merely a form of revolving credit, paid by the neo-colonial master, passing through the neo-colonial state and returning to the neo-colonial master in the form of increased profits.¹⁴ These criticisms of international involvement in former colonies portray that injections of foreign capital lead to processes which result in the ongoing exploitation of the former colonies and, in turn, the difficulties of government in post-independence contexts are related to the legacy of colonialism.

It is not only IOs which are considered as the vehicles for neo-colonial processes by anti-colonial nationalists. NGOs which constitute the ‘Third Sector’¹⁵ have begun to play an increasing role in less developed countries, mainly through various aid programmes. NGOs that provide aid are, however, seen by neo-colonialist critics as a means by which former colonial-style relationships are sustained. They argue that former colonial powers are still responsible for the underdevelopment of former colonies. But this picture has changed over the years. A significant number of Asian, African and South American countries, which were former colonies, have been able to achieve remarkable economic growth and are being referred to as part of a category of newly industrialised countries (NICs).¹⁶ The category of NIC is a socio-economic classification applied to several countries around the world by political scientists

¹²Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 3.

¹³Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 45.

¹⁴Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*.

¹⁵Sarkar, *NGOs and Globalization*, 8.

¹⁶For examples, from Asia, Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, China, India, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand; from Africa, South Africa; and from South America, Brazil have been identified as NICs.

and economists. NICs usually share some other common features such as increased social freedoms and civil rights, a switch from agricultural to industrial economies, especially in the manufacturing sector, an increasingly open-market economy, allowing free trade with other nations in the world, large national corporations operating in several continents, strong capital investment from foreign countries, political leadership in their area of influence, and rapid growth of urban centres and population.¹⁷ For NICs, colonialism is not the barrier it was earlier as former colonies pursue development.

Post-colonial theory tends not to identify productive and positive aspects of the relationships between former colonies and colonising powers. Although post-colonial theory provides a background to identify and explain complexities of the post-colonial societies, it draws a negative picture of Western influences on former colonies and of the positive influence of former colonial powers in addressing the complexities of the former colonies through NGOs.

2.3 GOVERNMENT-NGO RELATIONS

The capacities of NGOs to contribute towards effective governance in post-colonial societies have been widely discussed with critical scholars arguing that they do represent a new form of imperial agency and constitute a new form of colonialism,¹⁸ with a tendency to undermine the sovereignty of the state.

Many of these critiques are based on the relations between governments and NGOs. While some governments are found to collaborate effectively with NGOs in the pursuit of socio-economic development, others are more wary of the implication that NGO involvement suggests governments are neglecting their responsibilities. Still others are found to try to control the way NGOs administer foreign aid, and seek to direct that in a way that reflects favourably on the government. Against this background, government-NGO relations can be seen to take various forms, both within countries over time, and across countries.¹⁹

¹⁷See Bozyk, *Globalization and the Transformation*.

¹⁸Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, "Policy Arena," 668, 670.

¹⁹See Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization".

NGO involvement and government responses have taken many forms over time²⁰ in different situations and different policy areas in Sri Lanka. After more than six decades of independence, Sri Lankan society has continued to have many problems leading to and resulting in internal conflict and political disorder. Over this period, ethnic conflict has been an important driver of state policy. During and in the immediate aftermath of the war, which had consumed the full attention of the central government, the needs of local communities were basically neglected.²¹ In this context, attempts by NGOs to support the war-affected people and local communities, including encouraging their participation in local policy processes, have been significant.²² However, in the context that central government plays a dominant role, NGOs have not been encouraged to become involved in local government and local development.

2.3.1 *Governments and NGOs: Conflicts and Collaborations*

The relations between governments and NGOs are at times conflicting and collaborative at other times. Appadurai notes:

NGOs concerned with mobilising highly specific local, national, and regional groups on matters of equity, access, justice, and redistribution ... have complex relations with the state, with the official public sphere, with international civil society initiatives, and with local communities. Sometimes they are uncomfortably complicit with the policies of the nation-state and sometimes they are violently opposed to these policies. Sometimes they have grown wealthy and powerful enough to constitute major political forces in their own right and sometimes they are weak in everything except their transparency and local legitimacy.²³

The above statement reflects many of the dimensions and complexities of NGOs and their national and international relations. The main point highlighted here is that the relations between government and NGOs depend on the strengths and weaknesses of both parties.

²⁰Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 84.

²¹Asia Economic Institute, "Economic Impacts".

²²See Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance—2005 & Future Plans—2006* and Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Progress Report 2009, Future Plans 2010*.

²³Appadurai, "Grassroots Globalization," 16–17.

The fear held by some governments of losing control of their own agendas is one reason to exclude NGO involvement in policy matters.²⁴ Moreover, such governments fear that politically sensitive issues can be transmitted to the wider public through NGOs and that this can lead to political pressure.²⁵ This leads some governments to put in place restrictions over NGOs. Bratton notes:

Because NGO activities can involve a wide range of sensitive political actors – donors in the international arena, neighbouring countries in the region, and social groups within its own territory – a government may even come to view NGOs through the lens of state security. Where leaders are confident of their grip on power, they will not fear a populace mobilised in autonomous organisations. The more fragile a government’s sense of political legitimacy, the less permissive it is likely to be toward the institutionalisation of a strong voluntary sector. Therefore, the amount of space allowed to NGOs in any given country is determined first and foremost by political considerations rather than by any calculation of the contribution of NGOs to economic and social development.²⁶

While many government leaders express hostile attitudes to NGOs, even in broadly democratic societies, Willetts comments that virtually all government leaders, including those who have expressed hostility, will work with NGOs when they see them as allies in support of their political goals.²⁷ NGOs have to determine whether they can work within restrictions put on them by government, and work in accordance with government agendas, or whether to do so would undermine the NGOs’ role in addressing actual needs at the local level.

A wide range of economic, social and technical problems outstrip the capacities of most national governments,²⁸ and in this context the capacities of NGOs to solve such problems have become significant. These capacities are based on resources such as expert information, finances, decision-making capacity, popular support or legitimacy, enforcement

²⁴Fitzduff and Church, “Stepping up to the Table,” 9–10.

²⁵Ibid., 10.

²⁶Bratton, “The Politics of Government-NGO Relations,” *World Development*, 576.

²⁷Willetts, “What is a Non-Governmental Organization”.

²⁸Pentland, “International Organizations and Their Roles,” 244.

capabilities and diplomatic skills.²⁹ According to Bratton, governments see the strength of NGOs as a great weakness of government, but tend to value the NGOs largely because of the additional flows of development capital they attract.³⁰ While reporting the issues raised in the symposium on ‘Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs’ held in London in March 1987, Drabek points that the governments sometimes try to maintain control over NGOs precisely because of the NGOs’ access to funds.³¹ For Willis, NGOs are often regarded as the answer to the perceived limitations of the state. NGOs have been able to provide services for local communities when government assistance is not forthcoming or appropriate.³² NGOs act as facilitators or catalysts of local development efforts.³³ There is a growing interest in the rural development field in the role of NGOs as innovators of new technologies and approaches to working with the poor.³⁴ One of the earliest examples of the pro-NGO case is Michael Cernea’s report, written in 1988 for the World Bank (WB), which cites the NGOs’ main contributions as strengthening local organisational capacity. He notes that the NGO priority on first organising the people embodies a philosophy that recognises the centrality of people in development policies and action programmes and the importance of self-organisation.³⁵

The role of NGOs is recognised as including the organisation of people to make better use of local productive resources, create new resources and services, promote equity, alleviate poverty and influence government actions towards these same objectives while establishing new institutional frameworks to sustain people-centred development. According to Cernea, many NGOs have been found to possess a comparative advantage over government agencies in four main areas: (1) NGOs reach the poor in remote areas where government assistance does not exist or is ineffective; (2) NGOs operate at a lower cost due to the voluntary nature of their activities and lower technological overheads; (3) NGOs promote local participation by working with community

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Bratton, “The Politics of Government-NGO Relations,” *World Development*, 584.

³¹Drabek, “Development Alternatives,” *World Development*, xiv.

³²Willis, *Theories and Practices*, 98–100.

³³Drabek, “Development Alternatives,” *World Development*, x.

³⁴Lewis, “Individuals, Organisations and Public Action,” 202.

³⁵Cited in Lewis, *The Management of Non-Governmental Development Organizations*, 77.

groups as partners emphasising self-help initiatives and local control of programmes; and (4) NGOs innovate and adapt to local conditions and needs.³⁶ Kloos points out four reasons for government's collaboration with NGOs: (1) NGOs can carry out activities such as local-level development and services with greater efficiency and more know-how than government; (2) NGOs can carry out tasks that cannot be carried out by government for political reasons (e.g. carrying out medical tasks in militarily uncleared areas); (3) NGOs can tap foreign financial and other resources that are more easily accessible for them than for government; and (4) The existence of NGOs is a legitimization of government's democratic intentions.³⁷

It is evident that NGOs are potentially significant partners with the capacities to fill gaps created by government limitations and failures. Bratton reports that some governments were organisationally ill-equipped to deliver services and respond to needs at the rural community level. Centralised agencies also lacked information about, and the flexibility to adapt to, local conditions. As a consequence, a phalanx of NGOs with programmes in relief and rural development arose to fill the gaps left by governments.³⁸ By focusing on specific missions and drawing on the support of local communities, NGOs are able to address issues that organisations in other sectors cannot or will not address. Despite massive investment in social programmes, governments have never been able to address fully the multiple needs of their citizens. NGOs, in other words, have emerged in large part to bridge the gap between what governments can do and what society needs or expects.³⁹

The policies and programmes set up at the official level may have little chance of successful implementation if they are not adequately tailored to people's needs at the local community level.⁴⁰ Fitzduff and Church further note that policy makers often find it difficult to access and address local needs and conditions unless these are established within an identifiable framework. NGOs can bring contextually relevant, locally sourced knowledge to the policy table which is a necessary dimension

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 25–26.

³⁸Bratton, "Non-Governmental Organizations in Africa," *Development and Change*, 88.

³⁹Seffrin, "United States Nongovernmental Organizations".

⁴⁰Fitzduff and Church, "Stepping up to the Table," 13–14.

for successful policy making.⁴¹ NGOs are believed to work effectively with local communities through organising and service delivery and to develop innovative solutions to local problems.⁴²

NGO activism may become, on some issues, an alternative to governmental responsibility rather than a hindrance to policy. International NGOs can relieve governments of political responsibilities while appearing to hold them responsible.⁴³ A government may ignore their responsibilities by handing such responsibilities to NGOs. On the other hand, Fitzduff and Church argue that NGOs need to consider the potential loss of independence that may result from cooperating too closely with government.⁴⁴ Furthermore, NGOs may not want to be limited or constrained by state or other official concerns, but the very process of joint decision making, and the relationships developed therein, may mean that NGOs find it increasingly difficult to criticise governments and others. NGOs can lose their credibility as independent and neutral actors in the eyes of those they are seeking to work with on the ground, resulting in a significant loss, as trust and goodwill are the crucial features of an NGO's attractiveness to local people.⁴⁵ Although it is necessary for the NGOs to cooperate with and complement the efforts of the government, they must not subject their operations, finances and activities to governmental control and manipulation.⁴⁶ Bratton suggests that government-NGO relations are likely to be most constructive where a confident and capable government with populist policies meets an NGO that works to pursue mainstream development programmes. These relations are more controversial where a weak and defensive government with a limited power base meets an NGO that seeks to promote community mobilisation.⁴⁷ This book seeks to understand how to positively utilise the contribution of NGOs in local government and local development.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, "Policy Arena: Moving Forward," 666–667.

⁴³ DeMars, *NGOs and Transnational Networks*, 60.

⁴⁴ Fitzduff and Church, "Stepping up to the Table," 12–13.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Badu and Parker, "The Role of Non-governmental Organisations," *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 38.

⁴⁷ Bratton, "The Politics of Government-NGO Relations," *World Development*, 585.

2.4 POLICY PROCESS AND THE INTERACTIONS OF NGOs

Government policy can be thought of as emerging from a ‘policy process’ that consists of various stages⁴⁸ and includes several actors.⁴⁹ Although there is potential for multiple actors to be involved, the government is generally seen as a prominent and dominant actor in all stages of the policy process.⁵⁰

As discussed above, in the Sri Lankan government context, authoritative power is strongly centralised⁵¹ and the local level is neglected. Local communities remain voiceless even in the local government policy processes, leaving many needs at the local level to remain neglected and unaddressed.

The potential contribution of NGOs in addressing the needs at the local level is significant. NGOs are seen as appropriate actors to encourage people’s participation and to build networks among various policy actors at the local level.⁵² This opens a way to address post-colonial complexities and to strengthen government-NGO relations. It is, therefore, relevant to review the issues related to people’s participation in the local policy processes, NGOs and their interactions in the policy process, and the relevance of policy network theory in addressing such issues.

2.4.1 *NGOs as Policy Actors: Promotion of People’s Participation*

A government-centric view of the policy process is a significant matter. The policy process seeks to take account of the manner in which problems get conceptualised and are brought to the government for solution; the governmental institutions and processes by which alternatives are formulated and policy solutions selected; and the implementation, evaluation, and revision of those solutions.⁵³ Policy is of major concern at the highest levels of government, and the work of the executive—the prime minister, or president, and cabinet—is dominated by policy

⁴⁸See Hogwood and Gunn, *Policy Analysis for the Real World*, 7–10.

⁴⁹See Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, 46–57.

⁵⁰See Birkland, *An Introduction to the Policy Process*, Sabatier, “Fostering the Development of Policy Theory,” and Colebatch, *Policy*.

⁵¹Uyangoda, “Sri Lanka Post the LTTE”.

⁵²See Fernandez, “NGOs in South Asia,” *World Development*.

⁵³Sabatier, “Fostering the Development of Policy Theory,” 3.

decisions.⁵⁴ There are many voices within government, each viewing the issue from its own perspective and each seeking to turn policy making to its advantage.⁵⁵

In most democratic states, policy decisions are taken by representative institutions that empower specialised actors to determine the scope and content of public policies, but these institutions do not, as a matter of course, provide mechanisms through which the public can directly determine policy.⁵⁶ It follows that the public's role in policy making cannot be taken for granted as either straightforward or decisive. But neither should it be ignored. Elections rarely provide focused public input on specific policy options.⁵⁷ Anderson concludes that most people do not take the opportunities to engage directly in shaping public policy. Many people do not vote, engage in political party activities, join pressure groups, or otherwise display much interest in politics.⁵⁸ Through this, issues arise such as determining policy without the direct involvement of the public leading to inappropriate policies which do not address the actual needs of communities at the local level, and the policy process would be more successful if it took into account the ideas and needs of the people subjected to such policies.

Building public participation into the decision-making process can mean a broader range of policy considerations can be met.⁵⁹ Participation procedures focus on a single, discrete issue area, unlike representative politics, which bundles up disparate issues into unconnected bundles, such as election manifestos or legislative programmes.⁶⁰ Consequently, Colebatch argues that it is easier for some people, and more difficult for others, to take part in the policy process. A critical question is how people with little standing can challenge the existing order and participate in the policy process.⁶¹ Schattschneider argues that it is not necessarily true that people with the greatest needs participate

⁵⁴Colebatch, *Policy*, 40.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁶Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, 63–64.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 65.

⁵⁸Anderson, *Public Policymaking: An Introduction*, 65–67.

⁵⁹Dunleavy and O'Leary, *Theories of the State*, 312–313.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

⁶¹Colebatch, *Policy*, 27.

in politics most actively.⁶² Those with power can exclude issues and problems from the policy-making agenda.⁶³ This non-decision making suggests that policy makers with power have the capacity to keep issues off the agenda which they control.⁶⁴ There is a need to represent the actual needs of the people in the policy process and to organise the people towards participating in the policy process.

In policy-making processes, expertise becomes an important way of organising policy activity.⁶⁵ The different levels of expertise and finance that IOs can deploy often turn out to be crucial determinants of the impact that international actors can have on domestic policies.⁶⁶ Osman refers to IOs and NGOs as donor agencies and voluntary agencies and notes how the scarcity of financial resources in developing countries has made donor agencies another dominant policy actor.⁶⁷ According to Bratton, NGOs have useful ideas to offer to rural development planners. By demonstrating alternative methods of getting things done at the village level, they can offer policy suggestions on questions of local resource mobilisation, recurrent cost recovery and programme sustainability.⁶⁸ Furthermore, NGOs have an important role to play in political development to the extent that they can offer ordinary people an opportunity to participate in decisions and represent local interests.⁶⁹ Therefore, other than their primary contribution to improve the delivery of economic and social services to poor populations, NGOs have an important contribution to make to the policy process where the content of rural development policies is shaped and decided.⁷⁰ This leads to arguing that NGOs can provide expertise in assisting people and government towards policy negotiations, and NGOs might contribute to mechanisms to organise people at the local level to participate in the policy process.

⁶²Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People*, 105.

⁶³Bachrach and Baratz, "Decisions and Non-Decisions," *American Political Science Review*, 641–651.

⁶⁴Anderson, *Public Policymaking: An Introduction*, 94–95.

⁶⁵Colebatch, *Policy*, 28–29.

⁶⁶Howlett et al., *Studying Public Policy*, 76.

⁶⁷Osman, "Public Policy Making".

⁶⁸Bratton, "The Politics of Government-NGO Relations," *World Development*, 582–583.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 585.

⁷⁰Bratton, "Non-Governmental Organizations in Africa," *Development and Change*, 116.

We might think of NGOs as being a part of the policy networks in which public and private actors interact. Policy networks are recognised as consisting of a bounded set of actors and one or more sets of relations that connect these actors.⁷¹ They may be informal or rule-governed.⁷² Policy network theory, to a greater or lesser degree, recognises that ideas as well as interests bind together the groups and individuals in a policy sector.⁷³ In seeking to address a policy issue related to a specific community, a policy network will bring together government representatives, community-based organisations (CBOs), intellectuals, NGOs and others. In sharing ideas in policy networks, people gain an understanding of various problems and how to encourage participation in policy networks. For example, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) can be identified as a networking approach used by NGOs to incorporate the knowledge and opinions of rural people in the planning and management of development projects and programmes.⁷⁴

NGO and IO involvement in creating policy networks helps in mobilising local activists, social movements, and other civil society organisations which can pressure governments to change their policies and practices.⁷⁵ According to DeMars, NGOs are the constitutive actors of networks: no NGOs, no network. Without NGOs, other actors with the potential to participate in a network may be present, but the leadership of NGOs is required to activate the network.⁷⁶ NGOs are, in his view, the most influential actors in networking.⁷⁷ It is worth arguing that the possibilities for NGOs to be involved in the policy process as intermediate actors, especially at the local level through networking with the people, local organisations and local government would lead to effective local development.

⁷¹ Knoke, "Policy Networks," 210–211.

⁷² Scharpf, *Games Real Actors Play*, 116–151.

⁷³ Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy*, 32.

⁷⁴ Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?* 106.

⁷⁵ Knoke, "Policy Networks," 215.

⁷⁶ DeMars, *NGOs and Transnational Networks*, 51–52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Through reviewing the key insights from post-colonial theory, particularly the way that it focuses on foreign aid and NGOs as contemporary forms of colonialism, the potential for NGOs to act as agents in addressing the complexities of the post-colonial societies and governance has been recognised. The government-NGO relations and the ways in which they are in conflict or collaborate are significant issues. Government's response to NGOs is the decisive factor in determining whether there is benefit from such relations. The government-NGO relations diverge according to the differences in governments and NGO agendas. The government may hold a fear about NGOs, suspecting they might undermine the government's decisive power. Although there is a potential to neglect the actual needs of the people in government-centric policy processes, NGOs can promote people's participation in the policy processes at the local level by facilitating networks of policy actors.

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NGOs in Sri Lanka

Abstract This chapter reviews the history of NGO involvement in Sri Lanka. It begins by identifying ambiguities in defining NGOs in the Sri Lankan context. These ambiguities, complex legal procedures and institutional mechanisms have led to a lack of clear data about NGO growth in Sri Lanka. Over time, government-NGO relations have been collaborative and conflicting and have taken a variety of forms. These have been shaped by the policies of ruling governments, political parties and leaders. They have also been shaped by the exploitation of specific historical events by political actors for political gain.

Keywords History of NGO involvement · Legal procedures
Institutional mechanisms · Data about NGO growth
Government-NGO relations

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Sri-Lanka have, since the 1970s, played a key role in addressing problems including human rights violations, and issues with decentralisation, local government and community-led development. The relationship between the Sri Lankan government and the NGOs has similarly been both contradictory and collaborative. Various documents, reports and booklets published by NGOs, on both completed and ongoing projects, are drawn

upon in this chapter to provide an account of their role in the field of conflict resolution, peace building, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction work, humanitarian assistance, human rights, policy advocacy and local development. This chapter provides an account of the growth of NGO involvement in Sri Lanka, particularly from the mid-1970s where, as a consequence of the internal conflicts and insurrections, much of the commentary on the role of NGOs can be classified as critiques and counter-critiques of their practices. The chapter begins by addressing issues of definition and character that have arisen as a consequence of the growth in number and variety of NGOs in Sri Lanka. It goes on to outline the growth in the number of NGOs and review their evolving relationship with the Sri Lankan government.

3.2 NGOs: CONCEPTUAL CONFUSIONS

The ambiguities caused by the term NGO in the Sri Lankan context are evident in the literature, requiring an examination of the various definitions and explanations on the position of NGOs in the Sri Lankan context.

In writing on NGOs in Sri Lanka, most authors quote Uyangoda's definition:

NGOs are precisely what the long description of the acronym suggests: non-government organisations. They are voluntary bodies formed by groups of citizens for specific purposes of social service or social and policy intervention. They can be neighbourhood associations, pensioner's clubs or temple development societies, with a limited scope of interest and activity. They can also be human rights bodies or economic development and environmental organisations or women's associations with a concern for national issues and therefore a wider scope of interest and activism. Indeed, the range of NGO bodies is so wide that it is often difficult to stick the label to one set of citizen's groups in contradiction to another.¹

Although this definition is widely used, it is very broad and lacks specificity. Most Sri Lankan authors include community-based organisations (CBOs) like neighbourhood associations, pensioner's clubs or temple development societies in their definitions of NGOs, but this definition

¹Uyangoda, "NGOs, Hate Politics," *Pravada*, 6.

makes no reference to the international dimension of many of the larger, more influential NGOs.² Perera suggests that the definition does not pay enough attention to the different roles NGOs play, the differences in their emergence and historical evolution and the differences in organisation and funding.³ NGOs are not village-level voluntary organisations in the sense of people in Sri Lanka, but are organisations set up by specific individuals from the local area or by individuals from outside with access to local contacts.⁴ Wickramasinghe notes three characteristics of the NGO sector in Sri Lanka: (1) an international NGO sector serving the humanitarian needs of the country stemming from the ethnic conflict; (2) a few large and well-distributed national NGOs involved in poverty alleviation projects in conjunction with the state or complementary to the state; and (3) a myriad of small NGOs sometimes called CBOs involved in rural development.⁵

The Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Supervision) Act, No. 31 of 1980 is the main act which refers to organisational forms similar to NGOs but it does not specifically mention the term ‘NGO’. According to the act, ‘voluntary social service organisation’ means any organisation formed by a group of persons on a voluntary basis and (a) is of a non-governmental nature; (b) is dependent on public contributions, charities, grants payable by the government or donations local or foreign, in carrying out its functions; (c) has as its main objectives, the provision of such relief and services as are necessary for the mentally retarded or physically disabled, the poor, the sick, orphans and the destitute, and the provision of relief to the needy in times of disaster.⁶ Fernando notes that NGOs cannot be addressed as a homogenous category due to the vast diversity of different historical specificities in which these organisations emerged and the different ideological perspectives held by the organisations.⁷ Therefore, Fernando suggests using a country-specific definition to denote different conceptual and

² See Perera, “Non Government Organizations” and Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGOs*.

³ Perera, “Non Government Organizations,” 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 76.

⁶ *Voluntary Social Service Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act, No. 31 of 1980*.

⁷ Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 3.

operational meanings in terms of one country to another.⁸ Accordingly, the meaning of the term NGOs by different writers can vary according to the context of a study.

In sum, there is no widely accepted definition for NGOs in Sri Lanka. But there is ready agreement about the main elements of what constitutes an NGO. The different and overlapping definitions on NGOs indicate that there is a need to use the term NGO purposively and flexibly to match the Sri Lankan context and within the parameters of the particular study objectives concerning NGO-related research.

3.3 GROWTH OF NGOs IN SRI LANKA: PRE-COLONIAL TIMES TO PRESENT TIMES

The emergence of NGOs can be identified in Sri Lanka manifested by the informal groups functioning as *Wev Sabhas* (irrigation councils) which maintained and managed small-scale water reservoirs for agricultural needs.⁹ The British colonial period marked the clear emergence of the organisational forms of NGOs as they are known today. For example, the Christian missionary work in education, health and social welfare, and the establishment of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Salvation Army's presence in Sri Lanka were significant¹⁰ not-for-profit organisations.

In the late nineteenth century, local Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims began to imitate the organisational structures of the Christian missionaries with religious and social service agendas being established.¹¹ Despite their strong religious identity, the common feature of these organisations was social service and welfare activities,¹² although the designation NGO was not used.¹³ These social service provisions and welfare activities continued to develop into the post-independence period.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., 4.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Among the early NGOs was the Buddhist Theosophical Society which pioneered the movement for Buddhist education (Jayawardena, "The NGO Bogey," *Pravada*, 10).

¹²Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 4.

¹³Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 12.

Up until 1970, there was a slow but steady increase in the number of NGOs.¹⁴ The reason for the sudden increase in the number of NGOs from 1971 onwards was in response to the internal conflicts and insurrections which occurred at that time. In 1971 the Janatha Vimukthi Peremuna (JVP) insurgency¹⁵ led to a new awareness about problematic socio-economic issues, and in the absence of an adequate government policy, private persons took various initiatives to improve situations conceived as highly problematic.¹⁶

According to Fernando, prior to 1977 there was no trend towards the formation of new, or expansion of the existing, NGOs.¹⁷ It was the newly elected United National Party (UNP) government's emphasis on an open economic policy, after 1977, which led to a reduction of certain welfare policies and this trend opened spaces for NGOs to enter where and when the government withdrew.¹⁸ This argument is supported by Wickramasinghe who maintains that, after 1977, industrial growth based on foreign investment was encouraged, and a necessary concomitant to such an export-led strategy was the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s 'structural adjustment policies', which demanded shifting public resources away from social welfare into investment.¹⁹ Perera adds that since 1977 attempts were made to dismantle many components of the post-colonial welfare society which in financial terms were becoming unaffordable. This meant that certain kinds of activities such as small-scale development initiatives, informal educational activities, and the distribution of food rations were no longer the prerogative of the state.²⁰ NGO development in Sri Lanka might, therefore, be described as an appendage to market-oriented growth.²¹

¹⁴Ibid., 13.

¹⁵This was happened in April 1971 when the JVP, a primarily rural Sinhala youth movement claiming a membership of more than 10,000, began a 'blitzkrieg' operation to take over the government 'within 24 hours'. The purpose of the insurrection was to capture state power (Country Studies, "A Country Study: Sri Lanka.").

¹⁶Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 13.

¹⁷Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 5.

¹⁸Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 13–14.

¹⁹Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 39–40.

²⁰Perera, "Non Government Organizations," 7.

²¹Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 108.

The National Secretariat for Non-Governmental Organisations (the NGO Secretariat), discussed later in this chapter, refers to the growth of NGOs in Sri Lanka as follows:

With the liberalisation of the economy in the late-1970s and the consequent relaxation of foreign exchange regulations, trade and travel restrictions, there arose a phenomenal increase in the number of foreign NGOs. With the increased flow of foreign assistance and the expansion of community and rural development, a further proliferation of NGOs was observed in the country. Since NGOs were expected to play a complementary role to that of the government, and its selfless nature, the presence and operation of NGOs was welcomed by the government.²²

Many of the NGOs in Sri Lanka were interested in the issues of development located within the spheres in which the state played a less dynamic role or had completely vacated.²³ Wickramasinghe notes that over 65% of these were established after 1977,²⁴ and Perera adds that this trend gathered momentum in the 1980s. During the 1970s and 1980s, therefore, there was a quantitative expansion of NGOs set up by Sri Lankan citizens with or without the aid of international or foreign agencies.²⁵ There was also growth in the range of activities they performed.²⁶

This can be seen in the wider focus of NGOs in the 1980s, where they expanded their concerns from development-oriented activities to a rights-oriented sphere. The prolonged war and the second JVP insurrection²⁷ resulted in numerous human rights violations, and many NGOs were involved in activities associated with the protection of human rights and the support of war-affected people through relief and rehabilitation work.²⁸ Uyangoda claims that in the 1980s and 1990s, a number of other NGOs actively campaigned for peace and the democratic rights

²²NGO Secretariat, "The Growth of NGOs".

²³Perera, "Non Government Organizations," 8.

²⁴Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 78.

²⁵Perera, "Non Government Organizations," 3.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷The second JVP youth insurrection lasted for around 2 years from 1987 to 1989. The second insurrection was different from the first one in several aspects. The second one, more than being an insurrection, was a long-lasting armed struggle over two years (Fernando, "Youth and Politics.").

²⁸Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 5.

of the Tamil people.²⁹ These were multi-ethnic advocacy and activist groups, who were bound by a shared commitment to a vision of progress for Sri Lanka, conceived on the basis of liberal and humanitarian concepts of ethnic harmony, justice, and equality.³⁰

In the 1990s, increasing pressure came on NGOs through their donors demanding more attention be given to the effectiveness and efficiency of the aid. The heavy dependence of NGOs on foreign donor funds was a contributing factor in this. Many NGOs were unable to adapt to these new pressures due to a lack of capacity in terms of their institutional capability, human resources and organisational planning ability. As a result new NGOs emerged in the 1990s, along with individual consultants and consultancy firms, to assist in building this type of capacity.³¹

After the tsunami disaster in December 2004, many NGOs and private individuals descended on Sri Lanka with budgets of various dimensions and involving projects of varying time frames.³² This involvement can be highlighted as an important point of NGO growth in Sri Lanka. Although there was already considerable NGO involvement, it was in the post-tsunami period that these rose rapidly. There are, however, no reliable, systematically recorded data about the exact number of NGOs in Sri Lanka at this time. Brochard reports that, the exact numbers of NGOs are actually difficult to obtain as these change from week to week. It is estimated that over 2000 NGOs of various sizes have come to Sri Lanka since the tsunami. However, in April 2005 the newly created Centre for Non-Governmental Sector (CNGS) (discussed later in this chapter) only records the presence of 103 organisations.³³

²⁹Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE), Movement for the Defence of Democratic Rights (MDDR), Information Monitor on Human Rights (INFORM), Women for Peace, Dharmavedi Institute for Communication and Peace, National Christian Council, Citizens' Committee for National Harmony, and Sarvodaya are some of the leading NGOs active in the peace and democracy front (Uyangoda, "NGOs, Hate Politics," *Pravada*, 7).

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 21.

³²Brochard, "New Regulations and Procedures," 1.

³³Ibid.

Table 3.1 Estimated number of NGOs in Sri Lanka

<i>Year</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Estimated number of NGOs</i>
1991	The directory of foreign development agencies in Sri Lanka published by IRED (Innovations et Reseaux pour le Development) ¹	293 local NGOs 50 foreign NGOs
1993	The NGO Commission report ²	25,000–30,000 grassroots organisations ³ 3000 NGOs ⁴
1997	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	50,000 NGOs and CBOs ⁵
1997	Asian Development Bank (ADB)	25,000 NGOs and CBOs ⁶
1997	Stirrat and Henkel ⁷	20,000 local NGOs and grassroots organisations
1999	Kloos ⁸	20,000–30,000 NGOs
2001	Wickramasinghe ⁹	4000 NGOs
2007	Walton ¹⁰	10,000–12,000 local NGOs at the district and divisional levels
2007	NGO Secretariat ¹¹	1073 registered NGOs ¹²
2012	NGO Secretariat ¹³	1398 registered local and foreign NGOs ¹⁴

¹Cited in Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 5

²Discussed later in this chapter

³Cited in Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 82–83

⁴Cited in Social Scientists’ Association, “ICJ on the NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 15

⁵Cited in Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 82–83

⁶Cited in Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 5

⁷Stirrat and Henkel, “The Development Gift,” 67

⁸Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO’s*, 15

⁹Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 82–83

¹⁰Walton, “Conflict, Peacebuilding and NGO Legitimacy,” 163

¹¹Cited in *ibid.*

¹²This figure only includes international NGOs, Sri Lankan NGOs receiving foreign funds, and/or Sri Lankan NGOs working in more than one administrative district

¹³NGO Secretariat, “Directory of Registered NGO’s Sri Lanka.”

¹⁴According to the data recorded by the NGO Secretariat, out of 1398 NGOs registered at the end of year 2012, 357 were foreign-funded NGOs (*ibid.*)

Without a systematic and unambiguous registration system,³⁴ it has been difficult to determine the exact number of NGOs in Sri Lanka.³⁵ The best the available literature has been able to offer is estimates of the number of NGOs from a variety of sources (see Table 3.1).

³⁴Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 5.

³⁵Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 82–83.

The figures in Table 3.1 show a broad range of assessments in the number of NGOs. These figures, especially the larger ones, include organisations ranging from village-level CBOs to national-level NGOs. There is no viable source from which to obtain a reliable idea about the number of NGOs, and the figures available in the form of estimates do not provide details of the diversity of these organisations.³⁶

It is clear that the same uncertainty governs estimates of NGO funding. For Wickramasinghe, the donor funding channelled to local NGOs has increased if one were to judge it by the expansion of the number of organisations that call themselves NGOs. But the uncertainty about the exact number of NGOs makes it difficult to ascertain the volume of funds they now handle.³⁷ Wickramasinghe adds that in Sri Lanka, specific factors such as the war must be added as the expansion was driven partly by increased international NGO aid during the political crisis that began in the late 1970s with the emergence of a violent secessionist movement in the north and east of the island.³⁸ Much of the influx of foreign relief funds after the 1983 Sinhala-Tamil ethnic riots was handled by NGOs.³⁹ In 1993, the NGO Commission report acknowledged that 22% of the total foreign aid received by Sri Lanka was channelled through NGOs.⁴⁰ Walton claims that the amount of funding allocated to the NGO sector in Sri Lanka grew rapidly following the signing of the ceasefire agreement between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 2002, and in the aftermath of the tsunami.⁴¹ The total aid channelled through NGOs in 2005 was around US\$400 million.⁴²

In sum, while there is evidence of growth in the number of NGOs in Sri Lanka, there is a lack of specific detail about the nature, quality and impact of that growth. Nonetheless, this data is sufficient to draw a conclusion that NGOs and their activities have a significant place

³⁶Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 5.

³⁷Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 82–83.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 75.

³⁹Orjuela, “Dilemmas of Civil Society Aid,” *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 5.

⁴⁰Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 75.

⁴¹Walton, “Conflict, Peacebuilding and NGO Legitimacy,” 139.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 163.

in Sri Lanka, and that their growth has coincided with changes to the politico-economic situation. Similarly, political changes have had a positive as well as negative influence on NGOs, their growth and activity in Sri Lanka, as discussed below.

3.4 RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SRI LANKAN GOVERNMENT AND NGOS

The relationship between the Sri Lankan government and NGOs has taken a variety of forms over time going through stages of relative indifference up until the 1970s, ambivalence in the 1980s, and open confrontation in the early 1990s.⁴³ The role of NGOs in Sri Lanka has to be understood in the context of a transformed political outlook on the part of governments and a change in attitude to developmental activities.⁴⁴

The earliest recognition of an NGO taking a social role is seen in the Children and Young Persons' Ordinance of 1939 and in the Orphanages Ordinance of 1941, which empowered government agencies to obtain services for the rehabilitation of young offenders.⁴⁵ After 1948 the UNP government continued the plantation-based economy and the open policy on foreign investments.⁴⁶ In 1950 Sri Lanka obtained membership of the IMF and the WB. At that time, the government also reduced its social welfare commitments, and this led to a change of government in 1956.⁴⁷ After 1956 the government promoted Sinhala nationalism and this had a profound influence on development policies, foreign policy and the flow of foreign aid.⁴⁸ Furthermore, this period marked the establishment of diplomatic, trade and other relations with the Eastern European countries led by Soviet Union and China. During this period, therefore, the links with the IMF, WB, United States of America (USA) and the Western European countries became weaker.⁴⁹

In the 1960s, government recognition of an NGO role came in the 'freedom from hunger campaign' under the auspices of the Food and

⁴³Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 84.

⁴⁴Perera, "Non Government Organizations," 4.

⁴⁵Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 99.

⁴⁶Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 10.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

Agriculture Organisation (FAO).⁵⁰ At this time, NGOs also worked with the state on the promotion of minor irrigation schemes and as collaborators with government in development projects.⁵¹ In 1965, there was a change of government with the UNP again coming into power. During this period the Paris Aid Group⁵² was established with Western donors, together with the IMF and WB, extending their assistance to Sri Lanka. The developmental trend was reversed in 1970 when the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)-led coalition government came into power.⁵³ Although the Paris Aid Group continued to function, the aid flow from the Western countries declined under the strict socialist economic policies followed by the government.⁵⁴

The open economic policy of the new UNP government included efforts to attract foreign capital. An example is the Greater Colombo Economic Commission—now called as the Board of Investment (BoI)—which was established to attract foreign investments by providing legal and infrastructure facilities to such investors.⁵⁵ The state policy on welfare was changed and it began to reduce its role in providing welfare services such as health, education, subsidised food and transportation. In this context, the government allowed foreign NGOs and donors to work in Sri Lanka. As a result, there was a proliferation of both foreign and local NGOs. The initiatives of these NGOs received significant support from the international community. As was done with the foreign investors, the government created an environment which was conducive to international NGOs and donors functioning in Sri Lanka.⁵⁶ The trend continued in the 1980s as an increased amount of government spending was allocated to defence expenses leaving the state more dependent on international NGO and foreign donor funding for welfare and development work.⁵⁷

In the 1980s the *Gramodaya Mandalas* composed of the chairmen of the non-political voluntary organisations at the level of the *Grama*

⁵⁰Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 99.

⁵¹Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 14.

⁵²The forum of donor countries supporting Sri Lanka under the auspices of the WB.

⁵³Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 11.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 11–12.

Niladhari (GN) division provided for the participation of NGOs in local level planning and implementation, though some of the voluntary organisations which were ‘anti-government’ generally did not present themselves for inclusion of their chairmen in the *Gamodaya Mandalas*.⁵⁸ NGOs collaborated, with more or less success, in government projects such as the *Gam Udawa* (village re-awakening), integral rural development programme and the *Mahaweli*⁵⁹ development project.⁶⁰ The growing importance of NGOs is evident in the way the UNP manifesto in 1988 specifically recognised their role. It was the first time in Sri Lanka that a political party made an official stand on NGOs.⁶¹ In 1988–1989, the UNP’s electoral victory was achieved partly by incorporating an electoral commitment to an extensive ‘safety net’ programme in the form of a large income transfer scheme for the declared purpose of ‘poverty alleviation’.⁶² This programme was introduced as the *Janasaviya*, and sponsored by the WB.⁶³ In May 1991, the *Janasaviya* trust fund (JTF)⁶⁴ was set up to implement the programmes of savings and credit, and nutrition, among CBOs.⁶⁵ NGOs were involved as intermediaries in implementing *Janasaviya* sub-projects.⁶⁶ A large amount of funding began to be channelled to NGOs, and a number of NGOs were formed exclusively to implement the JTF-funded projects. As partner organisations of the JTF, NGOs received assistance for institutional development which included funding for infrastructure, office equipment and vehicles. This was recognised as one of the major collaborative relationships between the government and NGOs.⁶⁷ It reflected an acknowledgement by the

⁵⁸Leitan, *Political Integration through Decentralization*, 26–28.

⁵⁹*Mahaweli* is the longest river in Sri Lanka. *Mahaweli* development project aimed to generate electricity and to develop agriculture in the dry zones in Sri Lanka.

⁶⁰Cited in Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 99.

⁶¹Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 24.

⁶²Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 101.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 92.

⁶⁴The JTF was jointly funded by the government and bilateral or multilateral donors (*ibid.*, 101). The strategy of the JTF was to work in partnership with NGOs that functioned both at the national and village levels in order to mobilise the CBOs (Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 14).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 101.

⁶⁷Fernando, “The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka,” 14.

Sri Lankan government of a need for NGO support in the implementation of the project.

In 1994, the SLFP-led People's Alliance (PA) coalition came into power, marking another phase of government-NGO relations. In the 1994 Parliamentary election, the NGOs and PA government shared common ground on the need to solve the ethnic conflict through a negotiated political settlement.⁶⁸ NGOs became involved in implementing programmes towards a non-military solution for the ethnic conflict to restore peace.⁶⁹ However, this collaboration between the PA government and NGOs was not evident in other government programmes, with Fernando claiming that the government began to narrow the scope of NGOs.⁷⁰ For example, in the *Samurdhi* programme, the successor to the *Janasaviya*, the government did not obtain the support of NGOs.⁷¹ This trend continued when the PA government failed in its peace negotiations with the LTTE. The decision of the PA government to go back to a military strategy further undermined collaboration between the government and NGOs. Fernando notes that human rights-based NGOs began to revert to the watchdog role they had played in the 1988–1993 era as many incidents of human rights violations began to be reported, especially in war-affected areas.⁷² Election malpractices, violence and misuse of power by the government were also reported during the *Wayamba* (north western) provincial council election in 1999. NGOs played an active role in monitoring the election process and openly confronted the government's action.⁷³ In this period, therefore, the government began to come under heavy criticism by NGOs.

⁶⁸Ibid., 15.

⁶⁹Especially the NGOs collaborated with two initiatives of the PA government. The first was the *Sudu Nelum Viyaparaya* (the white lotus movement), which raised the public awareness of the ethnic conflict and advocated a non-military political solution. The second was the National Integration and Planning Unit (NIPU) formed under the Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and Ethnic Integration with the assistance of the Norwegian government. In both these initiatives, many NGOs took an active part in collaborating with the government (ibid.).

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹The strategy of *Samurdhi* was to recruit about 3000 unemployed educated youth as village-level coordinators (*Niyamakas*) and to establish a powerful network of CBOs.

⁷²Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 15.

⁷³Ibid.

In response to these criticisms, the government attempted to pressurise agencies such as USAID and the Asia Foundation not to support those NGOs involved in election monitoring, by interpreting that such support was a contravention of the memoranda of understanding they had signed with the government.⁷⁴ NGO liaison units in many ministries were disabled under the PA government indicating that the state had moved away from formally acknowledging a special role for NGOs in the development of the country.⁷⁵ Government withdrew from its association with not only rights-oriented NGOs but also development-oriented NGOs.

In December 2001, the UNP-led United National Front (UNF) coalition came into power and introduced new economic reforms and development programmes with the fullest support of organisations like the WB, IMF and ADB.⁷⁶ The election manifesto of the UNF had a separate section on its stand and policy on NGOs.⁷⁷ Fernando reports that the secretary of the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the Treasury, while addressing a meeting of a group of NGO representatives, invited the NGOs to take an active part in the UNF government's 100 days accelerated development programme. Some NGOs saw this as an opportunity to forge a more positive working relationship with the government and perform their role without being harassed by the government.⁷⁸

After the ceasefire of 2002, NGOs became involved in a range of peace building projects, which included promoting development in conflict-affected areas in an effort to establish a 'peace dividend', building relationships at a community level, and attempting to foster popular support for the peace process (particularly in the south). According to Walton, donor commitment to these programmes, and hence their support for NGOs, was heavily dependent on the state's commitment to the peace process. As a result, NGO activities and objectives became

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 99–100.

⁷⁶Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 23.

⁷⁷The manifesto claimed that the UNF recognised the NGOs and CBOs as important partners of the development process, and as leading actors in socio-economic transformation.

⁷⁸Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 24.

increasingly aligned with the political project driven by the UNF government and its international backers.⁷⁹

However, in 2004 the UNF government collapsed and the United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA), an alliance of the SLFP and the Sinhala nationalist JVP, came into power. Later this alliance received the support of the Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), another Sinhala nationalist political party but this collaboration again weakened government-NGO relations. As has been said, political responses to NGOs in Sri Lanka during this period were heavily influenced by the tsunami of December 2004. According to Walton, the unprecedented international response to the tsunami produced an unruly funding environment, which resulted in numerous examples of malpractice.⁸⁰ This response not only transformed the NGO sector in Sri Lanka by making it richer, it also boosted the public consciousness of NGOs. Walton further notes that this international response in turn, increased the potential advantages open to political actors who criticised NGOs as a means of articulating their own political visions which, for nationalist groups, usually meant highlighting the corrupting influence of Western culture or political interference. As a result, well-established nationalist discourses about the harmful impact of NGOs on Sri Lankan life gained greater relevance, and public perceptions of NGOs were damaged.⁸¹ But the base of these criticisms can be identified as the government's attempt to compete with the NGO sector. For Walton, the tsunami also rapidly elevated the NGO sector from an insignificant concern for government, to one which was suddenly receiving and distributing foreign resources and social welfare on a scale comparable to that of the state. Furthermore, for Walton, the tsunami response exposed failures in government decision making and operational weakness in the aftermath of the tsunami, providing further incentives for the government to attack NGOs.⁸² Government criticism of NGOs, in this context, can be seen as an attempt to hide its own weaknesses.

The election of a new President in November 2005 began a period of growing hostility towards NGOs in Sri Lanka. This prompted a sudden

⁷⁹Walton, "Conflict, Peacebuilding and NGO Legitimacy," 141.

⁸⁰Ibid., 142. See Lanka Standard, "Helping Hambantota Investigation" and Sri Lanka State Terrorism, "Sri Lanka's Tsunami Aid".

⁸¹Walton, "Conflict, Peacebuilding and NGO Legitimacy," 142.

⁸²Ibid.

widening of the ideological gap between the government and the majority of donors and NGOs working on peace building whose ideas had fitted closely with the previous UNF government's version of liberal peace building. This shift was accelerated by the government's reliance on two Sinhalese nationalist parties, the JVP and the JHU, as partners in the ruling UPFA coalition. Their new prominence allowed them much greater space to promote their views through the mainstream state media, and to encourage government measures to restrict the work of NGOs. Walton further adds that the backlash against NGOs was also closely linked to the slide back to full-scale military confrontation, which began in 2006. The government's increasingly militarist approach reduced the space for the critical voices that had grown in confidence during the ceasefire period. By putting the country on a war footing, the government was also able to tighten its grip over the media and use it to attack human rights and peace advocates, who were increasingly seen as a threat to the state's military objectives,⁸³ and indicated a return to past beliefs about NGOs. Since 2004, the UPFA government has remained in power and NGOs have faced continued limitations in terms of their operational capacities.

3.4.1 *The NGO Commission*

In March 1990 a high powered committee was appointed by the then Executive, President R. Premadasa, to investigate allegations that foreign funds were flowing into both international and local NGOs without the knowledge or concurrence of the government.⁸⁴ This was called 'the Presidential Commission of Inquiry in Respect of Non-governmental Organisations Functioning in Sri Lanka', better known as 'the NGO Commission'. There were three broad reasons for the inquiry which were made public in the gazette notification setting up the commission: (1) the number of (3000) NGOs functioning in Sri Lanka; (2) concern that there was no framework for monitoring the activities and funding of these NGOs; and (3) concern that some of the funds received from foreign sources, as well as those generated locally, were being misappropriated and/or used for activities prejudicial to national security, public

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 84.

order and/or economic interests and, in addition, for activities detrimental to the maintenance of ethnic, religious and cultural harmony among the people of Sri Lanka.⁸⁵

The commission began work in the first week of January 1991 and continued until December 1993. The general public were invited to make complaints or representations either publicly or anonymously and behind closed doors.⁸⁶ The commission also surveyed a number of NGOs (the exact number is unknown)⁸⁷ asking for details of all staff, use of funds, assets, and even the bank account details of spouses, children of senior staff and the board of directors.⁸⁸ From the NGOs who answered the questionnaire, it was revealed that a number of them were asked for very detailed information in a number of subsequent questionnaires.⁸⁹ Public hearings were held into allegations against three NGOs: (1) World Vision, an American NGO; (2) the Eye Donation Society; and (3) Sarvodaya, a large and well-known Sri Lankan NGO, with a presence in hundreds of villages and receiving significant amounts of international funding.⁹⁰ In these open-session hearings, the general public came forward on their own initiative or were called by the commission.⁹¹ Investigations and interrogations were also conducted by the police unit attached to the commission.⁹² These events of the commission received significant media coverage and created much unrest among the NGO community.⁹³

An independent report published in November 1991 by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) following their visit to Sri Lanka⁹⁴ concluded that whereas the intentions and the activities of the NGO Commission as such might be defended as ‘reasonable’, what was being done in its name was not acceptable. Brabant wrote that the ICJ

⁸⁵Social Scientists’ Association, “ICJ on the NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 15.

⁸⁶Brabant, “NGO Legislation,” *RPN*, 12.

⁸⁷Social Scientists’ Association, “NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 5.

⁸⁸Brabant, “NGO Legislation,” *RPN*, 12.

⁸⁹Social Scientists’ Association, “NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 5.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 6.

⁹¹Brabant, “NGO Legislation,” *RPN*, 12.

⁹²Social Scientists’ Association, “ICJ on the NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 15.

⁹³Brabant, “NGO Legislation,” *RPN*, 12.

⁹⁴Social Scientists’ Association, “ICJ on the NGO Commission,” *Pravada*, 14.

considered that the government had used the NGO Commission to foster a negative, discrediting and intimidating climate around NGOs. The effect was that NGOs felt that their rights to freedom of association and privacy were under threat.⁹⁵ The ICJ report recognised the government's desire to seek information on NGOs as a prelude to establishing a regulatory framework. It also did not doubt the integrity and impartiality of the members of the NGO Commission, chaired by a former judge of the Supreme Court.⁹⁶ But the report suggested that the commission should not lead to the harassment of NGOs.⁹⁷ The ICJ report stated that it should not be used to justify a control system that would be so heavy-handed as to dissuade persons from joining or contributing funds to NGOs.⁹⁸

The NGO Commission handed in its report to the President on 11th December 1993.⁹⁹ But the report has not been published and has not been released as public information.¹⁰⁰ An unofficial summary of the findings reveals that the commission found the NGO sector seemingly 'chaotic, anarchic and in disarray'. The report also criticised the undemocratic structure of some NGOs, their large overheads and especially their actions in promoting 'unlawful religious conversions'. To the degree that they sought to ameliorate the causes of poverty through advocacy and influence policy with foreign funding, criticism was levelled that they represented 'an alien hand' which was directly or indirectly trying to exercise power in Sri Lankan society. The report regretted that the NGO community had been uncooperative and seemingly hostile to the deliberations of the commission. It rejected the possibility of excessive

⁹⁵Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 12.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Social Scientists' Association, "ICJ on the NGO Commission," *Pravada*, 16.

⁹⁸Ibid., 17.

⁹⁹Social Scientists' Association, "NGO Commission," *Pravada*, 6.

¹⁰⁰Although the report of the NGO Commission has not been released or published, some authors have referred to an unofficially released version on the NGO Commission report. See Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGOs* and Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*. Some authors mention that they have to go on certain brief government statements and extracts in the newspapers of some sections of the NGO Commission report (Social Scientists' Association, "NGO Commission," *Pravada*, 7). This writer was not able to find the NGO Commission report. But an official from the Sri Lanka National Archives mentioned that there is a copy of the released report, but as it is a closed and restricted archive, it cannot be released for reference for any reason.

legislation but acknowledged the state's right to supervise the proper use of funds.¹⁰¹ The report revealed that NGO officers enjoyed extraordinarily high salaries and fringe benefits. It also revealed that there was misappropriation and other practices by NGOs, and that the NGOs were spending an unusually high proportion of funds for administrative purposes.¹⁰² The report stated that NGOs would not only have to comply with the national laws but also not undertake activities that might upset the balance between communities and religions, or to interfere in political matters.¹⁰³

According to government statements, the report recommended compulsory registration for foreign and local NGOs receiving foreign funding, as well as CBOs directly sponsored or directed by a registered NGO. The report further recommended monitoring of foreign funding. Therefore the NGOs would be required to disclose very detailed and comprehensive information about the use of foreign funds.¹⁰⁴ The commission report further recommended a new post consisting of a commissioner with its own secretariat, and an NGO coordinating mechanism.¹⁰⁵ This would require the creation of a central office, support staff and two advisory committees¹⁰⁶ to support the commissioner. It proposed that a few members from the NGO sector would sit on the committees, but that all would be appointed by the President. The NGO commissioner's office was to be the focal point for all national and international NGOs and would be authorised to make preliminary inquiries into matters of alleged misconduct or misappropriation, but would then refer the case to the proper authorities if warranted.¹⁰⁷ The report recommended the establishment of an NGO fund made up of percentage allocations of government grants and foreign aid grants. The stated purpose of the fund would be to help prevent 'uneven and skewed development within the country' and disproportionate funding going to 'selected groups'.¹⁰⁸ These recommendations reflect an attempt by the government to create

¹⁰¹ Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 13.

¹⁰² Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 13.

¹⁰³ Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 13–14.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ One on 'administrative matters' and one on 'state-NGO relations'.

¹⁰⁷ Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 13.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

a mechanism to control NGOs and their funds according to government's preferences.

Several criticisms emerged during and after the NGO Commission. Kloos noted that even though the report referred to various allegations, at the end only one particular NGO, Sarvodaya, was singled out for further investigation. According to Kloos, this is probably related to President Premadasa's suspicion that Sarvodaya leader A.T. Ariyaratne might become a rival for the presidency.¹⁰⁹ This case is complicated. Sarvodaya is a giant among local NGOs, and its leader is particularly influential among the rural poor. Premadasa was engaged in island-wide welfare programmes such as *Janasaviya* and *Gam Udawa*. Kloos further adds that Premadasa may have seen in Ariyaratne a potential rival when thinking about the future presidential elections which were scheduled for 1994.¹¹⁰

However, Premadasa's assassination in May 1993 is probably the reason that the report of the NGO Commission was shelved before it reached the Parliament.¹¹¹ This episode has become infamous as an attempt by the government to control NGOs.¹¹²

3.4.2 *Critiques and Counter-Criticisms*

There were subsequent challenges to the presence and activities of NGOs. In mid-November 1995, the official meetings of the Sri Lankan NGO Forum¹¹³ were disturbed by rioters. Kloos notes that in the same month, November, the Sri Lankan army launched operation *Riviresa*, which was meant to wrench Jaffna from the LTTE. Some Sinhala from nationalist groups and a number of their newspapers created the

¹⁰⁹Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 32.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 29.

¹¹¹Ibid., 32.

¹¹²Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 12.

¹¹³The establishment of an NGO Forum in 1993 followed the creation of the European NGO Forum on Sri Lanka in 1990. Sri Lankans decided in 1994 to form a 'counter Forum' and therefore four types of NGOs would participate: those in the fields of human rights, relief and rehabilitation, economic development, and peace (Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 33–35). The topics to be discussed were economic development, human rights and NGO partnership in addition to the more sensitive topics of peace and humanitarian assistance (Perera, "Today the NGOs," *Pravada*, 31).

impression that the forum meeting was held in order to stop the military campaign arguing that foreign-based and Sri Lanka-based NGOs supported the LTTE.¹¹⁴ He further added that although there was no evidence to justify this suspicion against NGOs, the government was also not free from the same suspicion.¹¹⁵ Perera critiques that: “It is quite absurd to believe that at a large meeting of around 80 NGOs, almost all of them local, that anything ‘anti-Sri Lanka’ could ever have been decided upon.”¹¹⁶

The campaign of hostility was of course not directed at all NGOs. Its primary targets were those NGOs that had intervened in national policy debates, lobbied and agitated for national policy reforms, and worked in a manner that had called for mobilisation of the people on specific issues. Democratic reforms, human rights, peace, free and fair elections, and media freedom were major themes in the advocacy and interventionist campaigns of these NGOs.¹¹⁷ The attacks by Sinhala nationalist groups on NGOs as foreign agents who supported the LTTE were countered by Uyangoda who argued that:

Actually, this ‘foreign agent’ argument is linked to an ideology of xenophobia, propagated by a section of Sri Lankans who, despite their own connections with foreign organisations, business enterprises and individuals, appear to believe that ‘foreign links’ endanger national security.¹¹⁸

It is significant that foreign funding of NGO peace work had come under harsh criticism in Sri Lanka. According to Orjuela, the most vociferous opposition to NGOs and peace processes came from Sinhala nationalist groups.¹¹⁹ Wickramasinghe adds that militant Sinhala groups vilified ‘foreign-funded NGOs’ as responsible for undermining the morale of the troops and pursuing ‘selfish aims’ instead of thinking of the good of the nation.¹²⁰ Critiques of relief organisations failed to make distinctions between local NGOs which received foreign funds and

¹¹⁴Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 35.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, 36.

¹¹⁶Perera, “Today the NGOs,” *Pravada*, 31.

¹¹⁷Uyangoda, “NGOs, Hate Politics,” *Pravada*, 6.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹¹⁹Orjuela, “Dilemmas of Civil Society Aid,” *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, 7.

¹²⁰Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 40–41.

others.¹²¹ Uyangoda connected his argument with the government and said that what was extremely interesting in Sri Lanka was that the state had only occasionally come out against the human rights-based NGOs on the argument that they endangered national security.¹²² Furthermore, Uyangoda added that if one really wanted to demonise, terrorise and silence one's enemy, the easiest argument was to suggest collusion with the LTTE. By using this argument, many NGOs have been demonised in Sri Lanka.¹²³

Reasons for the emergence of arguments suggesting NGO collusion with the LTTE include the fact that some NGOs had funded the LTTE and, in the north, there had been pro-LTTE NGOs. Humanitarian NGOs who had worked in the conflict areas were branded as pro-LTTE because they had worked among civilians in LTTE-controlled areas. For example, international humanitarian NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) were there because in situations of armed conflicts, direct parties to the conflict are not always capable of looking after, and providing for, the civilian population, affected by the conflict itself.¹²⁴ Uyangoda adds that these critics know that no international humanitarian NGO has worked in Sri Lanka's north without being invited by the government and asked by the government to carry out specific activities.¹²⁵

Many authors have repeatedly pointed out the baselessness of the government's criticisms of NGOs. According to Wickramasinghe, what some critics have failed to understand is that it is possible to pressure a legitimate state which has signed binding treaties and conventions relating to humanitarian law, but exerting similar pressure on rebel groups is hardly feasible.¹²⁶ Brabant states that NGOs clearly provided assistance to local government departments in the LTTE-controlled north, notably through purchasing and transporting essential supplies for them. NGOs provided assistance to displaced and resettled groups of people that led

¹²¹Ibid., 152.

¹²²Uyangoda, "NGOs, Hate Politics," *Pravada*, 7–8.

¹²³Ibid., 8.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid.

¹²⁶Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 152.

observers to wonder whether they were filling a gap or substituting for government.¹²⁷

Prior to the end of the war, the links between the LTTE and NGOs were of concern to some commentators. Only a handful of international NGOs were working in the LTTE-controlled north where there was no legal recourse or protection outside of LTTE structures. A few of these NGOs were directly operational while others funded a variety of small local NGOs. It was felt that the LTTE preferred to keep the international presence to the absolute minimum and that international agencies should fund and develop the capacity of local NGOs. The latter, however, have had little potential to negotiate LTTE directives.¹²⁸ This argument rejects the Sinhala nationalist suspicion that the NGOs have been in collusion with the LTTE.

Notably, most of the criticisms against NGOs have been connected to the sovereignty of the state and to colonialism. Jayawardena has countered this, asserting that situations of war tend to make people emotional and fearful. They also provide an occasion for nationalists and others to get up against 'foreign conspiracies' and local 'treason'.¹²⁹ She further adds that:

Why is it possible 50 years after colonial rule to raise cries of foreign money, alien ideology and a western way of life especially at a time when all governments try to attract foreign money, and when the people have modernised their dress and life styles? The reason is that it is the cheapest trick in the book to invoke 'imperialism' about which people have strong feelings and to abuse one's opponents as agents or running dogs of imperialism. In most parts of South Asia, this pretext is still used to stifle criticism. Human rights which are universal, become 'Western' (one of the most ludicrous of all excuses); comment by human rights groups in Sri Lanka become treacherous action (by those who work for 'dollars') and comment by foreign human rights groups become 'interference' in the internal affairs of the country.¹³⁰

¹²⁷Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 14.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁹Jayawardena, "The NGO Bogey," *Pravada*, 10.

¹³⁰*Ibid.*, 11.

Uyangoda adds that: “It is sheer nonsense to suggest that these NGOs have been challenging the sovereignty of the Sri Lankan state and acting as new colonial masters.”¹³¹ These debates are typical of the PA era of government rule and government relations with NGOs since 1994. But, as mentioned above, the later UPFA government together with the support of Sinhala nationalist political parties and groups have continued to make such criticisms against NGOs.

3.4.3 *Legal Procedures*

The lack of a uniform registration mechanism has been a major reason for confusion and ambiguity in defining NGOs. There are different forms of NGO registration in Sri Lanka. Under the Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Supervision) Act, No. 31 of 1980, better known as the VSSO Act, registration is mandatory for NGOs that obtain contributions from the public and government sources.¹³² Under the Companies Act, No. 17 of 1982, the companies formed to promote commerce, arts, science, religion, charity, sports or any other useful object, who intend to apply its profits, if any, or other income in promoting its objects, and agree to prohibit the payment of any dividend to its members, can be registered. NGOs can register under this act as ‘guaranteed limited companies’.¹³³ NGOs may also register in a variety of other ways. Through the Societies Ordinance of 1891 and Trust Ordinance of 1917, NGOs can register as unincorporated associations, while the foreign NGOs usually enter into a memorandum of understanding with an appropriate government ministry.¹³⁴

In May 1993, after President Premadasa’s assassination, President D.B. Wijetunga acted on the NGO Commission’s recommendations, promulgating an emergency regulation entitled ‘the Monitoring of Receipts and Disbursements of Non-governmental Organisations

¹³¹Uyangoda, “NGOs, Hate Politics,” *Pravada*, 8.

¹³²*Voluntary Social Service Organizations (Registration and Supervision) Act, No. 31 of 1980.*

¹³³*Companies Act, No. 17 of 1982.*

¹³⁴Brabant, “NGO Legislation,” *RPN*, 14.

Regulation No. 1.¹³⁵ This was made through an extraordinary gazette under emergency regulations.¹³⁶ Several criticisms emerged regarding the emergency regulation. Critics pointed out that there was no reason for the use of emergency regulations to register and monitor the workings of NGOs. Furthermore, commentators stated that if during its three years of operation the NGO Commission had found at least some of the suspicions on NGOs well founded, this fact would have been mentioned in the commission report and that it would have figured as a reason for urgency. Therefore the commentators justifiably assume that the commission had found no material base for such suspicions.¹³⁷ The NGO sector also noted that there was no discernible urgency or threat to the public security that warranted the enactment of legislation under emergency regulations.¹³⁸ However, this regulation lapsed¹³⁹ in 1994 after the PA government came into power. Wickramasinghe notes that NGOs complied with such regulation until the government allowed it to lapse the following year. She further adds that the general analysis of the NGO Commission episode has been a condemnation of the state's use of emergency measures to unleash its resources against institutions of civil society.¹⁴⁰

However in 1995, the PA government attempted to control NGOs through introducing an amendment to the VSSO Act. Although this amendment bill was presented to the Parliament, it was not taken for approval by the Parliament due to lobbying of the NGOs and the

¹³⁵Under this regulation, the organisations that are dependent upon the public or government grants-in-aid for funds and that are engaged in social welfare, development, empowerment, research, and environmental protection activities were defined as NGOs. Cooperative societies and NGOs with annual budgets less than Rs. 50,000 were excluded. The regulation required an NGO to register with the director of social services and submit detailed information regarding receipts and disbursements. Heavy penalties for non-compliance were built into the regulation (Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 84–85).

¹³⁶Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 13.

¹³⁷Social Scientists' Association, "NGO Commission," *Pravada*, 7.

¹³⁸Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 14.

¹³⁹Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 13.

¹⁴⁰Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 84–85.

Parliamentary opposition.¹⁴¹ But on 27th March 1998, when the main opposition party, the UNP, boycotted the Parliament, the government tactically passed this bill.¹⁴² This Voluntary Social Service Organisations (Registration and Supervision) (Amendment) Act, No. 8 of 1998 gives power to the minister of social services to control NGOs. The VSSO act together with the amendment remains is the latest Sri Lankan act applicable to NGOs. Some authors interpret these attempts of the government as a negative response towards NGOs. For Kloos, the rush to pass such an amendment signified the anger of the government towards human rights NGOs.¹⁴³ Kloos is critical of the government for betraying its wish for monitoring rather than understanding. Control of the NGO world would imply control of civil society.¹⁴⁴

Additional legal procedures regarding NGOs have been introduced. In April 1999, a presidential circular was issued to all government ministries, district secretariats, and departments calling all NGOs to be re-registered under the NGO Secretariat. All international- and national-level foreign-funded voluntary service organisations were required to declare their sources of funding, annual expenditure and annual budgets. Clearance from Ministries of Defence, Foreign Affairs, Plan Implementation, and the relevant line ministry was made a prerequisite for re-registration. The exceptions for re-registration under the NGO Secretariat are those organisations whose activities are conducted in one district and at divisional levels. Those organisations are required to re-register under the district secretary and the divisional secretary, respectively. However, if these organisations receive funds from foreign sources, they have to register under the NGO Secretariat.¹⁴⁵ Although the NGO Secretariat was formed in 1996, it was not active till 1999. Following the presidential circular, the NGO Secretariat became re-activated because the circular very clearly made re-registration compulsory.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 13.

¹⁴²Ibid.

¹⁴³Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGOs*, 33.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 39.

¹⁴⁵Fernando, "The Landscape of NGOs in Sri Lanka," 13–14.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 14.

As mentioned earlier, large amounts of foreign funds flowed to Sri Lanka following the tsunami, and the government introduced new regulations and procedures for international NGOs. Since the tsunami the NGO registration procedures have changed. According to Brochard, the introduction of new regulations and procedures has added a new layer to the relationship between the government and NGOs.¹⁴⁷ A new institutional mechanism established under the External Resources Department (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance and Planning became the Centre for Non-Governmental Sector (CNGS). Prior to the tsunami all international NGOs were registered with the NGO Secretariat of the Ministry of Social Services. But when the CNGS was established, pre-tsunami international NGOs were also requested to provide information on their activities to the CNGS as well.¹⁴⁸ The new registrations had to be initially recommended by the line ministry and approved by the Ministry of Social Services. Following this, applications needed to be forwarded to the CNGS of the ERD who then forward them to the Immigration Department after obtaining clearance from the Ministries of Defence, Finance and Foreign Affairs. This process made registrations very slow, and as Brochard claims, discouraged the international NGOs.¹⁴⁹ He further adds that the procedure and the duration varied from agency to agency. For example, with regard to the Caritas agencies,¹⁵⁰ the initial approval has to be given by the Ministry of Christian Affairs.¹⁵¹

The 2005 budget proposed to tax 6% of all funds granted by both local and international NGOs at the rate of 30%.¹⁵² While the taxation applied to international NGOs as well those involved in relief work, they had an opportunity to apply for exemption. But Brochard notes that, it was not clear how the exemptions were to be granted and also it was unclear if this would apply to tsunami-related relief work. Moreover, ‘humanitarian’ had not been defined in this regard. This added yet another registration which created further delays.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Brochard, “New Regulations and Procedures,” 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Caritas is a confederation of 164 Roman Catholic relief, development and social service organisations operating in over 200 countries and territories worldwide.

¹⁵¹ Brochard, “New Regulations and Procedures,” 2.

¹⁵² Ministry of Finance and Planning, *Budget Speech—2005*.

¹⁵³ Brochard, “New Regulations and Procedures,” 3.

The NGOs receiving tsunami-related funds were asked to channel those funds through a special bank account titled ‘post-tsunami inward remittances account’. Brochard says that it was reported that remittances received by NGOs far exceeded funds received by the government of Sri Lanka for tsunami-related initiatives.¹⁵⁴ He further adds that the government of Sri Lanka was not encouraging expatriates to take up positions in Sri Lanka with NGOs.¹⁵⁵ Agencies were being encouraged to employ Sri Lankans wherever possible.¹⁵⁶ These conditions prompted a re-evaluation of the state’s institutional and legal relationship with NGOs.

In January 2006, a Parliamentary select committee into the activities and impact of NGOs was launched with a ‘special focus’ on post-tsunami developments. Its terms of reference clearly reflected concerns linked to the ethnic conflict, including the allegations that some NGOs were engaged in activities that were ‘inimical to the sovereignty and integrity of Sri Lanka’, ‘detrimental to the national and social wellbeing of the country’ and adversely affected ‘national security’.¹⁵⁷ According to Walton, therefore, NGO legitimacy in Sri Lanka is reliant on a number of factors specific to the Sri Lankan context such as a highly centralised political system, a lack of legal protection for NGOs, and a sense that NGOs were elitist and threatened the aims of a nationalist political agenda.¹⁵⁸ Perera notes that the legal procedures have not been to evaluate the utility of NGO activities and projects but monitor them, which can leave them subject to control through state intervention.¹⁵⁹ Such legal procedures reflect government’s aims to suppress and control NGOs rather than obtaining their support in various sectors such as human rights protection and development.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁵It was pointed out that foreign recruits ideally should have qualifications and experience that were not available locally. Foreign accountants were particularly discouraged with the arguments that: (1) there is a pool of local professionals; and (2) accountants must be familiar with local accounting practices.

¹⁵⁶Brochard, “New Regulations and Procedures,” 5.

¹⁵⁷Walton, “Conflict, Peacebuilding and NGO Legitimacy,” 143.

¹⁵⁸Ibid.

¹⁵⁹Perera, “Non Government Organizations,” 9.

3.4.4 *The NGO Secretariat*

As noted earlier, in 1995 amendments were proposed to the VSSO Act which provided for the establishment of an NGO advisory council and appointment of interim boards of management to administer the affairs of NGOs,¹⁶⁰ reflecting the recommendations of the NGO Commission. Although a secretariat for NGOs was established in 1996 in the Ministry of Health, Highways and Social Services, the VSSO Amendment Act was passed in 1998. However, this act has not been adequately implemented and the registration of such organisations had not been strictly followed,¹⁶¹ leading to a presidential circular which was issued in April 1999 to make NGO registration compulsory.¹⁶²

The official web site of the NGO Secretariat mentions that their mission is to mobilise the resources and to coordinate the activities of NGOs within the national policy framework and to have NGOs contributing as partners in the process of development of the country. The goals of the NGO Secretariat are to ensure the registration of all NGOs which function in Sri Lanka and to assess if they are functioning within the frame of government policies.¹⁶³ The official web site mentions several objectives of the NGO Secretariat.¹⁶⁴ However, the entire mission, goals and the objectives of the NGO Secretariat stresses its strong affiliation with central government policy.

Among the various activities of the NGO Secretariat,¹⁶⁵ the registration of NGOs is prominent. There are different levels of NGO registration. All foreign NGOs, local NGOs receiving foreign funds, and the local NGOs which conduct their activities in more than one administrative district are required to register with the NGO Secretariat. The NGOs which conduct activities within the boundaries of only one

¹⁶⁰NGO Secretariat, "Measures to Introduce a System".

¹⁶¹For example, in 1997 the Ministry of Social Services collected lists of NGOs from variety of sources such as ministries, provincial councils, divisional offices, government agencies and human rights commission. At the end of 1997 a four-page form was sent to all known NGOs. Many filled-in forms have meanwhile been returned, but nothing has been done with the data due to lack of staff and computer facilities. The ministry could do not much more than store the forms in one of its two rooms (Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 15).

¹⁶²NGO Secretariat, "Measures to Introduce a System".

¹⁶³NGO Secretariat, "Mission and Goal".

¹⁶⁴NGO Secretariat, "Objectives".

¹⁶⁵NGO Secretariat. "Activities".

administrative district should register in the appropriate district secretariat. The NGOs which conduct activities within the boundaries of only one divisional secretariat area need to register in the appropriate divisional secretariat. These complexities reflect that there is still no single institution to register all NGOs in Sri Lanka.

The NGOs need to qualify to be registered. These organisations are not for profit; shall not share the profit or surplus earned through fundraising activities among its members; shall not be self-serving in aims and related values; and shall be within the legal framework and social values of the country.¹⁶⁶ Prior to registration, these organisations should apply for the recommendation of the ERD¹⁶⁷ through a separate form obtained from the NGO Secretariat. Some of these requirements are vague and complex, with regulations designed to discourage the NGOs. If a high official sees an NGO as a threat to the existing government's power, there are many ways to suppress or restrict NGOs in the country by labelling them as imperial agents. There are controversies over interpreting such vague terms as 'social values of the country'. These loopholes make a path for the misuse of laws and to direct the aims of NGO Secretariat towards fulfilment of political needs.

According to a special gazette notice issued by the President on 30th April 2010, the NGO Secretariat started functioning under the purview of the Ministry of Defence. And while the aims of establishing the NGO Secretariat may be clear and reasonable, the problem was the control the Defence Ministry had over it. Because the war ended in 2009, the government could not put forward arguments of national security anymore. In the post-war period, numerous human rights violations occurred in Sri Lanka. The government's poor response to these issues was manifest with the government fearing NGOs might spread news of these violent incidents to the outside world. Thus, the government may have tried to suppress the NGOs by controlling them under the purview of the Defence Ministry. According to critics, NGOs are required to submit financial statements, audited reports and work plans on a regular basis

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷The ERD approval is needed only if the objectives of an NGO contain the provision that their relief services are for the mentally retarded or physically disabled, the poor, the sick, the orphans and destitute, and contains the provision that the relief services aim the needy in times of disasters. These NGOs also needed to get positive recommendations from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence to be qualified to be registered in the NGO Secretariat (ibid.).

to the NGO Secretariat. Oversight of a clearly civilian function by the Ministry of Defence was deeply repressive and highly political. This was apparent in the restrictions that have been placed on organisations limiting work to specific activities and subject areas.¹⁶⁸ The monitoring of such organisations mainly working to address human rights and humanitarian concerns, especially in the north and the east, created an environment of self-censorship and curtailed meaningful intervention.¹⁶⁹

3.4.5 *Significant Views*

The writings on government-NGO relations suggest that the government readily perceives at least some NGOs as a threat and that it seeks to control and curb their activities.¹⁷⁰ Kloos' critique of the government position maintains that: (1) because NGOs are not effectively controlled there is a chance that financial resources are wasted or misappropriated; (2) when applying for resources abroad, NGOs may be tempted to present a picture of reality in Sri Lanka worse than it actually is, thereby tarnishing the image of the country; (3) support for an NGO might amount to support for an insurgent revolutionary or secessionist movement; (4) resources, foreign resources in particular, may be used to gain political influence in the national arena, thus undermining the sovereignty of the state, or for private gain; and (5) foreign resources, while officially used for socio-economic purposes, may have undesirable cultural consequences.¹⁷¹ Kloos claims this last criticism is voiced by some Sinhala nationalist groups and occasionally used by some of the Buddhist monks against Christian charity NGOs. The reason for this critique is that these NGOs are suspected of conversion activities in the wake of helping the poor.¹⁷² For Kloos there is a tension between the government and human rights NGOs, but hardly between the government and development-oriented NGOs.¹⁷³ Kloos further adds that although

¹⁶⁸For example, after the war the Sri Lankan military forces denied all access to the IDP camps by NGOs (see Amnesty International, "Sri Lanka: Unlock the Camps.").

¹⁶⁹Sumanthiran, *Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka*.

¹⁷⁰Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 36.

¹⁷¹Ibid., 26.

¹⁷²Ibid., 30.

¹⁷³Ibid., 37.

there definitely is a relationship of mutual suspicion, actual conflicts are rare indeed.¹⁷⁴ Wickramasinghe also notes that open conflicts rarely arise between the state and NGOs involved in rural and technical development but do occur between the state and human rights NGOs who purport to act as watchdogs of state excesses.¹⁷⁵ For example, the NGO Commission report states that human rights issues should not be used as political issues for confrontation with the government but as pure human rights issues.¹⁷⁶

Through these writings, it is clear that there is ambivalence and suspicion of Sri Lankan governments regarding their position vis-à-vis NGOs. Kloos brings three things to the discussion on the relationship between the government and NGOs in Sri Lanka: (1) the quantitative importance of NGOs in terms of the number of people working in this sector and concerns about the amount of money spent by NGOs; (2) the bewildering variety of activities carried out under the banner of NGOs; and (3) the fact that absolutely nobody has a full grasp of the extent of the phenomenon.¹⁷⁷ Therefore despite an explicit willingness on both sides to cooperate, collaboration between NGOs and government is limited. According to Wickramasinghe, for the state quite clearly the partnership with NGOs does not grow naturally out of its development vision. It is more a means to achieving certain political objectives.¹⁷⁸

The challenge for the Sri Lankan government is to combine economic growth and employment creation with a reduction in government spending.¹⁷⁹ For Brabant, this is only possible if the private sector and the non-governmental sector expand and take over the roles and responsibilities previously exercised by the government. He questions whether a government can opt to attract foreign investment and increase deregulation in the private sector, while simultaneously increasing its regulation over the civil society sector and controlling that sector's access to foreign funds.¹⁸⁰ This indicates the ambiguous policies of government over NGOs.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 98.

¹⁷⁶Cited in *ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷⁷Kloos, *The Sri Lankan Government and the NGO's*, 37.

¹⁷⁸Wickramasinghe, *Civil Society in Sri Lanka*, 101.

¹⁷⁹Brabant, "NGO Legislation," *RPN*, 15.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

It is clear that the relationship between the Sri Lankan government and NGOs has not evolved smoothly. Careful scrutiny into such criticisms and the different reactions of certain governments on NGOs give rise to several arguments. First, the government-NGO relations have slowly changed and are still changing according to different government policies, and therefore, it is clear that within the state boundaries of Sri Lanka, the government can and will control the activities of NGOs according to its political objectives. Second, the government's attempts to control NGOs indicate that the government identifies NGOs as significant and influential. Third, during the moments when the government and NGOs collaborated in the matters of human rights and development, it is evident that the results achieved were positive.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Overall, in Sri Lanka there is no widely accepted definition for the term NGO. Although there is evidence of the organisational forms like NGOs since pre-colonial times, due to the ambiguities of definitions and legal procedures, there is no clear data about the growth of NGOs in Sri Lanka. The relations between government and NGOs have taken a variety of forms according to the policies and aspirations of different governments and rulers, political parties and leaders, and incidents occurring in the country. The governments which obtained the support of Sinhala nationalist political parties and groups tried to label NGOs as imperial agents. This criticism has been counter critiqued by many authors as a trick of governments to avoid NGOs becoming involved in human rights protection, a sector which is intentionally ignored by many governments. This reveals the government's fear of receiving international pressure on human rights protection when the NGOs act as watchdogs to protect human rights. Compared with rights-oriented NGOs, development-oriented NGOs have not faced much pressure.

The following chapters examine the current gaps of Sri Lankan government structure especially in terms of local government, and seek ways in which NGOs can involve and contribute to local government and development in Sri Lanka despite the limitations imposed on NGOs by the central government.

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Local Development, People's Participation and Local Politics

Abstract The chapter outlines the complexities of local development, people's participation and the influences of national and provincial politics on local government by examining the views of political representatives, administrative officials, NGO officials and the representatives of the community-based organisations in Sri Lanka. The ways in which central government and local government define development were shown to differ. When central government promotes large-scale development at one end, at the other end some local governments tended to identify small-scale, local-level development as being more important and effective. From the local perspective, development, which is locally-led and community-oriented, stresses the importance of human resources over physical infrastructure. To address the local development needs, local government should encourage people's participation in local policy processes.

Keywords Local development · People's participation · Political representatives · Administrative officials · NGO officials
Community-based organisations · Central government
Human resources · Physical infrastructure

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Development is an elusive and ambiguous concept reflected by different meanings according to the context in which it is used.¹ The Sri Lankan literature points to development as a multidimensional process involving major changes in the social structures, popular culture and national political institutions combined with an acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty.² Development thus covers a broad range of positive changes; however, the ways in which different parties define development varies. For example, when central government promotes large-scale development at one end of the spectrum, some local governments prefer to promote small-scale development at the other end. Between these two variants, a range of different interpretations for development is evident. The main interest of this book centres on local development which is locally-led and community-oriented and where the development of human resources over physical infrastructure is stressed.³

This book proceeds on the assumption that local development is a responsibility of local government since that is where local needs must be met. The *Pradeshiya Sabhas* Act establishes the significance of people's participation in local development activities. According to the Act, *Pradeshiya Sabhas* (PSs) were established to provide greater opportunities for the people to participate effectively in the decision-making processes relating to administrative and development activities at a local level.⁴

The way in which local government views development varies according to the situation within particular areas coupled with political considerations. The availability of natural resources, and the demographic and geographical backgrounds also vary from area to area. Further, the political and administrative influences of central and provincial governments regarding local development, and the ways in which the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the individuals involved in local development activities cooperate also differ from area to area. To address the issues of local development and people's participation, it is important to examine the ways in which local government representatives define such

¹ Kularatne, "Community Development in Sri Lanka," 2.

² Amarathunge et al., "Conflict of Development."

³ Kleymeyer, *Cultural Expression*, 4-6.

⁴ *Pradeshiya Sabhas Act No. 15 of 1987*.

concepts. In turn, how local government is affected by national and provincial politics is critical.

This chapter outlines the current local governing mechanism in Sri Lanka and the different perspectives on local development, people's participation and local politics. The chapter identifies gaps in development and people's participation at the local government level in Sri Lanka and looks towards possibilities to fulfil this neglect.

4.2 CURRENT LOCAL GOVERNING MECHANISM

Local government in Sri Lanka presently consists of municipal councils (MCs) for cities and large towns, urban councils (UCs) for less urbanised areas or smaller towns, and PSs for rural areas.⁵ These councils operate under the Municipal Councils Ordinance, No. 17 of 1865, Urban Councils Ordinance, No. 61 of 1939 and *Pradeshiya Sabhas* Act, No. 15 of 1987 respectively.

MCs and UCs have been functioning for a long period of time but PSs are relatively new. The demarcation over the degree of urbanisation is not absolute and precise. There is no formal definition of the terms 'rural' and 'urban', nor is there an accepted standard of the characteristics on which it is determined. There are some PSs which are more urbanised than urban councils.⁶ Most of the time, the demarcation and the positions of local government bodies have been decided not according to the population, land or resources, but according to the political discretion of the local government minister. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999 recommended that as the needs of people in rural areas are different from those in urban areas, a correct demarcation was needed for these local government bodies to serve the people of their respective areas in a more effective manner.⁷

In 1987 under the 13th amendment to the constitution, local government gained constitutional recognition and became subject to provincial councils.⁸ When local government was placed under the provincial

⁵Leitan, "The Role of Local Government," *Governance*, 51.

⁶*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999*, 27, 39.

⁷*Ibid.*, 39.

⁸*The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka—1978*.

Table 4.1 Growth of the number of local government bodies

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of municipal councils</i>	<i>Number of urban councils</i>	<i>Number of Pradeshiya Sabbas</i>	<i>Total</i>
1988	12	39	257	308
1997	14 ^a	37	258	309
2010	18	42	270	330

^aThis happened as a result of creating a new *Pradeshiya Sabha* and upgrading two urban councils into municipal council status

Sources Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999, 22, 451 and Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Essential Information on Provincial Councils and Local Government 2010*

councils, the previous direct relationship with the central government Ministry of Local Government was de-linked. According to the 1999 Commission of Inquiry, under clause 4.1 in the 9th schedule of the 13th amendment, the control and supervision of local government was a power vested in the minister of the local government of the province and, accordingly, local government came under provincial councils. The Department of Local Government at the national level was discontinued and provincial commissioners and assistant provincial commissioners of local government (CLGs and ACLGs)⁹ were appointed for each provincial council.¹⁰

Since the establishment of PSs in 1987, the number of local government bodies in Sri Lanka has grown (see Table 4.1). The entire land area, with the exception of the free trade zones of Katunayaka, Biyagama and Koggala, falls within the areas of authority of the local government bodies.¹¹

The MCs are headed by mayors with deputy mayors and members of the councils making policy and policy implementation decisions. The mayor is the chief executive and is assisted by the municipal

⁹Provision is made for a provincial public service in each province while the powers of recruitment, promotion and disciplinary control of officers within such service are vested in the provincial governor. A provincial public service commission is also to function in each province, to which the governor is able to delegate these powers (*Provincial Councils Act, No. 42 of 1987*, 12–13).

¹⁰*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999*, 21.

¹¹In the free trade zone areas the local government functions are attended to by the Board of Investment (BoI) of Sri Lanka (*ibid.*, 22).

commissioner, who is a senior public official. There are several departments under the administration of a municipal commissioner, depending on size, complexity, staff availability and resources of the municipality.¹² Under the UCs and PSs the chief executive is the chairman. Moreover, there is a vice chairman and also a secretary to assist the work of the council.

Although there is no single legislative enactment in relation to local government in Sri Lanka, all three types of local government bodies have almost similar powers.¹³ Local government bodies are given powers to formulate their own by-laws in accordance with the provisions of the statutes.¹⁴ All three local government legislations provide for the creation of a municipal fund, a local fund and a *Pradeshiya Sabha* fund for the MCs, the UCs and the PSs respectively. In addition, legislation empowers local government to take necessary action to ensure that revenue generation takes place according to the wishes of the local government body.

Many other government institutions are engaged in local government functions in addition to the local government bodies. Therefore contradictions occur from time to time when implementing laws. The Urban Development Authority Act, No. 41 of 1978, was passed to deal with the physical planning problems of the urban areas of Sri Lanka. Previously, physical planning was a function of local government bodies, particularly of MCs. This change was made given the limited capacity of manpower and economic resources of local government bodies to prepare and implement development plans, and the problems associated with the acquisition of land. The Urban Development Authority (UDA) law has extensively superseded the relevant laws and regulations made under the Urban Councils Ordinance and the *Pradeshiya Sabhas* Act as well.¹⁵

Over time the utility functions of local government bodies have been taken over by central government decision making. For example, water supply was taken over by the National Water Supply and Drainage Board, electricity supply and street lighting were taken over by the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB), Lanka Electricity Company and the UDA. Rest houses were taken over by the Tourist Board. In defence, the government argued that there was a lack of resources and

¹²United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka".

¹³See *Municipal Councils Ordinance, Urban Councils Ordinance* and *Pradeshiya Sabhas Act*.

¹⁴United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka".

¹⁵*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999*, 30–31.

professional expertise within local government bodies to manage these utility services profitably. According to the 1999 commission report, this takeover was a severe blow to the financial resources of local government bodies.¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, the divisional secretariats at the divisional level were established according to President R. Premadasa's wish to extend the public administration to the village level. Leitan notes that the expected objectives of the local government have not been fully realised since the Transfer of Powers (Divisional Secretaries) Act, No. 58 of 1992 placed the emphasis once again on administrative agencies rather than on the institutions of local government. In accordance with the provisions of this act, the divisional secretariat, rather than the elected PS, has become the focal point of the administrative structure in each division.¹⁷ To avoid overlaps, Leitan proposed to merge PS with the divisional secretariat to enable the divisional secretariat to function as the administrative arm of local government body, the PS, and so strengthen the PS.¹⁸ But Hettige notes that early in the development of the divisional secretariats, a decision to make the divisional secretary the executive officer working with the PS was aborted due to resistance from administrative officers.¹⁹ The administrative officers who were appointed through the Sri Lanka administrative service (SLAS) rejected working with the local political representatives because of significant differences in the educational qualifications of the administrative officers which were higher than the low educational qualifications of most of the local political representatives. In effect, administrative officers were not willing to obey the rules of the local political representatives. However, when employed by the central government, these administrative officers obeyed the national politicians without any resistance.

The 1999 Commission of Inquiry brought the same proposal in a different way to debates by suggesting the desirability of combining these two agencies operative at the divisional level into one authority answerable to the local body in the area. The institutional arrangement would mean the services of the divisional secretary would function as the

¹⁶Ibid., 31.

¹⁷Leitan, "The Role of Local Government," *Governance*, 51–52.

¹⁸Leitan, "Sri Lanka's Institutions of Local Governance," *Governance*, 85.

¹⁹Hettige, "Local Democracy," 429.

commissioner of PSs and provide bureaucratic support through the one agency at the divisional level, namely the local body supported by the divisional secretary.²⁰ This proposal is encouraging, but the problem is the unwillingness of the administrative officials to engage and continue links with the PSs.

Current local government mechanisms in Sri Lanka reflect certain gaps and overlaps. Here the influences of central government over local government are significant. Decisions of the local government minister on the demarcation and the positions of local government bodies and takeover of local government powers by certain central government-controlled bodies have resulted in the undermining and weakening of local government in Sri Lanka. But local government bodies still have powers to formulate their own by-laws towards strengthening their powers. Although there were proposals to combine the complicated twin streams of local political and administrative authorities together, the unwillingness of administrative officers to engage with local political bodies resulted in further conflicting overlaps between separate political and administrative power structures at the local level.

4.3 FEATURES OF THE SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES

This book is based on a research that was carried out in the southern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Within these two provinces, 12 local government bodies were selected covering three districts of each province and three levels of local government, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 indicates the main demographic and geographical differences of the local government bodies. Comparing the MC and UC areas, it is clear that the PS areas are larger than the others. The land area and population together decide the number of local government representatives to be elected for each area and while the high populations have been mostly centred in the MC and UC areas, there are a number of PS areas with significantly higher populations as well (for example Baddegama PS), while some UC areas have significantly smaller populations (for example the Hambantota UC). These differences occur due to geographical location and the available facilities of each area.

²⁰ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999*, 138.

Table 4.2 Details of the selected local government bodies

	<i>Local govern- ment body</i>	<i>Province</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Area (square kilome- tres)</i>	<i>Number of GN divisions</i>	<i>Number of wards</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Number of council members</i>
1	Galle MC	Southern	Galle	16.5	43	15	90,934	19
2	Matara MC	Southern	Matara	12.8	41	15	74,771	15
3	Batticaloa MC	Eastern	Batticaloa	76	48	19	89,758	19
4	Kalmunai MC	Eastern	Ampara	23	74	28	104,546	19
5	Weligama UC	Southern	Matara	6.65	13	10	25,967	10
6	Hambantota UC	Southern	Hambantota	10.1	2	7	11,802	9
7	Trincomalee UC	Eastern	Trincomalee	7.5	19	12	102,857	12
8	Kattankudy UC	Eastern	Batticaloa	6.5	18	12	53,153	9
9	Baddegama PS	Southern	Galle	112.8	70	3	80,586	17
10	Suriyawewa PS	Southern	Hambantota	167.7	21	5	48,500	5
11	Kinniya PS	Eastern	Trincomalee	137.5	14	9	33,945	7
12	Lahugala PS	Eastern	Ampara	618	13	12	10,272	11

GN—*Grama Niladhari*; MC—Municipal Council; UC—Urban Council; PS—*Pradeshiya Sabha*
Source Budget reports (2011) of the 12 local government bodies

The numbers of *Grama Niladhari* (GN) divisions and wards²¹ indicate the inconsistency of Sri Lankan administrative and political divisions, but the information indicated in Table 4.2 identifies several differences in each area.

4.4 LOCAL DEVELOPMENT, PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION AND LOCAL POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW

This section provides a detailed overview of the perspectives of local government representatives on local development, and discusses the contradictions and problems attached to development with regard to the southern and eastern provinces. The discussion proceeds to consider the views of people's participation in local governing processes. The section focuses on the political influences of the central and

²¹*Grama Niladhari* (GN) division is the lowest level administrative division, and the ward is the lowest level political division in Sri Lanka.

provincial governments on local government, and on the ways such influences affect local development and people's participation in the selected areas.

4.4.1 *Local Development: Different Perspectives*

An underlying assumption of this research is that local government is best placed to address the demographic and geographical specialities of local areas when promoting local development. However, local government representatives have different perspectives on local development.

In a number of local government areas in the southern province, central government-led large-scale construction projects are the drivers of development. An example of this is the Hambantota UC which has seen large-scale infrastructural development in the form of the construction of a new harbour and an international conference centre. According to the chairman of the Hambantota UC, these initiatives are expected to lead to rapid development in the city. Already, he suggests, the improving infrastructure and facilities in the area, such as roads, markets and libraries, have made a major contribution to the city's development.²² Other local government areas, such as the Galle MC, have looked upon the new infrastructure as a source of direct income. New construction and reconstruction work²³ was highlighted as the pathway to development by the mayor.²⁴

Improving the income of the council through renting buildings and providing public utility services is important.²⁵ A similar view was expressed by the chairman of the Weligama UC who, in his 2011 budget message, noted development achievements over the last five years, with a new town hall and facilities, a supermarket, other markets and shops, and a beach park. There had also been reconstruction work including a playground, street lights and many roads.²⁶ He also commented specifically on the economic potential for income generation through rental properties and the supply of utility services to the people.

²²Hambantota Urban Council, *Budget Report—2011*, 1.

²³These include construction projects such as the new Galle central bus stand, a fish market, other buildings, and the reconstruction of roads, the erection of street lights and many other utilities.

²⁴Respondent: Mr. Methsiri De Silva, Mayor (UPFA), Galle Municipal Council.

²⁵Galle Municipal Council, *Budget Report—2011*, 1–6.

²⁶Weligama Urban Council, *Budget Report—2011*, i–vii.

Noteworthy is that centrally-led initiatives tend to ignore local knowledge which can lead to poorly planned projects that waste scarce resources and result in few local benefits.²⁷ Two examples of government wasting funds and resources on large-scale construction projects include the harbour project and the building of a new airport in Hambantota. Hambantota is situated in the dry zone where rainfall occurs for one month each year, leaving the area with serious water shortage problems. The population in the area is low compared with the other two districts in the province (see Table 4.2), and most of the people are poor. The harbour is being built, but some have argued that the Galle harbour would have been better if it had been renovated, or that the well-known Trincomalee natural harbour would meet the needs of the country. Instead, the government has spent, and continues to spend, millions of dollars building Hambantota harbour.²⁸ The plan is flawed given the existence of significant bedrock deposits which prevent large ships reaching the harbour. Similar criticisms have been levelled at the project to build a new international airport in Mattala, Hambantota. The site for the airport is in a reserved forest area. An article in a leading national newspaper, commenting on this development, stated:

Putting an airport right near a dedicated wildlife sanctuary and distant from large human populations is not the greatest idea. It will, guaranteed, disrupt the wildlife, and if the area does become a hub, that will disrupt and uproot them more. This might be necessary if there were no alternatives, but there are alternatives. Air traffic to Jaffna would be a guaranteed earner and many other regions (Anuradhapura, Matara) are projected to grow into major cities soon.²⁹

The Suriyawewa PS in the Hambantota district has also had a large-scale project involving the building of an international cricket stadium, but it has been built a long distance from the developed areas where there is a population of supporters. The majority of the poor in the Hambantota district do not have a culture of watching cricket matches and in fact struggle to afford day-to-day meals. Again, these examples are evidence

²⁷ACDI-CIDA, “Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme”.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹The Sunday Leader, “Why Hambantota?”.

of a poorly designed development strategy that has not been informed by local knowledge or the needs of the people.

Much of the centrally-led infrastructure development is oriented towards investment in the tourism sector and the promotion of sports events facilities. The Central government has stated that it is attempting to promote tourism in Sri Lanka by improving infrastructure,³⁰ expanding the capacity of the hotel sector, refurbishing existing facilities and building new hotels. Existing coastal tourist resorts, as well as new resorts, are being positioned for high-spending tourists. For this purpose, investments by internationally reputed hotel companies have increased³¹ reflecting the central government's view that large-scale tourism represents the ideal pathway to development.

Clearly, a mismatch exists between large-scale construction projects being pursued by the central government and the smaller scale tourism industry practices of local government bodies. The Hambantota UC has interpreted tourism needs differently requiring not large-scale industry but small-scale, local projects. An official document of the UC captures this:

Tourism has helped to improve the people's lives in the UC area. Local and foreign tourists pass the Hambantota UC area when they travel along the Colombo-Kataragama road to visit the reserved forests and sanctuaries, and the religious and historical places. People sell food items to these tourists and earn money. Some people have small huts to sell these things to the tourists.³²

According to local respondents, the rapid development of infrastructure in Hambantota with the use of foreign-funded large-scale construction projects has not benefitted these local tourist operators. For example, the people in the area have remained poor and are no longer able to sell small things such as sweets, casual food, king coconuts and fried fish along the road. Huts have become prohibited near the main road with the poor losing income as well as forest areas to feed their cows, and no land for cultivation. It is evident that a number of schools in Suriyawewa PS area have very poor facilities and do not have water and electricity.

³⁰Ministry of Finance and Planning, *Budget Speech—2013*, 14–15.

³¹Ibid., 36–38.

³²Hambantota Urban Council, *Hambantota Urban Council Area Details—2008–2009*, 4.

The conditions of the interior roads are very poor, but the main road which has been constructed to reach the international cricket stadium has four lanes. The chairman of the Suriyawewa PS pointed out the needs of the area related to lands, water, electricity, roads, and the selling of the agricultural harvests.³³ It is clear that the government's large-scale construction projects in promoting tourism and a sports economy are not addressing the needs of the poorer communities.

The southern expressway from Galle to Colombo is another large-scale project which has affected local people adversely. Although the highway entrance roads have been built along the villages, including the Baddegama PS area, the interior roads of the area are in poor condition and have not been repaired or maintained. The area has not been developed to accommodate the needs of locals, and the people in the area rarely get advantages from the highway project. A representative of the Baddegama PS noted the current situation and the actual needs of the area.

No development is seen in the area. The Baddegama PS area remains in the same undeveloped position. There are many children without parents in the area. They need support for their education. They also need support to fulfil their other personal and social needs. The disabled people in the area need help as well. As a local government we have to look after these people.³⁴

As well as noting the lack of development, this statement also indicates that there are local government representatives who aspire to play a greater role in meeting the needs of their specific communities. However, local government has been unable to influence these projects not as a result of a lack of interest in being involved in the development of such plans but because there are questions about whether local government bodies have the capacity to address the issues.

Central government-led large-scale construction projects promoting tourism are also characteristic of the development focus in much of the eastern province. The representatives of the Batticaloa MC were largely supportive of the large-scale construction projects that have been

³³Respondent: Mr. Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

³⁴Respondent: Mr. Manjula Liyanage, Representative (UNP), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

undertaken in the area since the war. According to the deputy mayor of the Batticaloa MC, the area has gained from these initiatives.³⁵ The mayor referred to large-scale construction projects in her message that accompanied the MC budget report of 2011, in which she thanked the provincial chief minister and the Economic Development Minister for developmental support.³⁶ The Batticaloa municipal commissioner commented that these were already generating revenue for the council:

New avenues of increasing the revenue of the council by lease and rent of shops and tourism development, without burdening the tax payers with increased taxes, are opened with the beautification of the beach, and construction of the new bus stand and business complex. We must strive to get the maximum revenue out of these new assets to increase the service provided by us to the tax payers.³⁷

Large-scale construction projects are therefore seen as positive initiatives and comments by members of the Trincomalee UC, indicating that they were hopeful such projects would be conducted in their area. The chairman of the Trincomalee UC stated that he believes in major development and accepts the central government's large-scale construction projects.³⁸ While there is advocacy, statements from other representatives of the Trincomalee UC indicate strong support for including local people in decisions about development projects in the area.³⁹

The chairman of the Kinniya PS has a goal of responding quite specifically to the particular social needs in his area, which are greatest in education and employment.

There are many youngsters in the PS area that have passed the G.C.E. Advanced Level. If we can provide opportunities to them, these youngsters can be used as the future base of local development. At present most of them are jobless. We as a PS want to help them develop their future as well as to develop the area. We are searching for investors who can start

³⁵ Respondent: Mr. George Pillai, Deputy Mayor (UPFA), Batticaloa Municipal Council.

³⁶ Batticaloa Municipal Council, *Budget Report—2011*, vi.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, viii.

³⁸ Respondent: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

³⁹ Respondents: Mr. N. Noormohamad, Representative (UPFA), Trincomalee Urban Council and Mr. S. Sanoon, Representative (UNP), Trincomalee Urban Council.

industries in this area. I expect that through investments like this, these youngsters will be able to get jobs and then the area and the people will be developed.⁴⁰

Although the expectation of the Kinniya PS chairman is to avoid unemployment, a document tabled in Parliament by MP M.A. Sumanthiran⁴¹ reveals that much of the government and donor focus on infrastructure projects does nothing to assist local communities. With the highest levels of unemployment, issues of hunger and malnutrition have become a serious concern.⁴² This reveals that the local communities in the area do not get job opportunities or benefits from large-scale construction projects.

A feature of central government involvement in post-war development in the eastern province is the large role played by the armed forces. Related to this is the question of land redistribution, and this has become a major problem, with the traditional agricultural lands of the people having been confiscated by the central government and handed over to military personnel for major projects. According to MP Sumanthiran, large sections of eastern province beach front land have been parcelled out to companies which are headed by military officers and, interestingly, the military has established a string of restaurants.⁴³ The local people are therefore very much at risk of losing their livelihoods due to the loss of their lands and lagoon areas where they cultivate and fish.⁴⁴ The chairman of the Lahugala PS commented on this as follows:

The Lahugala area is special due to its tourist attractiveness. But this area is war-affected and still under the influences of government military forces which are in the area. The lands used by villagers in Panama for their agricultural cultivations were forcefully taken by the military and now it is prohibited to enter these lands because of army fences and boards declaring 'No Entry'. Other than this, the fishermen also face problems when they fish in their usual fishing areas. The navy gun boats anchored near the shore and the traditional fishermen were not allowed to fish in those areas.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Respondent: Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴¹ MP M.A. Sumanthiran represents Tamil National Alliance (TNA).

⁴² Sumanthiran, *Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka*.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

By appropriating the limited economic opportunities that might otherwise be used by local residents to bring income and revenue to the fragile local communities, the military is maintaining and reinforcing the cycle of poverty.⁴⁶ Local people have been continuously losing their sources of income generation. According to MP Sumanthiran, severe restrictions are placed on members of fishing communities by resulting in a drastic change to their means of livelihood. These communities are unable to pursue their traditional livelihood.⁴⁷ A community-based organisation (CBO) leader stated that the locals have to get permission from the military personnel to fish in the lagoons and the sea.⁴⁸

The resettlement process since war continues in the northern and the eastern provinces; however, the armed forces are forcibly, and often without any explanation, taking over public or private property and land, in areas where people were returning to after being displaced because of war.⁴⁹ Many of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been relocated to remote areas in the interior where there are no facilities such as health, sanitation, education and transport. The military is also taking part in all activities at the community level including meetings to discuss local issues.⁵⁰

Clearly, local communities have been neglected and their voices compromised by government-sponsored military involvement and large-scale construction projects. These projects have failed the needs of the local communities including farmers and fishermen with the poor helpless in the face of large-scale construction projects.

While donor agencies have supplied funds to reconstruct the areas which were heavily damaged in the war, the main goal of these projects has been to develop infrastructure facilities in the eastern province, with most of them being handled by the Ministry of Economic Development. Significant amounts of foreign funds have been redirected to this ministry which has retained control of them. The chairman of the Lahugala PS reported that this has also led to the misuse of funds.⁵¹

⁴⁶Sumanthiran, *Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka*.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Respondent: Rev. Panama Chandarathana Thero, the Chief Priest of Panama Buddhist temple, the Principal of the Panama school, and the Leader of the movement to protect Panampaththuwa.

⁴⁹Sumanthiran, *Situation in North-Eastern Sri Lanka*.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

In terms of both the southern and eastern provinces, it is significant that there are variations in the views of local government representatives' understanding of local development. Addressing local development through dimensions such as education for children, employment for youth, welfare for the needy, the needs of fishermen, cultivators and small-scale employees is important and are key issues which have emerged among respondents. Comparing the southern and eastern provinces, several differences are apparent. The local communities in the eastern province have been greatly affected by the large-scale construction projects and by the heavy military involvement. Local government bodies have become powerless through central government decision making. In southern and eastern provinces there are many unaddressed issues relating to people's needs in different areas. There are two dimensions to the problem: first, large-scale construction projects of central government never address the needs of local communities; and second, despite their powerlessness to control the projects which impinge on the local communities, some local government representatives continue to believe that local development can be achieved through these large-scale construction projects.

4.4.2 *Encouraging People's Participation*

There is a new appreciation that local government is much more than administrative bodies that collect taxes and deliver essential services such as education, clean water, sewers, transportation, or housing.⁵² To Sisk, local government is the level of democracy at which the citizen has the most effective opportunity to participate actively and directly in decisions made for all of society.⁵³ However, it can be seen that securing people's participation in local policy processes is not easy.

Most local government bodies do not have effective links with the people in such areas. When considering most of the local government bodies in the southern province, there is little evidence of people's participation in local policy processes towards local development. One respondent of the Hambantota UC stated:

⁵²Sisk, *Democracy at the Local Level*, 1.

⁵³Ibid.

People's participation is very low in the UC area. The people do not participate in the UC work. There is no proper relationship between the CBOs and the UC. Also, no proper mechanisms to obtain people's participation exist.⁵⁴

In other local government areas, there have been attempts to obtain people's participation. The chairman of the Suriyawewa PS stated that they expect to build a four-year plan after obtaining ideas from the people. To obtain people's ideas and to meet their needs, they are conducting group meetings in the villages.⁵⁵

The chairman of the Baddegama PS, while referring to the construction and reconstruction work in the area, talked of the importance of people's participation in local development and ways they encouraged people's participation.

Aside from many barriers we have established CBOs in every GN division in the area to obtain people's participation in identifying development needs. Through this process we try to obtain people's proposals on area development and to supply the people's needs.⁵⁶

Reference to the CBOs in these statements reflects the link between people and local government bodies.

Some local government representatives noted the difficulties of achieving people's participation in local development. In the Weligama UC, the situation of the area and the people's attitudes changed after the tsunami, and this has become a specific problem to be addressed by the UC. A representative of the Weligama UC stated:

After the tsunami it took a long time for reconstruction to obtain and to re-settle the people. After the tsunami, people received support from the government and especially from non-governmental donors. Because of this people still have a dependency mentality and are not interested in becoming involved in development work. There is a need to change the attitudes of the people.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Respondent: Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council.

⁵⁵ Respondent: Mr. Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵⁶ Respondent: Mr. Anura Amarasiri Narangoda, Chairman (UPFA), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵⁷ Respondent: Ms. K.H. Thakshila Damayanthi, Representative (UPFA), Weligama Urban Council.

Development initiatives are of little benefit if they do not connect with the people.⁵⁸ To obtain the people's participation in city development, Matara MC created 15 *Purawesi Sabhas* (citizen committees) in the 15 wards of the MC area. This has built a path to solve problems between the MC area and the people. The former mayor of the Matara MC said they had established citizen committees to encourage people's participation. He added: "This was very effective and people have adopted the idea that they should work for the success of their city."⁵⁹

The establishment of citizen committees gave the community power to make decisions for their ward in development activities, service needs, wider community needs and welfare. A constitution clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of the citizen committees.⁶⁰ In the beginning some people were sceptical about the process of the citizen committees but over time, people have become engaged and have appointed community leaders to each committee. The special feature of the citizen committees was that there were no political party divisions in this process. All representatives of the MC equally supported and contributed to this process.

Through citizen committees, people pledged their support for the MC in collection of garbage and maintaining a clean environment. These committees are also vigilant about the construction of unauthorised structures and other obstacles to good health and sanitation. They organised *Shramadana*⁶¹ once a month to clean the MC area, creating a good social network among neighbours. The citizen committees held regular meetings with the MC officials, the mayor and elected members to update the outcomes of the committee meetings, and developed their own mechanisms to raise funds to develop the city.⁶² These committees became participants in the participatory planning and budgeting process implemented by the Matara MC from 2010 onwards. Citizen committees are a good example of how people's active participation in local policy processes can promote locally-led development.

⁵⁸ACDI-CIDA, "Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme".

⁵⁹Respondent: Mr. Upul Nishantha, former Mayor, Matara Municipal Council.

⁶⁰Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities, "CIVICUS Complete Report".

⁶¹The literal meaning of the word *Shramadana* is sharing of one's time, thought and energy for the welfare of all. In short, *Shramadana* means a gift of labour.

⁶²Federation of Sri Lankan Local Government Authorities, "CIVICUS Complete Report".

The successful implementation of citizen committees shows that people do participate in local government activities if given due space and recognition. Furthermore, citizen committees show that people need autonomy in the decision-making process, without the occurrence of political interference. The success story of citizen committees indicates that local government can attract resources from various institutions, voluntary organisations, expert groups, and volunteers by establishing participatory, accountable and transparent governing systems.⁶³

As discussed earlier, in the eastern province, following the war, and in the post-war environment a large and ongoing level of military involvement is present in people's lives with people's participation in local policy processes becoming a distant memory. It is also evident that large-scale construction projects being undertaken by the central government ignored needs at the local level. Nonetheless, messages from the chairman and the secretary of the Kattankudy UC in the UC's 2011 budget report provide evidence of people's participation in UC's annual budget preparation. According to the chairman:

Discussions were held with the people in every GN division as a prelude to the preparation of this budget. These estimates will be a guide for us to ensure continuity of the activities of the previous years, and to embark on new activities in the future.⁶⁴

And according to the secretary:

People of Kattankudy can now identify and prioritise their needs. They can obtain the financial resources and prepare budgets. This practice provides an opportunity for voters themselves to participate in local development. This is a special feature of exercising people's rights and is a significant democratic advance. It is our fervent hope and desire that we can progress towards development and good governance with the support and participation of people as well as with the dedicated service of our staff.⁶⁵

These statements reflect the formation of a people-centred view of local development. Furthermore, the budget report provides a detailed list of project activities planned by the UC together with the people

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Kattankudy Urban Council, *Budget Report—2011*, 2.

⁶⁵Ibid., 1.

to implement them in 2011. This list includes major 14 sections and several sub-sections⁶⁶ providing a good example of local government's attempt to identify the actual needs of the people and to address local development through people's participation.

In his message to the council's 2011 budget report, the former chairman of the Kinniya PS gave a different view on people's participation which is as follows:

Let me first thank you the voters of this PS area for electing me as the first chairman of this council by casting your valuable votes with the expectation that this council would fulfil your needs by providing extended services under my chairmanship. Having this in mind we embarked on the task of preparing a budget after identifying your needs and problems. We present this budget as a development-oriented one prepared by the representatives chosen by you.⁶⁷

This statement reflects that as local government representatives have been elected by the people, they should represent the people's needs in the council, and this signifies that there is no need to obtain people's direct participation in local policy processes. However, there is no guarantee that local government representatives will represent the actual needs of the people at all. The above examples of the Kattankudy UC and the Kinniya PS reflect two different views of democracy: first, the participatory democracy which strives to create opportunities for people to make contributions to decision making; and second, representative democracy where people vote for representatives who then decide policy initiatives.⁶⁸

In summary, the local government representatives identify CBOs as appropriate links to use in obtaining people's participation. A dependency mentality and the traditional attitudes of the people work as barriers, limiting participation and suggesting there should be a mechanism to drive people towards participation in local policy processes. Area-specific and people-centred development through obtaining people's participation is a significant issue in local government bodies such as the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 13–15.

⁶⁷ Kinniya Pradeshiya Sabha, *Budget Report—2011*, 1.

⁶⁸ See Beetham and Boyle, *Democracy*.

Matara MC and the Kattankudy UC. If local government bodies can provide opportunities, people are actively willing to participate in local policy processes.

4.4.3 *Local Politics*

The politicisation of the local government system in Sri Lanka has been a common feature, according to Bigdon and Hettige, who state that when one party proposes a project, the opposition blocks it, or the divisional secretariat will not allow it, since it is from the opposition and the divisional secretariat which represents the government. This political behaviour by local government leaders undermines the effectiveness of the local government system.⁶⁹ The prominent issue in local politics is the influence of central and provincial governments. These influences undermine and limit the powers of local government. There have been attempts by central and provincial governments to control local government and emerging local leadership, and contradictions between governing political parties and opposition political parties at the national, provincial and local levels of government.

Effective local government leadership can be identified as an important factor in local development. The example of citizen committees indicates that the Matara MC has had a positive view of people-centred development, although these development attempts have changed since the resignation of the mayor. In this MC, the loss of a mayor committed to an inclusive approach to local decision making has resulted in a decline in the level of local participation in planning and a recentralisation of power.

There is no doubt that the former mayor of the Matara MC worked to develop the MC area in a democratically inclusive way. He decentralised his power base and worked hard to overcome the challenges in the Matara MC area in a way that involved including the local population in decision processes. In the 2010 Presidential election he gave his support to the common candidate General Sarath Fonseka and as a result of this support, in March 2010 he received a charge sheet from the southern provincial chief minister alleging that he had committed

⁶⁹Bigdon and Hettige, "Key Issues of Good Local Governance," 95.

several transgressions contrary to the Municipal Councils Ordinance.⁷⁰ However, by filing a writ application⁷¹ in the southern provincial high court of Galle, Mayor Upul Nishantha sought an order of a stay in relation to the inquiry against him and the decision to suspend his duties as mayor.⁷² Although Mayor Upul Nishantha won the case, he resigned from his post in December 2010 until the investigation regarding him was complete.⁷³ This incident suggests that when the local leaders work hard and receive popularity, central and provincial government politicians see it as a challenge to their image, popularity and future in politics.

Soon after the resignation of Mayor Upul Nishantha, the deputy mayor was appointed as the new mayor but the control of the MC had been taken over by the UDA under the direction of the Ministry of Defence. Following this, there has been an increase in the level of involvement of military forces in the Matara MC. It has been observed that the military forces had started collecting garbage and carried out most of the construction work in the area, such as preparing land for new buildings and parks using the heavy vehicles from the war. This military influence was not acceptable to the staff of the MC or the people in the area. These actions point to the ways central and provincial governments have become more involved in controlling local government bodies.

Central and provincial governments' influence on local government worsens when the local governing party is different from the central and provincial governing parties.⁷⁴ Even if the local governing party is the same as the central and provincial governing parties, the opposition party representatives of the local government face ill-treatment most of the time. The opposition party representatives of the Galle and Matara MCs⁷⁵ mentioned that there are no opportunities for them to be involved in the major development projects carried by central government ministries in local government areas.

⁷⁰Lankika, "CA Refuses Order against Matara Mayor".

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid. Colombo Page, "Court Issues Order Suspending".

⁷³Ada Derana, "Matara Mayor Resigns".

⁷⁴Respondents: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council and Mr. Jayantha Pathirana, Representative (JVP) Matara Municipal Council.

⁷⁵Ibid.

It is evident that all the opportunities and benefits, such as handling the contracts of construction projects, remain with the council members representing the central and provincial governing party. These party affiliations create divisions between the local representatives, and this affects the unity of local government. This problem can be further illustrated through examining the committee system in the local government bodies.

As identified by the 1999 Commission of Inquiry, the committee system operating in local government bodies is a very important element of management.⁷⁶ Although the law provides for the appointment of various committees to assist the administration of local government bodies, in every local government area there are implementation problems arising from the existing law. Since political input has been uppermost in the minds of the politicians in power, adequate representation has not been the case in committees, even though the opposition groups or representatives have deserved representation.⁷⁷ An opposition party representative of the Matara MC stated:

There are legal procedures to work through in the committees without political bias and we have been appointed to follow them. But the ideas of the governing party get prominence. There is a need for more legal procedures to make these committees stronger.⁷⁸

This observation supports the assertion that the committee system in local government bodies is failing, because of the impact of strong party affiliations. Even in cases where members of these committees were appointed, the ideas of the political opponents and the disadvantaged groups were by-passed.⁷⁹

The problems get worse when the local leadership is affiliated with the political interests of the central and provincial governments. According to the comments of respondents, most of the time the political

⁷⁶The committees are called standing committees in municipal councils whilst in urban councils and *Pradeshiya Sabhas* they are called committees (*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms 1999*, 63–64).

⁷⁷United Nations ESCAP, “Country Paper: Sri Lanka”.

⁷⁸Respondent: Mr. Jayantha Pathirana, Representative (JVP) Matara Municipal Council.

⁷⁹Ibid.

connections between local government heads and political leaders in higher branches of government are aimed at securing profitable contracts and candidacy to contest future provincial councils or parliamentary elections.⁸⁰

Local government representatives follow central and provincial government agendas for their personal gain.⁸¹ National political parties have long been influencing local government by making national political issues the mainstay when canvassing votes around local government elections. The local issues such as water and electricity supply, education, unemployment, health and sanitation, transport, livelihood and agriculture have been for too long been neglected and the local communities remain voiceless. In such circumstances, they have no way of expressing needs. Instead, national politics emerge at the local government level as major issues.

The eastern provincial council is newer than the southern provincial council, but the responses of the local government representatives are almost similar in both provinces regarding provincial councils. The local government representatives in the eastern province, who were interviewed in this research, did not have positive feedback regarding provincial politics. Some of them pointed out that the provincial council is useless because their criteria are not matched to the people in the area.⁸² In fact, some local government representatives saw the provincial council as a barrier to their work. One stated: “Provincial councils do not allow us to work independently. We do not have a say. There is no need for provincial councils. It is easier to deal with the central government directly.”⁸³

This view confirms that some local government representatives still have hopes for the central government. But the problem here is that the central government controls the provincial councils and tries to fulfil its aims through provincial councils. The political aims of central government become easier when the provincial councils are also governed by

⁸⁰ Respondent: Mr. Manjula Liyanage, Representative (UNP), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁸¹ Respondent: Rev. Baddegama Samitha Thero, Representative (UPFA), Southern Provincial Council.

⁸² Respondents: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council and Mr. S. Sanoon, Representative (UNP), Trincomalee Urban Council.

⁸³ Respondent: Mr. N. Noormohamad, Representative (UPFA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

the same central governing political party. For example, MP Sumanthiran reports that the eastern provincial council provided assistance to the central government-sponsored land confiscation attempts handled by the military.⁸⁴

The responses of the representatives of the Lahugala PS provide more evidence about the different treatment of central and provincial governments towards local government when the local governing party is different from the central and provincial governing parties. The following statement of the former chairman of the Lahugala PS confirms this.

The PS cannot work alone without the help of the central government. In my period in office, the central government gave huge support to Lahugala PS because we represented the same central governing party (UPFA). The President and the Minister of Economic Development personally looked after this area and supported the people. Now the local governing party has changed. The UNP chairman does not receive any support from the central government. Therefore the development in the area has been stopped for now.⁸⁵

The new chairman of the Lahugala PS reported that the central government and the provincial council were not giving any support to the PS. This reflects the partial reactions of the central and provincial governments regarding local government bodies under different political parties.

When considering the southern and eastern provinces, there is little difference in the experience of local body politics. Political party affiliations clearly interrupt local government and people's participation in local development. When the local governing party is different from the central and provincial governing party, local government bodies do not receive support from either the central or provincial governments. Also, the representatives elected to local government bodies from political parties other than the central, provincial or local governing parties do not receive funds, and opportunities to address their projects or the needs of local communities. Even if the local leadership has been elected from the same central and provincial governing party, when such leadership does

⁸⁴Sumanthiran, *Issues and Problems Facing People*.

⁸⁵Respondent: Mr. J.S.D.M. Ravin Niroshan Kumara, Opposition Leader and former Chairman (UPFA), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

not conform to the agendas of central and provincial governments, or if they become popular, national and provincial politicians act against these local leaders.

The above sections on local development, people's participation and local politics, reflect the central and provincial government influences on local government in the southern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. These influences are seen in various ways. The central government-sponsored large-scale construction projects directly affect local communities, especially their traditional income sources. Such projects have not provided any benefit for local government or local communities. It is evident that there are possible ways for local government to obtain people's participation in local development. The nature of local politics discussed above reveals that the central government acts as an ultimate controller of the local government mechanism.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The Central government has largely neglected local government and the needs of local communities. While it is clear that most of the local government representatives have positive expectations about the large-scale construction projects conducted by the central government, some local government representatives claim that local development can only be achieved through the large-scale construction projects favoured by the central government. This situation creates a major gap in addressing the needs at the local level by local government bodies and acts against addressing needs by compromising people's participation. In both the southern and eastern provinces, local government representatives have aspirations to promote local development through educational achievement, addressing welfare needs, increasing employment opportunities, and securing small-scale employees. These views build a positive trend towards finding solutions to address local needs through local government initiatives. Citizen committees in Matara MC provide an example of successful participation by people in local development. Although there are several views on local development and people's participation, there has been no proper assessment of, or agreed way, to address or implement area-specific and people-centred local government policies towards fulfilling needs.

Local politics have been highly affected by central and provincial government power and influence and by the political party affiliations

of local politicians. Where local leadership has worked to achieve local development and people's participation, it has been rejected by central or provincial government. With such reactions to the creative and independent local leaders, most local government bodies have come to accept the central government's development plans. This indicates that the reasons for the contradictions and complications regarding local development and people's participation are mostly related to local politics rather than to the system's structural issues around local government. This suggests that structural issues are not the sole reason for the limitations local government faces in Sri Lanka.

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Problems in Local Government and Possible Solutions: NGOs as a Support of Local Government

Abstract This chapter identifies a range of problems in Sri Lankan local government, highlighted in the proposals of local government representatives and administrative officials. The lack of local government power, together with the lack of knowledge by local government representatives about how to use their power, presents a major problem. The main proposal for increasing local knowledge was to seek NGO support which would provide knowledge, technology, guidance, funds and resources to local government. In contrast, national-level political representatives and administrative officials proposed amendments, such as the integration of local government and central government-controlled administrative bodies at the local level as a way of enhancing local development. There were local-national discrepancies concerning proposed solutions for tackling local government problems and attaining solutions.

Keywords Local government · NGO support · Knowledge Technology · Resources · Political representatives · Central government-controlled · Local development · Local-national discrepancies

5.1 INTRODUCTION

There are a number of repercussions associated with local government in Sri Lanka. The constitution's 13th amendment to decentralise power to provincial councils has not yet been fully implemented and, instead, there has been a recentralisation of power in some instances making those provincial councils dependants of the central government. Under the 13th amendment, local government is subject to provincial councils, and the provincial chief minister has official powers to hold the provincial ministership of local government. As outlined earlier, this situation has resulted in conflict between local government and provincial councils when provincial councils have attempted to interfere in local government matters, and to control local leadership.

A major complaint of local government representatives concerns their inability to work for the area due to a lack of power, funding and resources. Furthermore, some of the legal procedures and established administrative bodies, such as divisional secretariats, have at times taken over the powers and functions of local government resulting in local government facing political limitations, conflicts of interest and an overlap in responsibilities.

This chapter examines these issues and extends the discussion developed in Chap. 4 on the possibilities to fulfil the existing gaps within local government that affect development and people's participation at the local level. The chapter examines the perspectives of respondents by focusing on the problems identified in local government in Sri Lanka and then analyses the reasons for such problems, and the proposals to solve them. The proposal to obtain non-governmental organisation (NGO) support to solve problems in local government is a major consideration in this chapter.

5.2 PROBLEMS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT: PERSPECTIVES

This section outlines the different perspectives of national, provincial and local political representatives and administrative officials, and scholars in terms of problems in local government under three main areas: (1) powers and functions; (2) funding and staffing; and (3) politico-administrative relations.

5.2.1 *Powers and Functions*

The powers and functions of local government are limited in Sri Lanka for several reasons. First, laws governing local government specify and delimit its functions, meaning local government bodies can only perform those functions specified in law.¹ Local government does not have autonomous powers and is not sovereign in its sphere of activities.²

Second, the functions allocated to local government are limited and focused on environmental management and social services. Roads, sanitation, health, water supply and solid waste management have been the primary responsibilities of local government bodies since their inception. Other activities such as education, agriculture, employment generation and poverty alleviation are not provided for under these laws.³

Third, other government authorities such as government-owned boards, corporations or statutory bodies, and, in the post-war period, the military have taken over many of the powers and functions allocated to local government, leaving local government increasingly dependent on those authorities to meet the needs of their electorates. Local government policies, operational systems and management in this context are more likely to be influenced by central government interests,⁴ constraining local government further and reinforcing its relatively weak functional position.

Fourth, many of the powers that, under the 13th amendment, were to be decentralised have not been transferred to the relevant bodies at provincial and local levels. In what follows, the respondents reveal the various dimensions of these limitations and the political implications arising from this failure to transfer power.

The mission of the southern provincial council's department of local government⁵ is charged with ensuring a robust local government system in the province, and achieving this through providing guidance, advice and assistance to local government bodies to work efficiently and economically, and in compliance with national policies for the well-being

¹ *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms* (1999, 29).

² *Ibid.*, 30.

³ United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka."

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ The ministries of provincial councils are known as departments.

of the public in the area.⁶ This close connection with central government has resulted in provincial councils tending to neglect local government. The mission of the local government department in the eastern provincial council centres on guiding, facilitating and supporting local government in policy formulation, and institutional and programme development to deliver quality services in a responsible, accountable and participatory manner.⁷ As with the southern province, no direct connection with the central government is made in the mission statement.

Although the mission of the southern and eastern provincial councils acknowledges assisting local government, a major complaint of respondent local government representatives centred on the way provincial councils had become barriers to effective local government and community development. Some depicted the provincial councils as white elephants,⁸ and referred to the system of provincial councils as a big burden.⁹ Comments from a number of local government representatives in the southern province capture these views. One said: ‘Provincial councils are not supportive of local governance. They put up barriers to local government. These institutions are extra burdens on the country.’¹⁰ Another said: ‘Provincial councils consume a lot of funds and resources but nothing useful is happening. They are big barriers between the central government and local government bodies.’¹¹

The respondents from the eastern province voiced a widely held view that the provincial council is useless and it does not concern itself with the needs of local government or people.¹² When provincial councils were established, the previous direct relationship between the central government and the local government ended and provincial councils were to become intermediary bodies. A number of respondents,

⁶Department of Local Government—Southern Provincial Council, “Mission.”

⁷Department of Local Government—Eastern Provincial Council, “Mission.”

⁸Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

⁹Respondent: Mr. Anura Amarasiri Narangoda, Chairman (UPFA), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

¹⁰Respondent: Mr. Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council.

¹¹Respondent: Mr. Jayantha Pathirana, Representative (JVP), Matara Municipal Council.

¹²Respondents: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council and Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

however, stated that this had not occurred as intended. Placing local government under provincial councils had not improved local government. Each of the local government representatives, from all political parties, agreed that provincial councils had not acted as intermediaries but had become barriers to effective communication between central government and local government.

Alternatively, the views of the eastern province local government representatives have revealed a willingness to connect with central government. In this area, most local government representatives did not have a sense that the provincial councils were powerless because central government had kept provincial councils under direct control. The reference to provincial councils as ‘useless’ bodies can be understood in the sense that they tend, merely, to follow central government policy, without reference to specific provincial needs.

These arguments lend weight to central government attempts to reduce the role of, or even abolish, provincial councils. In fact, local government criticism of provincial councils was described by a member of the southern provincial council as an excuse for the central government to abolish provincial councils. He suggested that central government can refer to the dissatisfaction of local government representatives with provincial councils as supporting its decision to abolish provincial councils.¹³

Although powers have been granted to provincial councils through the constitution, the non-transference of those powers in a practical sense is identified as a major problem in the literature on local government in Sri Lanka and also by the respondents. A member of parliament highlighted this issue, as follows.

The problem is that, when the power has been decentralised through the 13th amendment, some of the decentralised powers have not been transferred to the provincial councils by central government.¹⁴

Provincial councils were proposed as a solution to the ethnic conflict in the northern and eastern provinces, but they have not proved to be a solution and are now seen as problematic.

¹³Respondent: Rev. Baddegama Samitha Thero, Representative (UPFA), Southern Provincial Council.

¹⁴Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

An important reason for this failure has been a lack of clarity in the existing legal powers and procedures set down for provincial councils. There are separate acts governing provincial councils and local government bodies. According to the constitution, no government, at any level, can exceed its power. Clause 4.3 in the 9th schedule of the 13th amendment indicates limits: 'It will be open to a provincial council to confer additional powers on local authorities but not to take away their powers.'¹⁵ It was expected that provinces would prepare and pass statutes to transfer legally the official activities of local government bodies. Despite the law, local government has become a dependant of both central and provincial government.

According to the law, provincial councils are not designed as a control of local government instead, local government bodies, are independent with separate laws. Some respondents expressed the view that provincial council powers were designed for administrative supervision only.

Provincial councils have power only for administrative supervision which means provincial public service. Local government bodies are independent bodies because they have separate laws to continue their mechanisms. But the provincial councils identify local government bodies as their local agents. This is the problem. The political influences and challenges always come through the provincial councils. Most of the local government representatives do not like having to face these challenges. They have a fear of charge sheets. The only one who faced these challenges successfully has been Mr. Upul Nishantha, a former mayor of the Matara MC.¹⁶

As discussed in Chap. 4, a former mayor of the Matara MC faced a number of problems under the provincial chief minister. The Matara MC example reveals there are ways to contest the political influence of provincial councils; however, most local government representatives do not challenge the central and provincial governments' claims against decentralising power which, in law, is allocated to local government.

Despite the imposed limitations of decentralisation, some local government representatives in the southern province saw opportunities to work within the existing power structures. But they also pointed out that

¹⁵ *The 13th Amendment to the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka—1978.*

¹⁶ Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

even though they had input, there were other problems which undermined local government effectiveness.

MCs have powers and this power is more than enough to work. But the central governing political party corrupts the local government bodies. Nobody talks against this even when they see the failures. Therefore success has been hard to achieve.¹⁷

As discussed in Chap. 4, this comes through political party affiliations. The important point in the above statement confirms that the powers of local government are set in law. A representative of the Hambantota UC noted: ‘We have enough power but we do not have sufficient resources.’¹⁸ Another respondent noted: ‘Local government bodies can do many things within their power structures. But there is no unity among the political representatives.’¹⁹ Although this indicates problems such as insufficient resources and disunity among political representatives, these views show that in some instances there remain opportunities for local government to work.

In this context, it is important to examine the reasons behind complaints about a lack of power. One major reason is the lack of knowledge local government representatives have about legal procedure and power, as one respondent noted: ‘Most of the political representatives do not have a proper knowledge base about acts, statutes and the other legal procedures related to local government.’²⁰

On this account, although there are pre-existing powers, local government representatives lack the knowledge to exercise them effectively. Further, most local government representatives lack the capability to write development proposals, as the following respondent stated.

¹⁷Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

¹⁸Respondent: Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council.

¹⁹Respondent: Mr. Anura Amarasiri Narangoda, Chairman (UPFA), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

²⁰Respondents: Mr. Manjula Liyanage, Representative (UNP), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha* and Mr. Upul Nishantha, former Mayor, Matara Municipal Council.

There are many valuable ideas but there are no exact plans towards implementation. The local leaders should come forward and make plans. But most of them do not have a proper working knowledge of writing proposals and obtaining funds and technology.²¹

This lack of policy knowledge is not only a problem for local government representatives but extends to the provincial level as well. One respondent noted:

Health and education are two major subjects of the provincial councils, but the provincial ministers do not have proper knowledge about these subjects. The central government, therefore, uses this as an excuse to get involved in these matters.²²

The poor knowledge among provincial and local government representatives in terms of their powers and functions creates an opportunity for the central government to become involved in provincial and local government matters. It also means that upper-level politicians can block the opportunities of lower level politicians to gain knowledge. One respondent highlighted reasons for this.

Some higher level politicians do not like it when the lower level politicians and officials receive knowledge of their powers. This is because when these lower level politicians obtain a good knowledge about their powers and responsibilities, the higher level politicians do not get a chance to fool them and to force them to work according to their criteria.²³

The lack of knowledge results in the failure to interpret laws effectively and leads to an unwillingness by local government heads to decentralise power within local government. Some respondents highlighted the need to re-interpret the existing laws and activities of local government and to widen their capacities.²⁴ Another respondent noted: ‘Power should

²¹ Respondent: Mr. H.G.K. Jagath Kumara, PHI Officer, Matara Municipal Council.

²² Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

²³ Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

²⁴ Ibid.

be decentralised in a positive way. The appropriate lower level officials should receive instruction to make decisions and to act independently.²⁵

There was no response from the eastern province interviewees about exercising existing local government initiatives without considering the powerful influence of central and provincial governments. Although there are detractors of provincial councils, in the main, local government representatives and the people still pin their hopes on the provincial and local levels of government because, compared to other provinces, the eastern provincial council and the local government bodies are more recent with some respondents pointing out the war is the reason for this.

The northern and eastern provinces did not have active political bodies for a long time due to the war. The people did not have access even to central government. Therefore, when new provincial council and local government bodies were established there, people and also the politicians felt that the new political bodies were good and helpful. Also through these bodies, they received a link to central government.²⁶

But the situation is different in the south. People in the south have access to all levels of government and did not have any special need for provincial councils.²⁷

In summary, most local government representatives still believe that if they have a direct relationship with central government, without provincial councils as intermediaries, they will receive more benefits. In addition, the impotency of the provincial councils is a result of the non-transference of decentralised power to the provincial councils by central government. There are few differences between the responses of local government representatives in the southern and eastern provinces regarding provincial councils. Although there are certain working limitations to local government law, local government does have some autonomy to work on its own. But the most significant problem stems from local government representatives lacking the knowledge about the procedures and processes of legal jurisdictions.

²⁵ Respondent: Mr. H.G.K. Jagath Kumara, PHI Officer, Matara Municipal Council.

²⁶ Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

²⁷ Ibid.

5.2.2 *Funding and Staffing*

Local government becomes dependent when it lacks the funds, resources and staff to implement policy. This dependency on provincial councils for financial support and guidance fails when provincial council support is not forthcoming. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), local government in Sri Lanka has been largely dependent on grants received from provincial councils to meet their recurrent expenses, with the balance coming from their own revenue.²⁸ Most local government bodies are unable to meet operational and maintenance costs of existing assets as a large portion of their funds is allocated to pay for salaries and administration.²⁹

The limitation of revenue earnings by local government is a significant issue. There is a variety of funding sources available for local government. But there is a lack of taxation revenue, especially for the *Pradeshiya Sabhas* (PSs), with the local government not owning enough properties and is thus not able to provide many services. Additionally, when local government services such as water and electricity supplies are taken over by other agencies, this leaves local government with very limited opportunity for earning financial income.

As well as depending on funds from the centre, local government also depends on the administrative bodies through which government funds are channelled. Funding, such as that made through the decentralised budget,³⁰ is often channelled through district and divisional secretariats which disempowers local government of certain disbursements. Although members of parliament are keen on the construction of new facilities such as markets, playgrounds and roads, another problem emerges when the decentralised budget does not provide funds for the maintenance of such facilities. Local government is thus saddled with maintenance of facilities they did not ask for and for which they are not funded.³¹ It has also been pointed out that the district and divisional

²⁸Few MCs and UCs are able to generate 70% of their own revenue, and they rely for the remaining 30% on support from central and provincial governments (United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka.").

²⁹Asian Development Bank, "Technical Assistance Report."

³⁰A fund allocated to parliament members as well as to provincial council members to carry on area development. This fund is allocated through the annual budget.

³¹United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka."

secretaries, who are supposed to be neutral civil servants, often succumb to the demands of members of parliament and, in many cases, have built facilities knowing that local government did not have adequate capacity to maintain these.³² According to Bigdon and Hettige, not only the members of parliament, but also the international donor organisations cooperate more often with the divisional secretariats than with local government, which contributes to a further strengthening of the divisional secretariat while at the same time pushing the elected local bodies to an even more marginalised position.³³

Local government dependency impacts on staffing and related matters. After the implementation of the 13th amendment, the administrative officials of local government bodies were absorbed into the provincial public service, where they were subjected to the procedures of the provincial public service commission and were therefore transferable between local government bodies.³⁴ As all recurrent establishment costs are borne from allocations made by the finance commission³⁵ under block grants,³⁶ provincial councils, and through them local government, are required by the central government to decide on cadres, job descriptions and recruitment procedures which is a time-consuming process.³⁷ This situation has resulted in local government facing a shortage of suitable experienced administrative officials. The report of the 1999 Commission of Inquiry forewarned that a competent work force is a must for a systemic and efficient supply of services, and that the non-availability of approved cadres and lack of knowledge on the part of the available staff affected the quality of local government services.³⁸ Although there is a huge demand for trained officials, the government does not have sufficient training programmes or the technical capacity to train new officials.

³²Ibid.

³³Bigdon and Hettige, "Key Issues of Good Local Governance," 94.

³⁴United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka."

³⁵The finance commission is the mechanism through which the financial allocations are made to the provincial councils in Sri Lanka.

³⁶A grant from a central government that a local government can allocate to a range of services.

³⁷United Nations ESCAP, "Country Paper: Sri Lanka."

³⁸*Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms (1999, 73).*

The important point made by respondents was that without sufficient funding, local government is unable to plan for local development. If local government cannot afford the costs of maintenance and salaries, it is unable to respond to people's needs at the local level. Most southern province respondents highlighted the problem regarding the lack of funding. As one said, 'there are many needs but no funds to fulfil them.'³⁹ Another made the same comment: 'There are not many funds for the PS.'⁴⁰ Another pointed out: 'We don't have sufficient funds and staff to fulfil the needs of the PS area.'⁴¹

Problems of staffing at the local government level are linked directly to the lack of funding allocated to local government. The statements of some respondents reveal this.

The central government pays salaries for the permanent staff of local government. Therefore the central government does not allow appointing more staff for local government. So local government appoints temporary staff members and the salaries have to be paid using local government income. For these reasons, local government does not have extra money to spend on local development projects.⁴²

As mentioned earlier, local government can generate revenue and obtain funds in many ways, but respondents pointed out that local government revenue sources and funds had been taken over by the provincial councils.

The provincial councils are parasites that squeeze all nutrition from local government. Earlier local government collected taxes and also received court charges. But now the taxes and court charges are collected by the provincial councils. We have requested these funds several times but the provincial council does not release these to us. The provincial council

³⁹ Respondent: Mr. Manjula Liyanage, Representative (UNP), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴⁰ Respondent: Mr. M.D. Indika Thushara, Opposition Leader (JVP), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴¹ Respondent: Mr. Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴² Respondent: Mr. Jayantha Pathirana, Representative (JVP), Matara Municipal Council.

invests that money according to their preferences. These investments hardly help local government.⁴³

In the final analysis, both provincial and local governments depend on central government. By taking revenue and funds belonging to the local government, the provincial councils have compromised local government's capacity to be involved in local development. Criticism by senior administrative officials and national politicians confirm this conclusion. Many believe the provincial council take-over of local government revenue streams and funding is a breach of the constitution because according to clause 4.3 of the 9th schedule of the 13th amendment, the provincial councils do not have the power to appropriate local government resources.

National politicians were also aware of the takeover of local government revenue sources and funds by provincial councils.⁴⁴ A further reason for this takeover by provincial councils relates to provincial taxes in the provincial fund⁴⁵ which central government has taken over. One respondent said: 'Recently the laws have been changed. Now the central government takes over the provincial taxes as well.'⁴⁶ In turn, the provincial councils seek funds from local government to fill the gap left by losing provincial taxes.

The local government representatives of the eastern province also highlighted local government's lack of funds. According to them, although they have plans to develop the area, the amount of taxes is not enough to conduct proper development.⁴⁷ Again this indicates a lack of

⁴³ Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

⁴⁴ Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

⁴⁵ The provincial fund consists of: (a) all taxes imposed by the provincial council; (b) all grants made to such provincial council in respect of the province by the government of Sri Lanka; (c) all loans advanced to the provincial council from the consolidated fund of Sri Lanka; and (d) all other receipts of the provincial council (*Provincial Councils Act, No. 42 of 1987*).

⁴⁶ Respondent: Mr. L.H.A.C. Kumara, Assistant Director—Planning, Weligama Divisional Secretariat.

⁴⁷ Respondents: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council, Mr. S. Sanon, Representative (UNP), Trincomalee Urban Council and Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

local government income and the difficulties in generating funds and conducting development programmes without the necessary resources.

The PS funding situation is worse. The Kinniya PS chairman revealed that the PSs have more funding problems than the municipal councils (MCs) and urban councils (UCs) because the PS areas do not collect enough tax revenue and do not have the infrastructure to earn a sufficient income.⁴⁸ This point is further elaborated by the chairman of the Lahugala PS.

We have several plans to develop our area and to solve people's problems. The main problem is the limited amounts of funds we receive. The people are poor. There are a few shops with very poor facilities. These people cannot pay taxes to the PS and therefore the income level of the PS is very low.⁴⁹

The problem of funding stems from the lack of coordination among the national-, provincial- and local-level development plans. National and provincial politicians neglect local needs when administering funds for development projects.

Often funds fail to reach local government directly because of significant problems such as delays or reduced funds passing through several institutions, as the following respondent noted.

For example, think of a big piece of ice. When it passes through many hands it melts and becomes very small. That is what happens to funds as well. When funds pass through several institutions, local government receives very little. We cannot work with such small amounts of funds.⁵⁰

Also, proposals prepared by local government have to pass through complex processes and be approved by higher level institutions. There are constant delays and most of the time approval never comes.⁵¹

According to the chairman of the Lahugala PS, political affiliations are connected to the distribution of local government funding. He claimed

⁴⁸ Respondent: Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴⁹ Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵⁰ Respondent: Mr. N. Noormohamad, Representative (UPFA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

⁵¹ Respondent: Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

that ‘we receive some funds from the province specific development grant. But the amount of this fund depends on provincial council’s political affiliations with the local government.’⁵²

Frequently, local government is unable to make use of the funds allocated to it because of the negligence and failures of provincial councils. One senior administrative official stated:

There is a grant called a ‘criteria-based grant’⁵³ that provides Rs.1.5 million to each local government. This comes to local government through the provincial councils. This grant does not reach local government on time. Because of political influences, provincial councils do not release this grant on time. When the grant has been released at the end of the year, there is no time to start and complete development or construction projects. Therefore there is a need to make use of this grant without returning it and without doing any work.⁵⁴

As mentioned earlier, the lack of funding also affects the salaries and allowances of local government representatives and staff. Compared to the salaries of the provincial council members, these allowances are very small.⁵⁵ Given this lack of funds, local government staff become frustrated and discouraged, the result being that many lack motivation.

Further, the limitations on taxes and fines set out in earlier acts and statutes do not match the current economic situation. The need to increase tax revenue and fine rates has been pointed out by some local government representatives as economically important.⁵⁶

These failures and delays affect the whole system of local government income generation. The responses of the eastern province’s local government representatives are similar to those from the southern province. From all these responses it is clear that the central and provincial governments have neglected local government.

⁵² Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵³ This is allocated on the basis of population, per capita income or poverty levels, unemployment, health and nutrition, education, level of economic development, and inadequacy of current development activities in a local government area.

⁵⁴ Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

⁵⁵ Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

⁵⁶ Respondent: Mr. Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council.

There are some exceptions regarding this funding process. A former mayor of the Matara MC, Upul Nishantha, noted that the mayor has powers to obtain direct support from external organisations such as NGOs.⁵⁷ Another way local government can obtain direct foreign aid is through ‘sister-city’ programmes, as noted by one respondent.

There is a system which is called ‘sister-cities’. Here a local government builds connections with a local government in a foreign country to obtain aid. Also local government can go through this process via an NGO.⁵⁸

This system is a mutual relationship built between local government and a foreign counterpart. For example, the Galle MC has a long-term relationship with the Velsen municipality in the Netherlands. Through this relationship, the Galle MC has received significant aid and facilities from the Velsen municipality.⁵⁹

In summary, the lack of funding is a major problem for local government. The staffing problems also exacerbate the funding problem as local government is unable to afford the staff it needs. Local government, especially the PSs, do not have sufficient resources to generate income. Local government dependency on central and provincial governments for funding and staff recruitment is highlighted as a major problem. The take-over of revenue sources belonging to local government by the provincial councils is another problem with funds and aid for local government often delayed and reduced as they pass through central and provincial government hands. Sometimes resources never reach local government coffers because the central and provincial governments use these funds and aid according to their political agendas. Local government development proposals also get delayed and neglected when they go through central and provincial government authorities. Local government representatives report that most of their proposals never receive approval. Sometimes these delays are connected to the political affiliations which central and provincial governments have with certain local government bodies. Construction projects under the direction of other authorities in the local government areas are an extra burden in terms of

⁵⁷ Respondent: Mr. Upul Nishantha, former Mayor, Matara Municipal Council.

⁵⁸ Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

⁵⁹ Respondent: Mr. Methsiri De Silva, Mayor (UPFA), Galle Municipal Council.

maintenance for local government when the facilities were never sought in the first place. Although the local government still has powers and ways to obtain direct foreign aid, many local government representatives are not aware of how to access procedural powers.

5.2.3 *Local-Level Politico-Administrative Relations*

As discussed above, there are a number of overlaps and contradictions between political and administrative bodies at the local level in the exercise of their powers. First, the relationship between local government and administrative bodies such as district and divisional secretariats is very weak. Second, there are poor relationships between local government and central government authorities who are involved in local development. Examples include the Urban Development Authority (UDA) and the Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB). According to Hettige, in rural areas local government bodies have been marginalised in the development process due to the increasing significance of other political and administrative actors associated with national politics and the wider processes of development.⁶⁰

As outlined in Chap. 4, large-scale construction projects conducted by the central government in local government areas have neglected the voices of local government bodies related to the actual needs of the people. For Hettige, the area of authority of the divisional secretariat often overlaps with that of the PS. The expected outcome of the establishment of divisional secretariats was to facilitate the integration of the local administration with the elected local body so that local-level development and other activities could be better coordinated. In reality, the PSs and the divisional secretariats have functioned largely independently of each other.⁶¹ According to Fernando, the situation changed drastically after the introduction of provincial councils as divisional secretariats continued to function as the arm of central government without much concern for the provincial councils or the PSs. The public servants at the divisional secretariats, who are central government employees, do not feel obliged to work for the PSs.⁶²

⁶⁰Hettige, "Local Democracy," 435.

⁶¹Ibid., 429.

⁶²Fernando, "Local Governance in the Uva Province," 54.

In addition, the overlapping issues of the existing laws, especially in the development sector, make for ongoing problems, given the lack of clear responsibilities for each institution. This makes the coordination between authorities more difficult. Dasanayake notes that there is no uniformity in the way devolved subject matters have been defined in the legislative documents, giving rise to definitive problems when exercising the legislative power.⁶³ The lack of uniform laws governing local authorities has made legal procedures complicated and unclear. There has been no demand to create a uniform law, and the law-makers are silent on the complexities and overlaps within the existing local government laws.

In the view of the Baddegama PS chairman, there is minimal support from central- and provincial-level administrative officials for local government work. He hopes to get the support of central- and provincial-level administrative officials for local government work.⁶⁴ To examine the distinctions within the political and administrative bodies, the views of the administrative officials attached to the Baddegama divisional secretariat have been explored. Indicating contrasting viewpoints, one stated that there is a good relationship between the divisional secretariat and the PS, and the technical officers in both institutions work together on projects.⁶⁵ However, local government respondents have a different view about the limitations of the politico-administrative relationships, as the following respondent stated. ‘The relationship between the divisional secretariat and the PS is understandable. But as these two institutions are working independently, we do not have close relations.’⁶⁶

A respondent attached to the Suriyawewa divisional secretariat noted: ‘The relationship between the PS and the divisional secretariat is good. But there is conflict between the political representatives and administrative officials.’⁶⁷ These views reveal the contradictions between local political and administrative bodies. The response of the Suriyawewa divisional

⁶³Dasanayake, “Provincial Councils System,” *Governance*, 34–36.

⁶⁴Respondent: Mr. Anura Amarasiri Narangoda, Chairman (UPFA), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁶⁵Respondent: Mrs. H.I.G. Shirani Pushpakumari, Assistant Director-Planning, Baddegama Divisional Secretariat.

⁶⁶Respondent: Mr. Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁶⁷Respondent: Mr. M.K. Pradeep Kumara, Assistant Director-Planning, Suriyawewa Divisional Secretariat.

secretariat official signifies that the institutional relations are functional, but that the personal relations between political representatives and administrative officials are not as good. As they work according to central government agendas, divisional secretariats are less inclined to give attention to local government preferences. Local government representatives, therefore, do not get the support they expect from local administrative bodies.

The politico-administrative relations in the eastern province are different from those found in the southern province. In the eastern province higher administrative officials, such as district secretaries, were former high-ranking Sinhala military personnel, whereas the majority of the population was Tamil and Muslim. The military influence has been observed in the Trincomalee given that large amounts of foreign aid are granted primarily to Sinhala villages. This leaves the Tamil and Muslim majority within the area dissatisfied. The chairman of the Kinniya PS expressed his dissatisfaction about this situation: "The main administrative authority, the Trincomalee district secretariat does not provide aid to Kinniya because Kinniya is a Muslim area."⁶⁸ One administrative official attached to the Trincomalee district secretariat viewed it differently, saying: "Some NGOs are partial. Sometimes they make favourable grants to specific ethnic groups. But the district secretary tries to send aid to the Sinhala areas as well."⁶⁹ It is evident that there is some truth in the complaints against the Trincomalee district secretary regarding the ethnic biases in aid distribution in the area.

Another respondent from Trincomalee noted: "The district secretariat works as a separate unit. We don't have problems or special friendships with them. The relationship is neutral."⁷⁰ The problems are not necessarily about personal relations, but about the structure of institutions and procedures which create contradictions and overlaps. One administrative official said:

The systems in this country are very complicated. There are so many institutions and they do not have exact work practices. Some work overlaps. There is no need for elected political representatives. As administrative

⁶⁸ Respondent: Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁶⁹ Respondent: Mr. Subash Ponnamparuma, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat.

⁷⁰ Respondent: Mr. K Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

officials we can handle most of the work. We follow exact procedures. We do not have provincial barriers. We receive power directly from the central government.⁷¹

This reveals the negative relationship existing between the political and administrative bodies. As discussed earlier, an example of problems arising from overlapping power is seen in the local administrative bodies such as district and divisional secretariats which receive direct instruction from central government, while the local government recruits staff from the provincial public service. As the above respondent noted, local administrative officials who have been appointed by central government see themselves as more powerful than the provincial and local government representatives and the administrative officials attached to provincial and local government. This situation creates a lot of divisions and negates any positive impact on tackling the issues.

At every level of administrative division it is evident that central government has its agents: at the provincial level the provincial governor; at the district level the district secretary; at the divisional level the divisional secretary. This means that both the provincial councils and local government bodies are marginalised and forced to carry out the wishes of the central government. Furthermore, it is evident that the control of district and divisional secretariats by the central government has created major divisions between the local political and administrative bodies, as the following respondent noted. “The central government is using district and divisional secretariats to control local government, especially to control any local government which does not care for central government agendas.”⁷²

Despite this, local government has the legal power to control administrative influences when they affect local governance. One respondent noted that some local government bodies have prepared procedures to control administrative influences by passing regulations, including making it compulsory to obtain permission from the relevant local government before becoming involved in an area project.⁷³

⁷¹ Respondent: Mr. Subash Ponnampereuma, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat.

⁷² Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

⁷³ Ibid.

In summary, the responses of local government representatives and local administrative officials regarding their politico-administrative relations are inconsistent. Evidence of good mutual relationships or understandings between political and administrative bodies is lacking. The paucity of clear legal provisions on the scope and powers of local political and administrative bodies is identified as a major gap. Moreover, it is evident that as a result of a lack of political will on behalf of the central government to decentralise power to the lower levels of government, the central government-controlled local administrative bodies have been significantly strengthened. Although local government has the power to enact procedures to control administrative influences, exercising such power is not common.

5.3 POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS: NGOs AS A SUPPORT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The previous section revealed a number of problems associated with local government in Sri Lanka. This section analyses the proposals made by respondents to solve problems, focusing on the recommendations aimed at developing a more robust local government in Sri Lanka.

5.3.1 *Proposals: Local Level*

Most local government representative respondents in the southern province proposed obtaining foreign funds to develop the area and to fulfil the people's needs via NGOs. The following respondents outlined what type of foreign support they needed.

We need more foreign funds and the support of the NGOs to reconstruct the streams and drainage systems in the city. It is good if we can participate in foreign conferences on local government. Then we can obtain experience, training and also benefits.⁷⁴

If we receive foreign funds there are heaps of things to do. We have a compost plant but we do not have a plastic recycling unit. We never get

⁷⁴Respondent: Mr. Methsiri De Silva, Mayor (UPFA), Galle Municipal Council.

technological support for these things. The foreign funds and the foreign technological support can help a lot.⁷⁵

Obtaining foreign funds and technological support for local government work is important to respondents. As discussed earlier, local government in Sri Lanka has few funds for local development, but if foreign funds and support are obtained then local government can develop the area without depending on central and provincial government. One respondent was clear: “It is difficult to do all the work of a local government without foreign funds. Therefore we absolutely need foreign funds and support.”⁷⁶

Respondents in the eastern province were also clear about the importance of obtaining foreign funds. One respondent asserted: “We need foreign funds and support to develop the area.”⁷⁷ Not only local government representatives, but also local government administrative officials hope to obtain foreign funds and support for local development. One observed:

Our area is very crowded and there is no space to do agriculture or anything which needs much space. To fulfil the people’s need we need foreign funds and support.⁷⁸

Without space for agriculture and other activities local government cannot attract the revenue needed, so they need external funds. Another respondent noted that they do not have many facilities to serve people. He stated: “If foreign funding agencies can support us, we will be able to provide a better service to the people in the area.”⁷⁹

Foreign sources can provide important knowledge and technological skills. One respondent noted: “We need more training programmes and workshops which are conducted by the foreign-funded agencies. These

⁷⁵ Respondent: Mr. Manjula Liyanage, Representative (UNP), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁷⁶ Respondent: Mr. Anura Amarasiri Narangoda, Chairman (UPFA), Baddegama *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁷⁷ Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁷⁸ Respondent: Mr. Rahuman, Revenue Supervisor, Kattankudy Urban Council.

⁷⁹ Respondent: Mr. H.G.K. Jagath Kumara, PHI Officer, Matara Municipal Council.

can provide knowledge for us on local governing procedures.”⁸⁰ The following respondent gave more prominence to the need for training and technological skills rather than funds.

Sri Lankan local government bodies do not need huge amounts of foreign funds but they always need new knowledge-based training and technological skills from foreign countries to overcome the existing challenges. When the donor agencies feel confident about the local government development plans, they trust the local government and donate aid.⁸¹

This signifies that even if there are sufficient funds, to achieve success local government needs to understand the proper methods of service provision for development. For this, it needs knowledge-based training and technological skills.

Respondents pointed to their need for aid-related management systems to guide and implement training methods and programmes which the NGOs had started but needed to continue. They also highlighted the need for better methods of fund dispersion and a continuous monitoring system to avoid misuse of foreign funds.⁸²

Local government representatives take the view that with proper guidance and a monitoring system, local benefits will be achieved. Administrative officials have the same view. One stated that as the people in the rural areas do not work without any guidance, the programmes and projects which the NGOs started are not continuing after the NGO left.⁸³ This respondent proposed the appointment of someone to maintain NGO-funded construction and to oversee ongoing projects. In his view, if the NGOs deposited funds into a bank account for future use, then the repairs and maintenance of construction would yield results.⁸⁴

⁸⁰Respondent: Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council.

⁸¹Respondent: Mr. Upul Nishantha, former Mayor, Matara Municipal Council.

⁸²Respondents: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council, Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council and Mr. Padmasiri Ediriweera, Opposition Leader (UNP), Weligama Urban Council.

⁸³Respondent: Mr. M.K. Pradeep Kumara, Assistant Director-Planning, Suriyawewa Divisional Secretariat.

⁸⁴Ibid.

Eastern province respondents were cognisant of the need for mechanisms to handle funds carefully to avoid misuse. A local government representative said: “We need foreign funds and also a mechanism to handle them properly. When a number of institutions are involved in handling funds, misuse happens.”⁸⁵ Another respondent said: “We need foreign aid. We are at a big disadvantage if we refuse NGOs. What we need is good mechanisms to deal with the NGOs.”⁸⁶ These respondents emphasised the importance of having the resources to ensure the projects and programmes developed with the assistance of NGOs could continue. Although most respondents proposed continuous guidance, management systems and robust mechanisms to handle foreign aid in dealing with NGOs, few mentioned how this could become a reality.

Some respondents proposed that local government was the most suitable for handling the supervision of foreign aid, projects and programmes. One local government representative said: “Foreign aid is always helpful to the PS. But the aid needs to be maintained by the PS by directing them to the most critical areas and needy people.”⁸⁷ Another local government representative spoke of supervision.

We need foreign funds and NGO support because local government is not self-sufficient enough to conduct development projects in the area. But there is a need to supervise the NGO work by the MC. Foreign aid needs to be used carefully to fulfil the most important needs.⁸⁸

NGOs are recognised as having an important role to fulfil together with local government in identifying ways to approach local needs. One respondent mentioned that if the MC can obtain foreign aid directly and if the NGOs can reach through the MC, good results can be obtained.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Respondent: Mr. N. Noormohamad, Representative (UPFA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

⁸⁶ Respondent: Mr. Subash Ponnampereuma, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat.

⁸⁷ Respondent: Mr. M.D. Indika Thushara, Opposition Leader (JVP), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁸⁸ Respondent: Mr. Jayantha Pathirana, Representative (JVP), Matara Municipal Council.

⁸⁹ Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

As with southern province respondents, eastern province respondents proposed that foreign funds should reach local government directly. One issue raised was how to avoid the current long process of obtaining foreign funds. Therefore, the aid does not reach the most needed and also it is not prioritised according to needs.⁹⁰ The chairmen of the Trincomalee UC and the Kinniya PS expressed similar views and highlighted the importance of using foreign funds according to local government plans.⁹¹

Overall, the proposals of southern and eastern provinces' local government representatives and local administrative officials are strongly in agreement that foreign funds are necessary to develop the area and to provide services to the people. Other than funds, the respondents highlighted the importance of expert knowledge, technology and training from the NGOs. Also, they believed that there should be proper plans to use the foreign funds carefully. To continue the projects and programmes started by NGOs, and to maintain the work, local government representatives and local administrative officials looked to the continuous guidance and management of NGOs. Some local government respondents proposed the supervision and maintenance of funds by the local government. They also proposed that funds should reach local government directly. The issues for both southern and eastern provinces were very similar, with the same proposals on funding issues emerging from representatives of different political parties. However, the proposals of the southern province were more informed and detailed than those of the eastern province. Eastern province local government representatives were newly elected, and during their short period in office they had not had received much experience in their current positions.

5.3.2 *Proposals: National Level*

The respondent senior administrative officials and national politicians identified the lack of capacity at the local government level as a barrier to their effective liaison with NGOs. Even though local government has direct access to foreign funds, barrier limits were set on the funds

⁹⁰Respondent: Mr. S. Sanoon, Representative (UNP), Trincomalee Urban Council.

⁹¹Respondents: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council and Mr. S.L.M. Jawadullah, Chairman (UPFA), Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

received. A senior administrative official stated that, without reliable data bases, local government faces difficulties in obtaining foreign funds and support for projects. He further added:

Normally the NGOs require a systematic data base to provide aid. There are data bases for the national bodies, but at the local level we can't find information to provide information when NGOs request it. For example, the Road Development Authority (RDA) has a detailed data base about the roads under their control which is updated. But the roads in local government areas are always changing. New roads are emerging regularly in these areas. Therefore it is difficult to maintain a data base. But local government should try and prepare data bases. If they have a proper data base, in place local government can obtain direct support from the NGOs.⁹²

It is assumed that local government lacks reliable data bases because they do not have the knowledge or expertise to prepare them or the relevant proposals to obtain funds. Knowledge and guidance is required, and NGOs can play a role in providing this.

As with local government representatives, some national politicians believe that there is a need to monitor and guide the work of NGOs, and these should be friendly to local government and to NGOs. Not only local government representatives, but also national politicians believe that NGOs can provide advantages for the local-level collaboration.⁹³

Respondent senior administrative officials mentioned that the recently drafted proposals to restructure the local government system in Sri Lanka cannot be implemented owing to the political influences and unwillingness of central government. For example, the draft national policy to improve the situation of local government has faced a number of difficulties and challenges. The proposal for metropolitan committees that aimed at making all MCs and UCs in a city work together by discussing plans and problems was rejected by central government. The proposed ward committees to the PS level that required PSs to work together under a joint plan were also rejected by central government.⁹⁴

⁹² Respondent: Mr. Gamini Gunasekara, Commissioner, Kaduwela Municipal Council.

⁹³ Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

⁹⁴ Respondent: Mr. M.L. Sunil Fernando, Advisor, Policy Division, Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.

Re-activating *Gramodaya Mandalas* is a popular proposal for some writers. Although *Gramodaya Mandalas* had constitutional recognition under clause 4.4 in the 9th schedule of the 13th amendment, they were automatically de-activated through changes in local government law. Leitan proposes re-activating *Gramodaya Mandalas* in terms of ‘bridging institutions’. Because *Gramodaya Mandalas* were not abolished, they would be suitable for connecting village-level groups to the PSs.⁹⁵ A member of parliament noted:

The government has totally neglected the *Gramodaya Mandalas*. *Gramodaya Mandalas* have not been demolished. But these institutions were de-activated by the government. If the government is willing, these institutions can be re-activated.⁹⁶

It was in 2005 that the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government⁹⁷ took steps to re-launch *Gramodaya Mandalas*, confirmed in a performance report about their revitalisation.⁹⁸ A national newspaper reported that the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government re-launched *Gramodaya Mandalas* on 17th June 2005.⁹⁹ Pilot programmes commenced in 11 districts to facilitate the activities of *Gramodaya Mandalas*, and a unit was established under the ministry. The objective of *Gramodaya Mandala* revitalisation programme was to ensure the availability of active community organisation at the village level, which would be useful for rural development. These organisations were expected to work closely with local government bodies in developing their areas. The ministry expected that this initiative would also create a forum for all community organisations to meet and participate in the development process.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵Leitan, “The Role of Local Government,” *Governance*, 54–55.

⁹⁶Respondent: Mr. Joseph Michael Perera, MP (UNP), Gampaha District.

⁹⁷Prior to 2006, the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils was called as the Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government.

⁹⁸Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance-2005 & Future Plans-2006*, 10.

⁹⁹Kumarasinghe, “Gramodaya Mandalas Re-launched.”

¹⁰⁰Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance-2005 & Future Plans-2006*, 10.

However, after 2007 the *Gramodaya Mandala* re-launch took a different direction led by a funding proposal called *Jana Diriya*.¹⁰¹ The ministry decided to establish this fund to provide investment support from local government bodies to CBOs working at the local level.¹⁰² In establishing the *Jana Diriya* fund, government amended the *Gramodaya Mandala* Fund Act,¹⁰³ renaming the *Gramodaya Mandala* fund the *Jana Diriya* fund.¹⁰⁴ In 2009 a *Jana Diriya* division was established in the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.¹⁰⁵ However, expectations about the viability of the *Jana Diriya* fund were not realised and it collapsed, as the following respondent noted:

Gramodaya Mandalas still have the constitutional recognition but nobody wants to activate these institutions again. There was a large amount of money in the *Gramodaya Mandala* fund, and we prepared procedures to transfer this fund to start a new programme called *Jana Diriya*. This aimed to help PS areas. But the *Jana Diriya* has been taken over by the Ministry of Economic Development and the President. So the expected results have not been achieved.¹⁰⁶

This points to another recentralising attempt by the central government, and as such attempts by the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils to re-launch *Gramodaya Mandalas* have discontinued. Even with renaming the fund, the expected aims of *Jana Diriya* have not been fulfilled. From 2009 there is no evidence of *Gramodaya Mandala* or *Jana Diriya* implementation processes occurring. This reveals that government favours extending its centralisation agenda. One respondent highlighted:

¹⁰¹Literal meaning is people's courage.

¹⁰²Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2007 & Future Plans-2008*, 18 and Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2008 & Future Plans-2009*, 36.

¹⁰³The *Gramodaya Mandala* fund was established in 1982 to grant financial and other assistance to *Gramodaya Mandalas* at that time to carry out their work (*Gramodaya Mandala Fund Act, No. 28 of 1982*).

¹⁰⁴*Gramodaya Mandala Fund (Amendment) Act, No. 68 of 2009*.

¹⁰⁵Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Progress Report 2009, Future Plans 2010*, 4.

¹⁰⁶Respondent: Mr. M.L. Sunil Fernando, Advisor, Policy Division, Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.

Central government always tries to take over the decentralised powers and has become involved in many projects which belong to local government. The Defence Ministry has become involved in local government matters too. This is a bad trend. In every way local government is losing its power and becoming helpless and useless. With these actions, the most badly affected are the people.¹⁰⁷

This response further shows the political influences of central government and points to the takeover of the powers at local government level. Another respondent added to this point:

It is very difficult to work under political influences. We have good plans but there are no opportunities to implement them. Everywhere there are restrictions. We want to serve the people by developing policies and implementing them correctly. We are trying to work tactfully with the central government to achieve positive results.¹⁰⁸

This indicates that there is still hope for improvements in local government in Sri Lanka. Clearly, local government representatives and local administrative officials are focused on obtaining foreign funding, knowledge, technology and guidance. This would then give them sufficient funds to develop key areas and to provide for people's needs. But there are major discrepancies between proposals at the national level and those at the local level. When national level-officials complain about the non-implementation of policy proposals and about the centralisation of power, the local level shows little concern about their lack of power. In turn, respondents at the national level were not concerned about foreign funding and its dispersal at the local level. Despite this, the interest at the local level to obtain foreign funds, knowledge, technology and guidance using their remaining legal power is a positive trend.

¹⁰⁷ Respondent: Mr. D.P. Hettiarachchi, Retired Additional Secretary, Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils; and Consultant, Environmental Management Lanka (EML) Consultants.

¹⁰⁸ Respondent: Mr. M.L. Sunil Fernando, Advisor, Policy Division, Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In examining the perspectives of the respondents, this chapter identified three main problem areas pertaining to the Sri Lankan local government. It has not always been the lack of legal power, but rather the lack of knowledge of local government representatives in terms of their power which is the major problem. It is also evident that local government representatives have the potential to obtain knowledge about legal procedures. Although they complain about the provincial councils, local government representatives realise that they have sufficient power to work if they have the support of funds. Local government representatives were not proposing to amend local government policies but were proposing to abolish provincial councils because the provincial councils had barred local government from obtaining central government funds and had also taken over local government funding sources. Due to the lack of funding, local government representatives and local administrative officials propose obtaining funds from foreign sources and also knowledge, technology and guidance from NGOs to develop the areas and secure people's needs. This is clearly different from the proposals of national-level administrative officials and some authors who argue that amendments to Sri Lankan local government policies will suffice. Additionally, connecting local political and administrative bodies, establishing metropolitan and ward committees, re-activating *Gramodaya Mandalas*, and launching the *Jana Diriya* programme found prominence among national policy makers. Within these local-national contrasts, it is evident that there are opportunities in Sri Lankan local government for NGOs to be involved, providing support in developing solutions to problems.

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NGO Involvement at the Local Level: Centrally-Led Projects

Abstract The chapter outlines the many foreign-funded NGO projects at the local level in Sri Lanka that have been conducted according to central government agendas. During the post-tsunami and post-civil war situations, large amounts of foreign funds flowed into Sri Lanka together with many NGOs which aimed to provide support in disaster recovery. Aid management problems occurred at central, provincial and local government levels. Many projects were planned by central government ministries without concerning the local knowledge. Therefore, the development needs of local communities were not identified and addressed. These centrally-led NGO projects led to a strengthening and centralisation of authoritative power.

Keywords Foreign-funded NGO · Post-tsunami · Post-civil war
Disaster recovery · Aid management · Local communities
Centrally-led NGO projects · Authoritative power

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organisation (NGO) involvement in welfare, development, human rights, relief and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka has developed into a significant issue. The Sri Lankan government has, over time, had both collaborative and antagonistic relations with NGOs. Apart from a small number of municipal councils (MCs) with long-term

connections to foreign municipalities, Sri Lankan local government organisation has not had links with NGOs until the disastrous tsunami in December 2004. Prior to the tsunami, obtaining foreign support was an unfamiliar concept for local government bodies in Sri Lanka. When large amounts of foreign funds and resources flowed into Sri Lanka in the post-tsunami period, there were no proper mechanisms at local, provincial or central government level to manage the aid in an effective way. Additional foreign aid flowed into Sri Lanka in the post-war period from May 2009 and was managed centrally with limitations placed on the role NGOs could play in how it was used.

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the key features of the involvement of NGOs at the local level in centrally-led local development projects and analyse the results. The chapter first examines the issues and problems related to foreign aid and NGO involvement at the local level through the perspectives of local government representatives and local level administrative officials. Then it examines a number of foreign-funded projects which were conducted at the local level, characterised by adherence to central government agendas.

6.2 FOREIGN AID, NGO INVOLVEMENT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

The tsunami led to major damage in 70 of 311 local government areas in seven MC areas, 14 urban council (UC) areas and 49 *Pradeshiya Sabha* (PS) areas in Sri Lanka. Damage was estimated at Rs. 2833 million, which is approximately US\$30 million.¹ It led to the destruction of many local government buildings and paralysed local government service deliveries. Roads and bridges were destroyed, public markets and shopping complexes were ruined, and there was a loss of income from taxes and rates which left local government bodies in a most difficult fiscal situation. Irreparable damage was done to many local government records.²

The affected areas received large amounts of foreign aid and a remarkable level of NGO support following the tsunami and, later, the war.

¹Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance-2005 & Future Plans-2006*, 12.

²Ibid.

Given this situation, there were problems with the effective management and utilisation of aid. These included political interference in the planning, implementation and allocation of funds; staffing and related problems in project management; excessive conditions imposed by donors; and complex government procedures imposed on NGOs.³ The destruction of infrastructure, the disappearance of public records, and the sheer number of donors and programmes created a complex web of aid transactions that were difficult for both donors and recipients to manage.⁴ The risk of poor coordination between many government bodies and NGOs resulted in the reduction and effectiveness of foreign assistance. The reluctance by certain NGOs to engage with government administrative structures was part of this problem.⁵

The problems associated with the government distribution of aid, described above, led to NGOs often being seen as a more efficient means of aid delivery.⁶ However, in the process NGOs were unable to fully bypass the government. Some NGO-related literature suggests there should be a collaborative approach involving effective coordination between NGOs, central, local government and community groups.⁷ This literature recognises that, despite their real and perceived inadequacies, local government bodies in Sri Lanka can, and should, play a positive role in such coordination.⁸

Against this background, this section addresses the perspectives of the southern and eastern province local government representatives and the local administrative officials regarding the ways in which they dealt with foreign aid and NGOs, and the problems which occurred in this process.

6.2.1 *Southern Province*

Only a very few of the local government areas in the southern province received foreign funds and resources prior to the tsunami. One exception is the Galle MC which operated a sister-city relationship with the city of Velsen which led to the flow of funds and support from the Netherlands.

³Jayasuriya et al., *Post-Tsunami Recovery*, 33.

⁴Ibid., 34.

⁵Ibid., 45.

⁶Ibid., 46.

⁷Ibid., 3, 46.

⁸Ibid., 46.

The sister-city links commemorate the Dutch-related background of Galle,⁹ the ancient Dutch fort and other historical sites which help cement the connection. Some organisations, such as the Netherlands Alumni Association Lanka (NAAL), and the ‘Velsen helps Galle’ Foundation, helped in creating connections between the city of Galle and the city of Velsen.¹⁰ While Galle MC received support from the Dutch government, after the tsunami, the government of Netherlands extended support to some other Sri Lankan local government areas as well.

Prior to the tsunami, and apart from the sister-city arrangements in Galle, there was no history of foreign funds, resources or development guidance being provided in this area.¹¹ Most of the foreign aid that subsequently arrived was aimed at helping those affected by the tsunami and with reconstruction initiatives.¹² Local government bodies in the province received large amounts of foreign aid following the tsunami, but there were many problems in managing that aid. Working with NGOs and handling large amounts of foreign aid was new to local government bodies, and local government representatives and staff lacked relevant knowledge and management experience.¹³

Respondents added that there was a lack of capacity and opportunity to prepare the proposals and plans needed to obtain additional aid. There were no proper development plans for local governments to obtain aid according to the procedures.¹⁴ In these situations, a large

⁹ Respondents: Mr. Methsiri De Silva, Mayor (UPFA), Galle Municipal Council and Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

¹⁰ VNG International, “LOGO South”.

¹¹ Respondents: Mr. Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council, Mr. Padmasiri Ediriweera, Opposition Leader (UNP), Weligama Urban Council and Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council.

¹² Respondents: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council, Mr. Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council, Mr. Padmasiri Ediriweera, Opposition Leader (UNP), Weligama Urban Council and Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council.

¹³ Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

¹⁴ Respondents: Mr. D.A. Gamini, Opposition Leader (UNP), Hambantota Urban Council and Mr. M.D. Indika Thushara, Opposition Leader (JVP), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

amount of aid was returned.¹⁵ Disagreements between the NGOs and government authorities also resulted in the return of aid. Representatives of the Hambantota UC highlighted this issue. According to the deputy chairman of the UC, “the politicians of the area did not agree with the foreign agendas and therefore a lot of aid was returned.”¹⁶ In many instances there was a lack of a shared understanding between the NGOs and government authorities at the local level about the exact needs of the areas and where aid should be directed.

The fact that the foreign aid which arrived in the wake of the tsunami went through dual institutional lines—political and administrative bodies—contributed to complications. As the district secretariats and divisional secretariats are under the direct control of the central government, most of the tsunami aid came through these administrative bodies. As a result, local government was not able to obtain such funds for its own development purposes. A representative of the Galle MC stated the problems they had with the Galle district secretary in the aftermath of the tsunami.

Most of the time, the district secretary neglected and postponed facilitating NGOs. There were many disadvantages due to the failures of such authorities and the aid did not reach the appropriate people.¹⁷

In contrast with this perspective from an elected representative, administrative officials stated that they believed they were the most appropriate authorities to handle foreign aid and NGOs. According to them, they have a better relationship with the NGOs than local governments,¹⁸ and they coordinate and manage the funds and give guidance and support to the NGOs.¹⁹ These indicate that local government was marginalised in

¹⁵ Respondents: Mr. S. Mubarak Maulana, Deputy Chairman (UPFA), Hambantota Urban Council and Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

¹⁶ Respondent: Mr. S. Mubarak Maulana, Deputy Chairman (UPFA), Hambantota Urban Council.

¹⁷ Respondent: Mr. Nimalchandra Ranasinghe, Representative (UNP), Galle Municipal Council.

¹⁸ Respondent: Mr. M.K. Pradeep Kumara, Assistant Director-Planning, Suriyawewa Divisional Secretariat.

¹⁹ Respondent: Ms. Rupika Rajakaruna, NGO Coordinating Officer, Galle District Secretariat.

aid distribution, with the role of administrative officials to the fore rather than local political representatives.

6.2.2 *Eastern Province*

The eastern province, in contrast with the southern province, attracted much foreign aid in the aftermath of the war. The tsunami struck while the war in the north and east was still underway, and as a consequence many local government bodies were not activated, leading to a greater role by central government-controlled administrative authorities in the control of aid management process.²⁰

Following both events, according to eastern province respondents, many NGOs offered support to the eastern province people in order to rebuild the area.²¹ In this province, local administrative bodies received funds to address the needs of specific ethnic groups, given the more multicultural character of the area. For example, the Kalmunai divisional secretariat received funds from local and foreign Muslim associations and from Arab agencies because it is an area with a Muslim majority.²²

As with the southern province, aid management of the eastern province was also characterised by problems, resulting in what was described as the misuse of funds and resources. A representative of the Trincomalee UC stated:

Although the UC received foreign funds after the tsunami, the criteria for obtaining and using them were problematic. Not only the UC but also many government authorities mishandled the responsibility of aid management. Therefore there was misuse of aid.²³

However, according to a number of eastern province respondents, NGOs were also partly responsible for the failures in the process of aid

²⁰Respondent: Mr. Mohamad Mussil, Assistant Director-Planning, Kinniya Divisional Secretariat.

²¹Respondents: Mr. Subash Ponnampere, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat and Mr. George Pillai, Deputy Mayor (UPFA), Batticaloa Municipal Council.

²²Respondent: Mr. Abul Hassan, Administrative Officer, Kalmunai Divisional Secretariat.

²³Respondent: Mr. N. Noormohamad, Representative (UPFA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

distribution and usage. One respondent said: “The NGOs try to work according to their agendas without listening to the government. We cannot trust their work at all.”²⁴ Another added that “some NGOs work well. But most of them use funds for their own benefit and contribute small funds to the needy. Therefore we cannot trust all of them.”²⁵ These statements do not reject all NGOs and their work. There were NGOs which worked effectively at the local level. Some of the failures of NGOs, therefore, did not stop local political representatives and administrative officials from expecting support from the NGOs.²⁶

Overall, local government in the southern and eastern provinces received large amounts of foreign aid, but the failures of local government and other government authorities to manage the aid, the lack of knowledge in handling the aid and in working with the NGOs, the institutional complexities, and the disagreements towards some of the NGOs made for a complicated and difficult situation. Despite disagreements, dissatisfactions and limitations, several NGOs have implemented their projects at the local level.

6.3 CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AGENDAS AND NGO PROJECTS

Central government involvement in the provincial- and local-level construction/reconstruction work has been a prominent feature in the post-tsunami and post-war situations in Sri Lanka. For example, central government established a Task Force to Rebuild the Nation (TAFREN) which is the single coordinating agency to manage tsunami aid and to organise reconstruction. However, there have been problems with its overall effectiveness which some have attributed to political interference. These include the influences of central government ministries on TAFREN’s staff appointments and decisions.²⁷

The Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government noted that the mandate and the mission of the ministry made the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the provincial and local government assets

²⁴ Respondent: Mr. Subash Ponnampereuma, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat.

²⁵ Respondent: Mr. K. Selvarajah, Chairman (TNA), Trincomalee Urban Council.

²⁶ Ibid. Respondent: Mr. Subash Ponnampereuma, NGO Coordinating Officer, Trincomalee District Secretariat.

²⁷ Jayasuriya et al., *Post-Tsunami Recovery*, 45.

destroyed by the tsunami, a direct responsibility of the ministry and not the provincial or local government.²⁸

As the parental organisation of the decentralised agencies, i.e. provincial councils and municipal councils, urban councils and *Pradeshiya Sabhas*, this ministry is expected to deliver the wide variety of services related to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of those agencies.²⁹

The same report goes on to note: “Within the parameters of the strategic framework of the national implementation plan for rebuilding the tsunami-affected area, the priorities have been decided.”³⁰ In the ministry’s annual performance reports, reference is made to a number of foreign-funded projects which have been implemented by the ministry with or without the cooperation of the other government bodies.³¹ This section analyses a number of foreign-funded projects implemented at the local level following central government agendas.

6.3.1 *Local Government Infrastructure Improvement Project (LGIIP)*

The LGIIP was a semi-government project conducted through the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, which covered the whole country, except the Colombo district, for the period 2006–2011. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided US\$50 million to implement this project comprising 75% of the total project expenditure. The central government contributed 18% with 7% from the local government.³² As part of its assistance to the local loans and development fund (LL&DF)³³ needed for implementing the planned LGIIP,

²⁸Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, *Performance-2005 & Future Plans-2006*, 12.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 12–13.

³¹The annual performance reports from 2005 to 2010 were available at the ministry at the time of the field research.

³²Respondent: Mr. Lal Induruwage, Project Director, LGIIP, ADB-Sri Lanka.

³³LL&DF is a statutory body incorporated by the Ordinance No. 22 of 1916. This institute is one of the oldest financial institutions in Sri Lanka and provides loans at concessionary rates for local infrastructure and revenue generating projects (Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2010 & Future Plans-2011*, 19–21).

Table 6.1 Terms of financial assistance to local government bodies

	<i>Grants (%)</i>	<i>Loans (%)</i>	<i>Local government contribution (%)</i>
<i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i>	60	33	7
Urban council	50	43	7
Municipal council	40	53	7

Source Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, “Projects with the Assistance of the Asian Development Bank”

the ADB supplied technical assistance to strengthen local government infrastructure financing in Sri Lanka.³⁴ LGIIP targeted the building of provincial council and local government capacities to strengthen the LL&DF.³⁵ Under LGIIP, several components were eligible for financing.³⁶ Table 6.1 sets out the ways in which the grants and loans have been distributed to local government bodies.

However, the implementation of LGIIP indicated that the donor agency’s role was limited, and there was no direct communication between local government and such agency. All project proposals, funding and repayments went through the provincial level to the national-level ministry. The ministry planned the LGIIP and handled the LL&DF where a project was in line with the central government’s development priorities,³⁷ especially where the pursuit of economic growth through investment in large-scale infrastructure was apparent.³⁸

At the provincial level, the commissioner of local government (CLG) had the responsibility of controlling and directing LL&DF. The CLG maintains a data base of local government in the province, including the current needs of local government.

Knowing the needs and also the defects of local government in the area is very important. Also it needed to know the successes and losses of each

³⁴ Asian Development Bank, “Technical Assistance Report”.

³⁵ Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, “Projects with the Assistance of the Asian Development Bank”.

³⁶ These include community water supply, roads, drainage and communal sewerage, solid waste management, and basic health clinics, public libraries and recreational parks (Asian Development Bank, “Technical Assistance Report.”).

³⁷ Respondent: Mr. Lal Induruwege, Project Director, LGIIP, ADB-Sri Lanka.

³⁸ Asian Development Bank, “LGIIP”.

local government. Various projects related to local government are handled through the CLG's office. For example, the ADB-funded LGIIP reached the appropriate local government bodies through the CLG's office.³⁹

The ministry claims that under LGIIP, there was potential for local government to plan for the improvement of its basic infrastructure and living conditions, and that this project was designed to be decentralised, providing local government with the decision-making role to identify, decide and apply for sub-project finance from the LL&DF.⁴⁰ As discussed in Chap. 5, most local government representatives and staff said they did not have the knowledge and skills to write proposals to obtain funds, leading to situations where the resources local government received from LGIIP were less than expected. It is not evident that local government made creative decisions to the LL&DF for funding.

6.3.2 *North East Local Services Improvement Project (NELSIP)*

The World Bank (WB)-funded NELSIP was conducted by two ministries: the Ministry of Economic Development; and the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils. The project is was implemented between May 2010 and December 2015,⁴¹ at a total cost of US\$86 million, with US\$50 million from a WB loan, US\$34 million from the Sri Lankan government and US\$2 million from community contributions.⁴² NELSIP was designed “to improve the delivery of local infrastructure services by local authorities in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka in an accountable and responsive manner.”⁴³ The five components of the NELSIP were: (1) infrastructure service delivery; (2) institutionalising accountabilities; (3) building capacities; (4) assessments and evaluation; and (5) project management.⁴⁴ The greatest provision has been allocated to the first component, infrastructure service delivery.

³⁹ Respondent: Mr. Saman Pandikorala, Provincial Local Government Commissioner, Provincial Local Government Commission, Southern Province.

⁴⁰ Ministry of Provincial Councils and Local Government, “Projects with the Assistance of the Asian Development Bank”.

⁴¹ World Bank, “North East Local Services Improvement Project”.

⁴² Ministry of Economic Development, *Draft Project Implementation Plan*, 16.

⁴³ World Bank, “North East Local Services Improvement Project”.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

NELSIP has been planned at the national level, and there were provincial and district levels of the project which reach the divisional level. When it reaches local government, questions about whether such a project addresses the actual needs of a local government area and whether local government can implement such a project emerged because there was a large distance between project planning and implementation. The donor, the WB's role was missing from the project implementation plan.

However, according to its aims, NELSIP was to improve the quality of governance processes, not to build infrastructure; nonetheless, the chairman of the Lahugala PS stated:

NELSIP provides funds for road construction. But their criteria are so complicated because there are many rules and regulations to fulfil before releasing funds. Our PS applied for a fund from NELSIP but is not sure about obtaining it.⁴⁵

This statement indicates that NELSIP was not supposed to follow local government agendas. Even the WB finds gaps in NELSIP implementation. For example, a WB report on NELSIP notes that the progress reports indicated set-backs in the approval and commencement of sub-projects for 2012 in some local government areas. The WB has had to discuss the matter with the Ministry of Economic Development and with the provincial councils,⁴⁶ because it did not have direct relations with the local government bodies where the projects have been carried on.

6.3.3 *Local Governance Project (LoGoPro)*

LoGoPro, funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was implemented through the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils. The four-year project (2009–2012) was to expand the capacities of provincial and local government for peace-building, strengthening social cohesion and managing the equitable delivery of public services.⁴⁷ In the post-war period in Sri Lanka, local government in the eastern province was in the process of being

⁴⁵Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁴⁶World Bank, "Implementation Status & Results".

⁴⁷UNDP, "LoGoPro Sri Lanka".

re-established, and with newly elected representatives, there was an urgent need to ensure the core functioning of these newly reinstated institutions.⁴⁸

Although LoGoPro's aims were connected specifically with local governance, the project board did not have any direct link with local government bodies. The project board consisted of a number of administrative officials, but there were no political representatives. The UNDP's view is that the ministry can guide LoGoPro to help local government, as the project advisor of the LoGoPro stated: "LoGoPro is to promote local government. Reaching local government through the ministries is fine because they can guide us to help local government bodies that need aid."⁴⁹

This research notes that through LoGoPro, two local government bodies have received infrastructure facilities such as a community meeting hall⁵⁰ and a market.⁵¹ These are infrastructure although the purpose of LoGoPro was to enhance governance. This reveals a mismatch between governance aims and project implementation at the local level.

6.3.4 ART GOLD⁵² Sri Lanka (AGSL)

This programme promotes area-based development through mobilising international resources, and through channelling specialised technical resources by activating thematic networks of cooperation for human development and universities associated with the programme.⁵³ This programme was implemented by UNDP with the cooperation of the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.

⁴⁸ UNDP, "UNDP—Local Governance Project".

⁴⁹ Respondent: Mr. Rajendrakumar Ganesarajah, Local Governance Advisor, Local Governance Project, UNDP-Sri Lanka.

⁵⁰ Respondent: Mr. Rassaiya Chandrasena, Chairman (UNP), Lahugala *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵¹ Respondent: Mr. A.R. Subair, Secretary, Kinniya *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

⁵² In this programme, ART stands for support to territorial and thematic networks of cooperation for human development, and GOLD stands for governance and local development.

⁵³ UNDP, "ART GOLD Sri Lanka Programme".

This was financed for five years (2006–2011) mainly by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation.⁵⁴

Central government played the lead role in coordinating the programme through its membership in the project board and as a beneficiary and chair of the national coordinating committee.⁵⁵ The southern province has been the main partner in this programme.⁵⁶ Local working groups were established, guided and supervised by the southern province working group and the national coordinating committee with the support of the AGSL project team.⁵⁷ Although the AGSL project was on governance and local development, its mechanism means that the AGSL mostly connected with the central government-controlled administrative bodies rather than with the local government bodies.

A major concern of the AGSL has been to develop infrastructure in the local government areas such as market places, pre-schools and government offices.⁵⁸ For example, a pre-school has been established in the Suriyawewa PS area through the UNDP's ART GOLD programme.⁵⁹ The Suriyawewa PS area lacks key facilities such as water, electricity and proper interior roads. Had there been good coordination among local working groups and the provincial and national-level bodies involved in AGSL, establishing a pre-school would not have been the main priority in the Suriyawewa PS area for the AGSL. Instead, the basic lack of infrastructure services would have been addressed.

Overall, the foreign-funded projects as outlined in this chapter were aimed at enhancing local governance and local development. A number of problems can be highlighted when assessing these projects in terms of the ways in which the NGOs are involved at local government level

⁵⁴Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2008 & Future Plans-2009*, 25.

⁵⁵The national coordinating committee is responsible for policy decisions, supporting the provincial and local working groups, promoting the project activities at national level and the outreach to international partners (UNDP, "ART GOLD Sri Lanka: Project Document.").

⁵⁶Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2008 & Future Plans-2009*, 25.

⁵⁷UNDP, "ART GOLD Sri Lanka: Project Document".

⁵⁸Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2008 & Future Plans-2009*, 25.

⁵⁹Respondent: Mr. Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

and in analysing whether their project aims match with local needs, or indeed, how far the aims have been successfully achieved in terms of the extent to which they address the local development needs. The neglect of NGO project aims at the implementation stage by central government ministries was a common problem. Critically, when projects were planned by central government ministries, and implementation strategies put in place either through central government-controlled administrative bodies or provincial councils, local government or local communities could not be involved in such projects. Therefore, the needs of communities at the local level were often not identified. The distance between the project planning and implementation stages resulted in a lack of coordination between the local needs and the project outcomes. While some local government areas needed aspects of infrastructure, the projects were not prioritised in order to meet needs.

6.4 CONCLUSION

As identified earlier, the extraordinary circumstances of the tsunami and the war provided room for NGOs to be involved in reconstruction, relief and rehabilitation work in Sri Lanka. Later this work was extended to other areas not directly affected by the tsunami or the war. The major donor agencies such as WB and ADB work with the central government ministries and central government-controlled administrative bodies according to central government agendas and are mostly involved in large-scale infrastructure development.

The responses of local government representatives revealed their lack of knowledge of the objectives of the major foreign-funded projects. Central government's argument is that there is no capacity at local government level to deal with foreign aid and NGOs. Further, local government representatives reported that they lacked experience on foreign aid management and did not have the knowledge and capacity to prepare development proposals and plans to obtain aid. While they expected to obtain such experience and knowledge, this was not available. Clearly, lack of capability at the local government level should not be an excuse for the central government to control foreign aid and NGO projects according to its political agendas.

Central government needs to equip local government officials to deal with foreign aid and NGO projects in terms of locally-led and community-oriented development. As evidenced in the above-discussed projects,

when there is no direct relationship between NGOs and local government, NGOs have to follow central government preferences without considering local needs. This type of aid delivery reinforces the dependence of local government on the central government and serves to undermine NGO efforts to address local development needs leading to a strengthening and centralisation of authoritative power. If NGOs can connect directly with local government bodies, these NGOs will be able to develop local government competency in preparing development proposals and plans, identifying the actual needs at the local level, and managing aid. A real change must be instituted around capacity development aimed at enhancing local government and local development.

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NGOs as Local Development Partners: Locally-Led Projects

Abstract This chapter investigates the features of direct NGO involvement at the local level. Compared with the projects handled by central government, the NGOs which directly connected with local government and local communities were generally more successful and more focused on addressing local development. By using local knowledge in policy processes, these projects have been able to network local partners and people consistent with identifying and prioritising the needs of local communities. The success of these projects highlights the way local government can establish an advantage if foreign assistance comes directly to local sources.

Keywords Direct NGO involvement · Local government
Local communities · Local development · Local knowledge · Network
Foreign assistance

7.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chap. 6, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are required to follow directives from central government and go through its administrative bodies rather than through local government. According to Thangarajah, in most cases, NGOs are explicitly instructed by the central government to work through the administrative system beginning with the district secretary and divisional secretary. This means that NGOs

have been reluctant to be involved with entities such as the *Pradeshiya Sabhas* (PSs).¹ The problem here is that the central government-controlled administrative bodies give prominence to the agendas of central government rather than local government. Because central government political agendas predominate, there is less likelihood of creative decisions on aid distribution. For example, through directing NGOs to provide infrastructure, the central government has been able to capture aid and use it to fulfil its aims in particular areas, such as developing large-scale tourism industries rather than the development of local communities. A further problem is that in general the bureaucratic officials in such administrative bodies are not from the same area and lack knowledge about local needs in the areas in which they work.

However, there are many international NGOs directly involved in different projects at the local level. This chapter analyses recently completed and on-going locally-led projects which have been conducted by NGOs and taken place in the southern and eastern provinces.

7.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND NGO PROJECTS

Some NGOs are aware of defects in centrally-led development and have found ways to connect directly with the local government to carry out their projects. For example, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) acknowledged that international partners faced circumstances over which they had little control when dealing with a highly centralised approach and sought to overcome the disjunction between lower levels of government and community organisations.² This resulted in CIDA working directly with local government. The section below outlines a number of recently completed and on-going projects which directly connected local government levels.

7.2.1 *Federation of Canadian Municipalities—Canada/Sri Lanka Municipal Cooperation Programme (FCM/MCP)*

Under this programme the FCM provides assistance to local government, especially to rehabilitate the service delivery systems of

¹Thangarajah, “Local Governance in the Eastern Province,” 90.

²ACDI-CIDA, “Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme.”

tsunami-affected local government bodies in the southern and eastern provinces.³ The involvement of the FCM began with the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils.⁴ This was part of the tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation programme of CIDA, with many sectors cooperating including employment, economic well-being and micro-finance, governance, housing, and the environment.⁵

FCM was one of the few organisations that worked with local political representatives.⁶ FCM's participatory mechanisms like the community support fund (CSF),⁷ association building, and mid-term planning systems and procedures⁸ have had significantly positive results in local government areas. In this way, communities are able to influence the order of priorities for rural infrastructure by submitting proposals and contributing 50% of the project costs in the form of labour. Evidence for the success of FCM/MCP was found in the Matara municipal council (MC). A respondent stated:

FCM/MCP worked with the people and therefore they received full support of the people. Most funds were saved due to the people's labour. For example, when we received funds from FCM/MCP to construct 75km rural roads, we could complete an additional 25km as well because we could save money by using people's labour.⁹

Moreover, FCM/MCP provided good guidance to local development work in the Matara MC area. They provided opportunities to the Matara MC staff to go on foreign work tours to Canada for training programmes. As a consequence, the staff gained knowledge of working in

³Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance-2007 & Future Plans-2008*, 18.

⁴Ibid.

⁵ACDI-CIDA, "Tsunami Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Programme."

⁶Ibid.

⁷The CSF has been used mostly for road construction (see *ibid.*).

⁸Ibid.

⁹Respondent: Mr. Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council.

local government and received useful advice on processes and procedures from the Canadian experiences.¹⁰

7.2.2 *City of Munich, Germany: WASSER¹¹ Project*

Under this partnership between a Sri Lankan local government and the city of Munich, Germany, assistance was offered to the tsunami-affected cities of Batticaloa and Kalmunai.¹² At the request of the special commissioner of the Kalmunai MC, and with the facilitation of the national technical advisor of United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), the mayor of Munich agreed to assist the Kalmunai MC.¹³ The combination of foreign and Sri Lankan local government officials in policy planning leads to successful development plans.¹⁴ The city of Munich also prepared a proposal for the European Union (EU) to implement the WASSER project acting as the overall project coordinator and serving as a direct link to the EU. The Batticaloa and Kalmunai MCs integrated the participatory planning approaches for strategy development and forged ahead with implementation of the project.¹⁵

The objectives of the WASSER project include planning and setting-up of sewerage systems in tsunami-affected areas and the provision of drinking water supplies for the poor and tsunami-affected people. In the Kalmunai municipality, more than 50% of the people use shallow wells to drink water which is polluted by the open dumping by the cess pits. Therefore, WASSER brought timely assistance to Kalmunai at the critical point of water pollution. Another project funded by the EU, the Environmental Remediation Programme (ERP), supported WASSER. Under the ERP the garbage-dumped open water bodies are cleaned.¹⁶ As a result, the MCs' capabilities were enhanced in the field of environmental planning and environmental management of information systems,

¹⁰Respondent: Mr Mohammad Nabavi, Opposition Leader (UNP), Matara Municipal Council.

¹¹The term WASSER means water in German.

¹²Kalmunai experienced the highest death toll and property damage in Sri Lanka (Kalmunai Municipal Council, "Completed Projects.").

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵WASSER—City of Munich, "The Project Partners."

¹⁶Kalmunai Municipal Council, "Completed Projects."

setting-up of a cadastre for utility planning, and adopting information for risk assessment and disaster mitigation purposes.¹⁷ Moreover, because this project established a relationship between a well-developed city in a foreign country and a city in Sri Lanka, the Kalmunai MC believed this would open new doors for its needs and concerns to be voiced to the outer world.¹⁸

The WASSER project has been a remarkable success in educating the local community about conserving water, assisting poor families in meeting their drinking water problems, and for highlighting the services rendered by the municipal administration. Through the WASSER project, improved community participation has been achieved.¹⁹ Another important achievement was the establishment of networks and linkages with local communities. WASSER created the opportunity for local government representatives, staff and community volunteers to meet and discuss the needs and problems of the area. Furthermore, after the tsunami, the capability of the municipal technical staff was poor and WASSER has helped to build competence.²⁰

7.2.3 Asia Foundation: Local Economic Governance (LEG) Project and Transparent Accountable Local Governance (TALG) Programme

The Asia Foundation works with the private sector and local government bodies to improve local service delivery, administration and accountability, and facilitates private-public dialogues that provide a forum for local government and business leaders to discuss the impediments to economic growth in their localities and provinces.²¹ The Asia Foundation's LEG project is designed to improve the overall business environment and to promote local economic development in Sri Lanka. In 2007 the Asia Foundation constructed an economic governance index²² for local

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Asia Foundation, "Policy Advocacy Handbook."

²²The Asia Foundation's local economic governance indexes analyses local business environments, measures the quality of local economic governance, assesses progress through a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators, and supports policy reforms (Asia Foundation, "Measuring Economic Governance.").

government which has helped to identify and facilitate understanding of government-influenced constraints to economic growth and to indicate the influence of economic governance on business behaviour.²³

Under the LEG project, and with the collaboration of Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), the Asia Foundation has established a mobile service assessment on tax collection in the Trincomalee urban council (UC) area. Designed to start a conversation between the UC and the tax payers, it aimed at increasing transparency and people's participation in UC matters. A booklet on the 2011 budget summary was printed and distributed to tax payers in the area with important information about tax obligations and permit procedures.²⁴

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded TALG programme sought to help local government bodies make key political institutions more responsive to citizen input, improve service delivery, provide post-tsunami emergency recovery assistance, and increase the rule of law to protect and empower vulnerable groups.²⁵ Through this programme (March 2005–September 2007), the Asia Foundation provided technical assistance and training to local government in 35 areas affected by the tsunami and/or by the war within the country.

The TALG programme developed a number of training modules and guide books as part of its institutional strengthening programme for local government in Sri Lanka²⁶ to cater for the demand within local government and mobilise funds from external sources for priority social, environmental, economic and infrastructure projects. In the post-tsunami rehabilitation process, funding agencies were eager to fund local reconstruction and rehabilitation work; however, few appropriate funding proposals came forward from local government bodies.²⁷ Consequently, it became evident that for fundraising to be effective, there was a need to increase the knowledge around project proposal writing. The Asia Foundation expects that such training modules and guide books can be used to improve the ability of local government to

²³Ibid.

²⁴Trincomalee Urban Council, *Budget Summary—2011*.

²⁵Asia Foundation, "Country Overview."

²⁶Asia Foundation, *Guide to Proposal Writing*, 1.

²⁷Ibid., 5.

write successful proposals and to acquire the funds needed to implement their medium-term development plans and other priority projects to improve the delivery of services to citizens and promote development in their communities.²⁸

The successful implementation of the TALG programme has enabled mid-term and short-term planning to be incorporated in local government management processes.²⁹ Among the local government bodies in this book, Weligama UC experienced successful results from the TALG programme, as the following respondent noted.

The Asia Foundation gave very good guidance about developing project proposals. After developing project proposals, it was very easy to obtain foreign funds because then the UC already had a proposal to show the donors. However it was a difficult task to collect people's ideas. They only explain their ideas. They do not even write their ideas down. Therefore during the TALG programme we were very busy collecting ideas. It was a new experience. We collected people's ideas and wrote all of them up then edited and organised those ideas in a way in which they could be implemented.³⁰

The participatory planning process helped the local government identify the high priority needs of its citizens with TALG effectively, encouraging local government staff and others to become involved in making project proposals. The Asia Foundation helped in preparing a four-year plan for the Weligama UC. Under the four-year plan, 16 proposals were written for 16 projects,³¹ with the UC implementing all of them.³²

²⁸For example, the manual for writing a funding proposal is designed to empower persons to be successful in obtaining funding grants. The manual focuses on the relationships with funding agencies, organisations and persons in a collaborative and participatory approach at all levels of government. This manual assists in the preparation of strong and fundable proposals (*ibid.*, 5, 7).

²⁹Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils, *Performance—2007 & Future Plans—2008*, 17.

³⁰Respondent: Mrs Nirosha Kumari Herath, Community Development Officer, Weligama Urban Council.

³¹Some of the projects are construction of two public fairs, an urban council building, meeting halls for fishermen, a library, children's parks, parking place for three wheelers, solid waste management, a compost yard development and the purchase of tractors.

³²Respondent: Mrs Nirosha Kumari Herath, Community Development Officer, Weligama Urban Council.

Suriyawewa PS also provides evidence for the success of the Asia Foundation's guidance on policy planning and suggests that local government can achieve people's participation without much difficulty. The chairman of the Suriyawewa PS noted:

The Asia Foundation's involvement in policy planning was remarkable. They have given guidance for policies according to rural people's needs. They have organised people to participate in policy planning by raising people's needs and related issues. We have received a good working knowledge about policy planning through this.³³

According to the Asia Foundation, the planning and managerial capabilities of local government improved giving them a stronger role in socio-economic development and in planning for their areas by strengthening coordination between local and central government officials at the community level.³⁴

7.2.4 USAID—*Democracy and Governance Programme: Supporting Regional Governance (SuRG)*

USAID's Democracy and Governance Programme started in 2007 to support provincial and local government in particular areas aimed at strengthening their capacity in planning, budgeting and in ensuring transparent and participatory planning processes. SuRG (2008–2011) is one of many democracy and governance programmes to facilitate post-war transformation in the eastern province. Beginning in 2007 it centred on increasing citizen engagement in provincial and local government, strengthening inter-community reconciliation procedures and promoting social equity. USAID was awarded a contract to Association for Rural Development (ARD) for implementation of its SuRG in March 2008.³⁵

SuRG has identified a range of training needs for local government, including participatory planning, governance, proposal development, project management, office management, accounting, finance, leadership and legislature programmes. SuRG aims to improve the knowledge

³³ Respondent: Mr Nandasiri Ranathunga, Chairman (UPFA), Suriyawewa *Pradeshiya Sabha*.

³⁴ Asia Foundation, "Local Governance Programmes."

³⁵ Respondent: Mr. Abul Kalam, Programme Manager, SuRG of USAID.

and skills of elected representatives and staff to fulfil their core functions, increase public participation in decision making, increase transparency and accountability of local government functions, and enhance the public sector environment.³⁶ SuRG has provided technical assistance to all selected local government bodies in the eastern province through workshop-level training. Capacity building within selected local government bodies is provided through workshops, mentoring, technical assistance and training. The programme manager of the SuRG noted: “Under this programme we have already trained hundreds of officials and councillors within selected local government bodies, including the commissioners and assistant commissioners of local government (CLGs and ACLGs).”³⁷

SuRG has a language training programme which targets the local government sector. Under this, 40 language teachers from 38 local government areas have been trained. Local government officials learn Tamil or Sinhala through this programme.³⁸

SuRG assists local government to build participatory governance forums and works to engage directly with the local level by encouraging citizens to participate in local government policy processes. These forums are consisted of not more than 15 citizen representatives including the representatives from each village or *Grama Niladhari* (GN) division, religious leaders, community-based organisations (CBOs), informal village leaders and business community; and not more than 15 representatives from the PS including the chairman, opposition leader, local government representatives and relevant staff from PS.³⁹ Kattankudy UC, one of the local government bodies for SuRG, has developed a wide range of plans to implement with the assistance of SuRG.

7.2.5 *Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International: Livelihood Support Projects*

CARE International operates small-scale projects in villages which provide support for people’s lives by developing socio-economic programmes to improve conditions in the rural communities. The duration

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

of this project is five years with its direct involvement in the project implementation lasting two years. The project includes 110 villages in three divisions in Hambantota district: Suriyawewa, Hambantota and Tissamaharama. From its area office in the Hambantota district, CARE addresses rural development through a community participatory approach using the theory and practices of community governance.⁴⁰ The team leader of the project stated:

We see that it is not enough to focus on only one sector. For example, if livelihood development is the major component, we also have to improve people's social and economic development as well. Therefore the support we provide differs such as improving the income level or developing the infrastructure.⁴¹

This project aims to improve peoples' social status by focusing on women, youth, and POP (poorest of the poor—the lowest economic level of the society). The POP have no opportunities to enter development processes, earn small wages on a daily basis, and cannot participate in meetings. They are vulnerable and marginalised.⁴² The team leader of the project further noted:

We cannot make development plans to improve POP's conditions by sitting in the offices. We need to reach them and to obtain their participation. Also we need to develop a system to obtain their participation. We call it an enabling environment. The meaning of this is to build a proper environment around these people.⁴³

CARE promotes community participatory development based in the villages where the issues are livelihood development, environmental management, social resources and infrastructure development.⁴⁴ CARE establishes village operating units (VOUs) and selects officials to represent the villagers. As a result, CARE reaches the CBOs in the villages.

⁴⁰ Respondent: Mr. Sisira Wijesundara, Team Leader, CARE International—Hambantota Office.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

CARE further encourages and builds CBOs in the villages and supports women and youth participation.⁴⁵

CARE reaches villages through the GN because it simplifies the identification of village leadership. CARE prepares an activity plan for each village known as the village development plan (VDP) which is constantly updated and implemented through a VOU. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA) has been used to make VDPs accountable. Through this, CARE touches the lowest level groups which lie below the GN level.

According to CARE, poor people may have skills but they can lack the relevant equipment to work effectively, so CARE provides direct grants and training to these people, as the same respondent highlighted.

The villagers do not have opportunities to obtain funds. They do not have access to the banks and the other financial agencies at all. The banks may have high interest rates and they often need documents; there may be no buses to go to town. Therefore people's accessibility to the banks is hard. We thought of creating seed capital in the villages. Here we ask people to state their priority issues and we give money to them through our project. But they can't get these funds without a plan or a proposal. So we tell them to make a design plan or a proposal. We deposit money in VOUs or CBOs. People have to repay this money to the VOU or to the CBO. Through this method, people can use this money again and again.⁴⁶

The importance of this project is that it ensures closer scrutiny of the poor local communities in the villages. CARE works with the central government-controlled administrative authorities especially with divisional secretariats when implementing VDPs and not with the local government, but it works according to its own priorities and not according to central government agendas. The Central government does not pay much attention to control NGOs directly connected with the local level and small-scale projects which handle less funds compared with the larger funds of major NGOs.

CARE only selects two proposals at once when providing assistance, and expects that through their projects, the people will learn how to prepare proposals and plans which go to other institutions (government or the private sector) to obtain funds. CARE does a facilitating role and in

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

this way, it addresses core issues. When the villagers are able to administer alone, the project is transferred to the next village.

7.2.6 *Transparency International: Projects to Support Local Government*

Transparency International has three working areas: (1) national and local government; (2) private and civil society; and (3) citizenry. It prepared a three-year strategic plan (July 2011–2013) to improve people’s participation in local government and to improve the services of local government to the people. These projects have been implemented in five districts in Sri Lanka and funded by EU and United States (US)-based Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) and National Endowment for Democracy (NED).⁴⁷ Its first programme aimed to reduce corruption by teaching the people and local government officials about corruption, and how to work against its influences.⁴⁸

Transparency International has built a direct relationship with local government to reach local levels. Its second programme in Ridimaliyadda PS⁴⁹ centres on good governance by guiding local government to provide efficient services to the public. Under this programme, a system called citizen report card (CRC) was developed as a kind of survey used to determine people’s responses to local government services.⁵⁰ Transparency International joined with the PSs in carrying out this survey. After obtaining people’s responses, Transparency International trained the elected representatives of the PSs on the ways of improving their services.⁵¹

In their programme, Transparency International found that the PS did not have strategic plans, especially a four-year plan or knowledge to make plans to obtain funds.⁵² As discussed in Chaps. 4 and 5, this is a common

⁴⁷Transparency International, “Funds Received.”

⁴⁸Respondent: Ms. Nauli Wimalarathna, Consultant, Transparency International-Sri Lanka.

⁴⁹A *Pradeshiya Sabha* in Badulla district, Uva province. Uva province has three poorer PSs. Ridimaliyadda is the poorest.

⁵⁰Respondent: Ms. Nauli Wimalarathna, Consultant, Transparency International-Sri Lanka.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

situation in many local government bodies. A consultant of Transparency International stated:

PSs can obtain funds from NGOs if they can make plans or proposals. We did a workshop to develop a four-year plan for Ridimaliyadda PS. We expect to help them until they are able to handle it alone.⁵³

Without guidance, encouragement or motivation, local government representatives and communities do not engage in policy development processes. Transparency International's expectations to continue their assistance is proving effective. Transparency International has equally divided responsibilities among the 10 local government representatives in order to work within 42 GN divisions in the Ridimaliyadda PS area.

At the time of this research, a third programme was scheduled to be conducted in the Galle district. In Galle district, Transparency International puts into practice people's participation at local government level by selecting PSs which can maintain a standard budget. Three local government bodies from Galle district—Ambalangoda UC, Yakkalamulla PS and Baddegama PS were selected. Transparency International approaches local government bodies and builds connections with them with officials always involved in the programme to ensure its implementation.⁵⁴

Transparency International does not provide funds or material aid to local government but provides guidance and builds connections between local government and people. The organisation does not act as a donor agency but provides knowledge to local government representatives about local government income sources. The respondent consultant further noted:

When we tell them, they realise that they have certain ways to earn money. Through passing by-laws, local government can earn money using the resources in the local government area. We think that knowledge is needed and the most important thing for them. Provincial councils sometimes say that they have NGO funds to distribute to the local government bodies. But if local government does not have a proposal or a plan at the time, they cannot obtain these funds. For this reason, most of the time they miss

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid.

out on chances of obtaining funds. We always work at giving knowledge to improve their ability to obtain funds. If local government has a plan, the funds will go through in the right direction and will reach the neediest.⁵⁵

Again this project is an example of NGO efforts to address the problems of local government funding.

7.2.7 Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA): Programmes to Support Local Government

CPA works to build two-way communications between people and local government so that representatives can get to know the people's problems and needs following regional and world best practice solutions.⁵⁶ CPA adopts examples from the Indian and Nepalese local government systems and looks at both advantages and disadvantages in these systems.⁵⁷ For its programmes CPA receives foreign funding mainly from Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA)⁵⁸ as well as International Budget Participation (IBP), Washington.

CPA supports local government to obtain people's participation in decision making, as the following respondent stated.

The public galleries⁵⁹ were closed in many PSs. These PSs had no idea about the importance of public galleries before. We have opened the public galleries in many PSs and now people are involved actively in local government matters.⁶⁰

CPA guides local government bodies on effective methods of tax collection and provides knowledge to the people on taxes. Local government bodies depend on attracting 33% of taxes which is insufficient, with

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Respondent: Ms. Sriyanie Wijesundara, Contact Person, Governance and Anti-Corruption Programme, CPA.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸ANSA helps to improve local government budgeting in South Asian countries.

⁵⁹A public gallery is an area in a representative institution that is set aside for the public.

⁶⁰Respondent: Ms Sriyanie Wijesundara, Contact Person, Governance and Anti-Corruption Programme, CPA.

few people having any proper knowledge about taxation.⁶¹ The same respondent further added:

Local government representatives think that they are supposed to collect only the taxes mentioned in the revenue files. There are hidden taxes. There is a need to highlight these taxes and to give proper knowledge to the people about taxes. We believe that then the people will want to be actively involved in the tax payments.⁶²

CPA's Governance and Anti-Corruption Programme aims to reduce corruption in local government by acting as a facilitator with more than 75 area-specific local partners including local government and various civil society organisations (CSOs) all over the country. This programme focuses on governance issues with particular emphasis on local government and transparency and accountability within their budget processes. CPA pays attention to the attitudes and experiences of ordinary citizens as it pertains to corrupt practices when receiving goods or services from the public sector.⁶³

7.2.8 *Social Scientists' Association (SSA): Networking at the Local Level*

The SSA works at sharing experiences in local governance between representatives and officials of PSs and CSOs in order to explore strategies for strengthening local democracy.⁶⁴ SSA's programme on Local Governance and Local Democracy began with 75 participants from the rural areas, the majority of whom were elected representatives of PSs of Kurunegala, Monaragala and the Badulla districts. The programme brings together a range of people to share experiences in local governance in the periphery, and focuses on issues of development, people's participation in governance, and strengthening the capacity of PSs in efficient governance.⁶⁵ Through this programme, SSA expected to bring different communities at local levels together through forums for sharing

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Centre for Policy Alternatives, "On-going Projects."

⁶⁴Social Scientists' Association, "Recent Events."

⁶⁵Ibid.

and learning. SSA says that this forum enabled SSA to establish and strengthen direct links with practitioners at local levels.⁶⁶

Another programme of SSA is Promoting Social Engagement through Buddhist Practices.⁶⁷ This programme is a part of the above discussed USAID's SuRG programme and is designed to help ease tensions in the community, especially in Sri Lanka's eastern province. This is funded by ARD-SuRG which reached out to a selected group of 75 Buddhist monks and 25 nuns who represented approximately 10 temples in each of the following districts: Monaragala, Ampara, Polonnaruwa.⁶⁸ They participated in capacity building, community engagement, language training, outreach and networking activities. The programme was focused on issues of reconciliation and governance issues including peace, democracy, conflict resolution, gender equality, diversity, human rights and ethnic harmony within the framework of Buddhist teachings and practice.⁶⁹ The participating monks and nuns selected a curriculum topic in accordance with their abilities and interests to engage and raise awareness about reconciliation and governance with community members patronising their local temple to receive counsel. In each of these districts, 30 lay people⁷⁰ who belong to 10 area temples have participated in this programme. They included youth groups connected to temples, and members of CSOs, local government bodies and local business establishments. Finally, this programme has laid the foundation for a network among Buddhist, Hindu, Christian and Islam clergy dedicated to inter-ethnic and religious reconciliation.⁷¹

7.2.9 *Waste Management Projects*

There has been remarkable support among several NGOs for waste management projects in many local government bodies. The tsunami severely

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰The SSA notes that as the temple in Sinhalese society is traditionally a centre for community activities, these lay people have provided a support base for the monks and nuns in the programme and have become change agents in the *Dayaka Sabbas* (patron societies) of the temples (ibid.).

⁷¹Ibid.

damaged houses and belongings increasing the amount of solid waste which put pressure on the collection infrastructure, requiring NGOs to focus on solid waste management.⁷²

The solid waste management project of the Matara MC is funded by the EU for the solid waste recycling plant. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provided the relevant technology and training. ADG (Aide au Développement) was also involved and provided support for this project. Since the funding agencies left, the solid waste management project has been controlled by the Matara MC. This means all the profit goes to the MC.⁷³

The Galle MC is another example of where various NGOs have become involved in different waste management projects. Caritas Social and Economic Development (SED) Galle constructed buildings and donated machinery to establish a compost plant which is now handled by the MC although the project from time to time receives foreign funds for its maintenance from various sources such as FCM/MCP, Association of Dutch Municipalities (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, VNG) and Germany.⁷⁴

In 2006 the EU was involved in a three-year waste management project called COWAM (Construction Waste Management) which aimed at building-waste management in Galle city. Through this project, waste is re-used to produce raw building materials, and deal with environmental pollution arising from building-waste which has subsequently been reduced. Staff members of the MC were trained in Germany, and in 2009 total ownership of the project was handed over to the Galle MC. The MC now produces bricks and concrete chips which can be used for building and road construction.⁷⁵ The mayor of the Galle MC noted:

The waste management project started with foreign guidance and support. Through recycling, we saved more money. Recycled concrete chips bring a good income to the MC and save a lot of funds.⁷⁶

⁷²VNG International, “LOGO South.”

⁷³Respondent: Mr. H.G.K. Jagath Kumara, PHI Officer, Matara Municipal Council.

⁷⁴Respondent: Mr. Dileepa De Silva, Technical Officer, Galle Municipal Council.

⁷⁵Information provided by the Galle municipal council.

⁷⁶Respondent: Mr. Methsiri De Silva, Mayor (UPFA), Galle Municipal Council.

Practical Action also supported waste management in the Galle MC, introducing compost bins to the MC area and sponsoring a paper, plastic and polythene recycling centre.⁷⁷

Hambantota UC offers a different example of foreign-funded waste management. Prior to the tsunami disaster, garbage dumping was a major problem in the Hambantota UC area, until the UC started a solid waste management project. The project was stopped after the tsunami. The Hambantota *Nagara Pavithratha Sangamaya* (association for Hambantota city cleaning) was established by a few young men who restarted the solid waste management project in 2007. They received funds, buildings and machinery from the Energy Forum-Netherlands and were supported by VNG and Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID).⁷⁸ The project is now run by the UC with workers receiving salaries from the UC.

7.3 CONCLUSION

When analysing these NGO projects according to how they participate in ways which address local needs, and in terms of the extent to which their project aims have been fulfilled, many advantages can be identified. The special feature of these NGO projects is their direct connection to local communities. Through this these projects have been able to network local partners and people consistent with identifying, prioritising and addressing the needs of local communities. These project plans have been shown to fit with local needs. Throughout the duration of projects, NGO officials have been actively involved at all levels. By providing involvement and continuous guidance, problems are reduced in project implementation. Compared with the larger foreign-funded projects of central government, the smaller projects conducted by various NGOs are more directly connected with local government and local communities and can be identified as more effective.

Supplying rural infrastructure, waste management, encouraging people's participation in local government policy processes, educating local government representatives on their powers and income sources, training

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Respondent: Mr. H.A. Sisira Rohana, Project Manager, Solid Waste Management Project, Hambantota Urban Council.

local government staff to improve their management skills, supporting the building of CBOs, addressing the needs of the POP, and strengthening inter-community relations have received critically important NGO contributions at the local level. These indicate the varied benefits and advantages of NGOs in the selected local government areas, and signify the importance and potential of NGOs who contribute to development and address needs at the local level. The positive responses from respondent local government representatives and staff members in terms of successful achievement from these projects confirm this. For example, participatory budgeting promoted by the Asia Foundation and USAID has become popular among local government bodies in identifying the most appropriate needs in specific areas. The knowledge provided to local government representatives and staff on project proposal writing and income sources by NGOs, such as Transparency International, Asia Foundation and CPA, has built a path to achieve successful outcomes.

The success of these projects highlights the way local government can establish an advantage if foreign assistance comes directly to local government sources. These NGO contributions match the proposals of local government representatives outlined in Chap. 5. The importance of encouraging people's participation in local government policy processes, the need for more knowledge and guidance on their powers and functions, and the need to obtain knowledge, guidance, funds, resources and technologies from NGOs to promote local governance and local development were some of these proposals.

The projects outlined above indicate that there are possibilities to build collaboration among local government and NGOs in local-level activities leading to improved forms of local governance and local development. The important point here is that this can help local government bodies to overcome their dependency. An approach to local government which is dependent on central and provincial government can be changed by improving local government capacities through NGO involvement. This book, therefore, identifies the importance of substantive direct NGO involvement at the local level and stresses the need to shape future local government relationships away from the traditional approach towards cooperation. Through this process, local government representatives and staff would connect with NGOs as collaborative partners focused on local development.

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Conclusion

Abstract This chapter summarises the political context of the book where it has been argued that the centralisation of power undermines local government. Anti-colonial interpretations, the sensitivity of the Sri Lankan society towards nationalism, and the Sinhala majority's willingness to protect the unitary state structure have all contributed to the centralisation of power. Local government itself and the people it represents, lack the resources to advance local interests. NGOs have been identified here as having the capacity to empower local government in pursuit of local development through encouraging people's participation in policy processes. Although NGOs have this potential, this book also reveals that there are challenges that are connected with central government control over foreign aid and NGOs.

Keywords Anti-colonial · Nationalism · Sinhala majority
Unitary state structure · Centralisation of power
Local interests · Local development Foreign aid

This book has focused on local development in Sri Lanka examining the role of local government in planning and promoting strategies within the context of longstanding neglect by central government. It explored how local communities in Sri Lanka have been overlooked in development initiatives, the reasons for this failure while analysing the positive role played by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) given this

situation. Recognising the constraints imposed by central government on local government and on NGOs in Sri Lanka, the book examines the actual and potential contribution of NGOs to local government and local development in an effort to address the needs of local communities.

This book is situated in a political context where it has been argued that the centralisation of power undermines local government. The latter is then unable to determine its own policy or to use its policy processes to bring about local development. The book focused on this context because centralisation has been a continuing and abiding feature in Sri Lanka. The attitudes, beliefs and sentiments of the Sri Lankan society have over many years seen the political system strongly structured around centralisation, despite the many groups which have argued against centralisation. This political culture is a significant factor which needs to be highlighted in consideration of the recent trends and consequences of centralisation.

Sri Lankan politics have been shaped and are still being shaped by the ambitions of certain governments and leaders, who have relied on the highly centralised authoritative power structures in pursuing their political ambitions. A major consequence of this political sociology has been the neglect and undermining of provincial and local levels of government. It has not been part of Sri Lanka's political culture to focus on the socio-economic needs of the many communities. It was expected that people would look after the social and economic welfare of their communities rather than looking to central government to provide a great deal.

The colonial experience did not challenge the dominant political culture, leaving governments and political leaders to maintain and reinforce the centralised authoritative power. The political elites have long been accustomed to this culture and have built on it over the centuries, so that with the ongoing conflict and the recent tsunami the political leaders were able to draw on powerful and deep-rooted cultural values to continue to assert their strongly centralising policies. The introduction of military personnel into positions of leadership reflects how far the centralisation of political authority has been widely accepted within the political culture.

The issues of centralisation and its widespread acceptance show the mutual dependence of the political leadership and the public at large. People have significant social and economic needs which must be voiced, but the reluctance by people to express their views has begun to be challenged following the recent tsunami and the conflict between Tamils

and the government. The centralising tendencies strengthened by the tsunami of 2004 and the war have resulted in large amounts of foreign aid flowing into Sri Lanka and managed in a highly centralised way. While there have been questions about the lack of transparency with the administration of this aid, including questions about whether it has been directed towards the neediest, there have been no inquiries. The fact that there have been no demands or protests from within the Sri Lankan society, especially from the local level, about these questions suggests a broad acceptance of centralising trends by the people, or an underlying fear of speaking out against the government.

The provincial councils have constitutionally recognised powers, but these have not actually been transferred by the central government. Provincial councils were developed as a solution to the ethnic conflict, but there was no support for this initiative from the majority ethnic group, Sinhala. Sinhala nationalist elements have instead promoted the unitary state structure, and this has been met by the Tamil nationalist elements with demands for a separate Tamil state. The Sri Lankan government has been unable to provide a mediated solution which can satisfy the demands of these two positions. When Sinhala nationalist elements entered into coalition politics with the Sri Lankan political leadership, their ambition for a unitary state structure was promoted and the separatist Tamil nationalist elements were crushed through the war.

As argued in Chaps. 4 and 5, the central government maintains its position by using its power, funds and resources to fulfil its ambitions, without regard for the preferences and needs of the people. The large-scale construction projects, land confiscation issues and military involvement in people's lives in both southern and eastern provinces are examples of this highly centralised authoritative power.

This book has revealed that there are contradictions between what the central government interprets as development and what the local levels of government and the people expect. For example, the construction of a harbour, airport, international cricket stadium and an international conference centre in the Hambantota district of the southern province is not seen by locals as meeting the needs of the people in the area. Additionally, large-scale tourism development in the eastern province has resulted in local people losing their agricultural lands and traditional fishing areas. People in these areas do not see themselves as receiving any benefit from such developments, and many have lost their means to generate income.

The Central government has strongly influenced local politics by forcing provincial and local leaders to address central government agendas rather than fulfil local needs (see Chap. 4). The major problem highlighted by local political representatives pertains to their lack of power and funding connected to the highly centralised power structures maintained by central government (see Chap. 5). The central government-controlled administrative bodies also work as supportive institutions in centralising attempts. Similarly, the local government lacks the capacity to address development needs at the local level. Given this highly centralised power structure in Sri Lanka, the foundation research of this book has focused exploring ways in which local government can be empowered to address local community needs.

More than six decades after decolonisation, debate about colonial influences still continues in the Sri Lankan political arena. Through the mixing of ethno-cultural diversities which evolved throughout history, the colonial influences structured many politico-economic and socio-cultural differences in Sri Lanka. Since decolonisation, Sri Lanka has been faced with its own problems such as internal conflict, poverty, election malpractices, violence, misuse of power by the government and corruption. Rather than the experience of colonialism, it has been the failures of post-independence rulers to address the various needs of the people which have been a barrier to development and a reason for many problems in Sri Lanka. But these failures have been interpreted by anti-colonial Sinhala nationalist political parties and groups as the result of colonialism.

In an environment where nationalist feelings have pitted one ethnic group against another, it is easier to introduce outside enemies naming them as supporters of each rival group. In Sri Lanka, NGOs have been named as imperial agents by the anti-colonial Sinhala nationalist parties and groups which have supported successive governments, and they have been portrayed as being supportive of the Tamil nationalist groups. This criticism has been used mostly by governments as a means of preventing rights-oriented NGOs which have engaged in protecting the interests of the people, especially those affected by the war (see Chap. 3).

As discussed in Chap. 3, in many situations, NGOs have been involved in protecting the rights of the people. In the 1980s the war and second Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) insurrection resulted in human rights violations, with many NGOs becoming actively involved in calls for the protection of human rights. They supported war-affected people through relief and rehabilitation work and demanded inquiries to

investigate the disappearance of people during hostilities and the insurrection. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, several NGOs campaigned for peace and for the democratic rights of the Tamils. Moreover, many NGOs worked against government-sponsored election violence, intimidation and malpractices, corruption and the misuse of power from the late 1990s onwards. Similar NGO involvement was evident during the last years of the war. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have worked to provide humanitarian aid to war-affected people faced with numerous restrictions, ill-treatment and harsh criticism by the government. NGO involvement has been met with a number of attempts by the government to restrict and discourage their activities and tarnish their image among the people. This anti-NGO trend has been government-sponsored but publicised by Sinhala nationalist parties and groups. Despite this, NGOs continue to have government approval to continue with their work. The government's interest in receiving foreign aid means that although it promotes and supports nationalist groups in criticising rights-oriented NGOs, it does not reject the support of development-oriented NGOs (see Chap. 3). Accordingly, the criticism of some anti-colonial Sinhala nationalist groups which depicts NGOs as imperial agents can be seen as opportunistic and far beyond the truth.

NGO involvement that is oriented towards protecting people's rights has the potential to influence governments in ways that are positive. In the context where people have not come forward on their own to advance and protect their democratic rights, such NGO involvement is beneficial for drawing attention to people's needs and in improving democratic governance and development. The involvement of NGOs, therefore, does not maintain the exploitative relations of colonialism, but challenges the post-colonial and neo-colonial critiques (see Chap. 2). In contrast, the NGO involvement leads to improved forms of governance and development.

As discussed in Chap. 3, many complex legal procedures and institutional mechanisms used by the Sri Lankan government to control NGOs have weakened government-NGO relations. There are several criteria and reporting requirements that must be met by NGOs if they are to be registered to work in Sri Lanka. Government has imposed strict conditions on NGOs working in post-war areas. Fulfilling these requirements does tend to discourage NGO activities.

As mentioned earlier, Sri Lanka received large amounts of foreign aid and support from NGOs in the post-tsunami and post-war situations. These extraordinary circumstances were different from normal foreign aid

flows and NGO support. As there were no aid management and distribution mechanisms at any level of government at that time, the central government assumed control of the whole aid management and distribution process (see Chap. 6). Many NGOs in Sri Lanka have had to work through central government ministries, the NGO Secretariat, district and divisional secretariats to support the local people. Much of the time, NGOs have to work according to the agendas of these institutions. NGOs which support central government agendas and political goals, such as the large-scale construction projects, have been fully supported. As discussed in Chap. 6, the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are directly connected with central government and work according to government agendas. The many stages of project planning and aid flow from national level to local levels, widening the distance between NGOs and local levels. When NGOs do not have direct access to the local level, they have to agree to central government control over their operations, finances and activities. This undermines NGO capacity to address actual needs at the local level.

As set out in Chap. 3, the relationship between the Sri Lankan government and NGOs has taken a variety of forms. Among these, there were examples of collaborative relations. Three major examples were the *Gramodaya Mandala* system, the *Janasaviya* programme and the 2002 peace negotiations. In 1980s the *Gramodaya Mandalas*, compositions of village-level voluntary organisation chairmen and *Grama Niladbaris* (GNs), provided opportunities for NGOs to be involved in local-level planning and implementation. In the 1990s *Janasaviya* was set up as the government's major poverty alleviation programme sponsored by the WB. Many NGOs were involved in implementing *Janasaviya* sub-projects at that time. During the 2002 peace negotiations, NGOs were involved in a number of peace building projects in the conflict-affected areas together with the government. These collaborations were progressive and heavily dependent on the pro-NGO policies of successive governments. These collaborative relations confirm that central government can maintain strong leadership without undermining the development of collaborative relations with NGOs which enhance local government and local development. As discussed in Chap. 2, positive utilisation of NGO contribution thus can be promoted by central government.

In the events mentioned above, the agreements with the NGOs permitted them to work without strict government controls. The Sri Lankan government provided its full support to promote the role of

NGOs. This reveals that where government and NGOs collaborate, both parties can share responsibilities for addressing the needs of local communities without undermining one another. When compared to government-controlled NGO projects, such collaboration is identified as different and progressive. But this does not mean that there were no problems between the government and NGOs during such events. In the *Gramodaya Mandala* system, some anti-government NGOs failed to participate in meetings and were not involved in planning and implementation. Although NGOs supported the *Janasaviya* programme, after the appointment of the NGO Commission in 1993 by the President, many NGOs broke with the government. As mentioned in Chap. 3, the NGO Commission was interpreted by commentators as an outcome of personal rivalry and competition between the President and a local NGO leader at that time. With changes of governments and leaders over time, therefore, government-NGO relations can also change. The positive support of NGOs in the 2002 peace negotiations reversed when the war restarted. In situations where the government does not recognise people's democratic rights, and when NGOs work against such actions, there have been conflicts between government and NGOs, evident in the government-imposed restrictions on rights-oriented NGOs.

As discussed in Chap. 4, most local government representatives lacked a clear idea about local development and people's participation in it. They tended to see central government-led large-scale construction projects as local development. Also, local government representatives' lack of knowledge about their powers and functions was an obstacle to building productive relations with NGOs. Most local government representatives did not know that they had the power to obtain direct support from NGOs and they did not know how to apply for foreign funds, resources and garner support from them. Despite their political party affiliations, local government representatives of both the southern and eastern provinces proposed that aid and support be sought from NGOs (see Chap. 5). As mentioned above, most proposals by local government representatives and local administrative officials to get foreign funds needed the guidance of NGOs in management, technology and policy planning.

NGOs such as Transparency International and Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) provided knowledge to local government representatives on local government legal powers and income sources. The Asia Foundation has been involved in promoting people's participation in local government through participatory budgeting. The Weligama urban

council (UC) in the southern province received support from the Asia Foundation in preparing project proposals which helped it obtain aid from a number of foreign donors to develop the area. The Kattankudy UC in the eastern province also received guidance on participatory budgeting from United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE) International has been involved in supporting the building of community-based organisations (CBOs) and addressing the needs of the poorest of the poor (see Chap. 7). This NGO involvement at the local level illustrates two dimensions. First, the central government has not been involved in providing the support to encourage the development of local government capacities; and second, the work which has been carried on by NGOs at the local level matches the proposals of local government representatives and local administrative officials.

Some local government areas have sister-city relations with foreign counterparts that supply aid and guidance, such as the Galle municipal council (MC) with the city of Velsen, Netherlands, and these are identified as having productive relations (see Chap. 7). Because of these relations, local government was able to avoid the barriers put up by central and provincial government to control foreign aid and NGO support. It is evident that central government reacts differently to different NGOs, particularly NGOs directly connected to the local level which manage small funds. These NGOs have their own agendas and handle small projects according to needs at the local level. The Central government does not find much advantage in taking over these NGOs because they cannot support central government's large-scale project agendas. Also, these NGOs tend to be development-oriented and not rights-oriented.

This book has focused on two types of government-NGO relationship in Sri Lanka. The first is the central government-NGO relationship, and the second is the local government-NGO relationship. Two features are central in assessing the significance of NGOs: the extent to which NGOs identify and address the local needs through their projects and programmes, and in what ways they collaborate with local government and local communities. Among the two types of relationship, the most productive government-NGO relations are built at the local government level. While the central government-NGO relations focus on the importance of developing physical infrastructure, the significant work undertaken by NGOs through connecting with local government provides evidence of their support for, and encouragement of, developments

beneficial to Sri Lanka by stressing the importance of human resources. These NGO relations support local government bodies in improving governance and in addressing the needs of local communities through providing knowledge to local government representatives and staff, and encouraging people's participation to promote effective policy processes and local development (see Chap. 7). There are possibilities for central government to accept NGOs which work at the local level, and there are opportunities for local government to collaborate with NGOs towards enhancing local governance and local development.

The central government's neglect of local government and local development is significant. Local government respondents indicated they had encountered discrimination from the national and provincial politicians who were aiming to use local political representatives as their agents to fulfil central and provincial government agendas. Most local government respondents saw provincial councils as barriers to local development. As noted in Chap. 5, they responded negatively to provincial councils, not because they rejected decentralisation, but because the provincial councils lacked the powers and capacities to support local government. Provincial councils acted mostly as central government-controlled bodies rather than as separate political institutions because central government had not transferred the constitutionally allocated powers to provincial councils as mentioned above. As long as provincial councils acted in accordance with central government agendas, the central government did not abolish these institutions. When there have been demands to transfer powers to provincial councils, the central government has limited the role of provincial councils. The main tactic employed by central government has been to set aside provincial councils as a part of any centralisation process. As discussed above, with central government-centric policy processes, the government can neglect the issues it does not want to consider. For example, the problems faced by local communities due to a lack of essential facilities such as water, electricity and interior roads have not been addressed by central government's large-scale construction projects. Such projects are focused on tourism promotion which is a central government priority. The significant issue here is that local people's views have not been considered in the policy process.

In Sri Lanka, there are limited means for organising and obtaining people's participation in local policy planning and local development. This book has revealed that people's participation in local policy

processes was not encouraged by local government bodies, nor were they required to consult locals. While many local government representatives saw the benefits of encouraging people's participation in local policy processes and building CBOs for this purpose, it rarely happened. In this context, this book identifies potential for external actors to promote a role for people in the policy process. It has shown that some NGOs have the potential to help build CBOs and guide local government representatives in ways of obtaining people's participation in local policy processes (see Chap. 7). Some local government bodies such as Matara MC have been successful in promoting people's participation through establishing citizen committees at the ward level. The major reason for the success of Matara MC was the creative and effective leadership of the mayor at that time. The NGO support in building citizen committees was an advantage.

A number of respondents in this research proposed the need for improved mechanisms to engage with local communities and to bring all policy actors together in the policy planning process at the local level. It can be assumed that such respondents place their hopes in external actors, helping them to build network mechanisms bringing all relevant parties together. The expectations of local government representatives and local administrative officials to obtain support from NGOs to organise and encourage people's participation in policy planning and development programmes proved significant.

This research found that local government bodies, CBOs and local people did not come forward on their own to participate in the local policy process or to build networks. This is again a characteristic of the Sri Lankan political culture where people do not seek to project themselves forward to participate or object. Although some of the local government representatives stressed the importance of CBOs in obtaining ideas for local policy processes, many local government bodies lacked networked relationships with CBOs. Neither has information on CBOs been recorded by local government bodies. It is evident that NGOs such as CARE International helped to establish CBOs in certain local government areas. This research shows that key NGOs such as the Asia Foundation, Transparency International, Social Scientists' Association (SSA) and CPA were involved in various ways in networking with local government, CBOs, people at the local level, intellectuals, professionals, the private sector and funding agencies aimed at organising local resources, solving local development problems and overcoming

difficulties in local government areas through making and implementing appropriate policies. Furthermore, where people have been encouraged by NGOs to participate in the policy process in local government, better results have been obtained. For example, the Asia Foundation supported Weligama UC on participatory budgeting, and through this guidance the UC was able to complete many foreign-funded projects which had been prioritised by the people. This research determined that NGOs have been involved in policy planning and in obtaining people's participation in local governing and development. NGOs, therefore, play a positive role in encouraging people's participation in the local policy processes and local development. This research shows that despite the strong centralisation of authoritative power, NGOs can organise people's participation in local policy processes towards local development through networking parties together (see Chap. 7). This illustrates the policy network theory discussed in Chap. 2.

The findings of the foundation research of this book reveal that over decades the central government has tended to use local government as a means to strengthen the centralised power structures. In this context, people have acquiesced to a highly centralised governing structure which has consistently neglected the local communities by concentrating power at the centre. People at the local level continue to be characterised by a lack of power, funds, resources and especially a lack of knowledge about how to advance their demands.

Sri Lankan politics has been shaped by the post-tsunami and post-war situations where the central government has dominated most of the reconstruction work, controlling aid and its management and distribution. The military has been promoted and given a high level of recognition within the administration. The government has imposed restrictions on the work of rights-oriented NGOs. Yet at the same time, the government has welcomed development-oriented NGOs which do not raise the same concerns.

The research in this book began with the recognition of a clear need to empower the local level by connecting local government and local communities in order to overcome difficulties and to fulfil development needs. The Central government has consistently withdrawn from initiatives to empower local government. Local government itself, and the people it represents, lacks the resources to advance local interests. NGOs do have potential in this regard. They have been identified here as having the capacity to empower local government in pursuit of local development through encouraging people's participation in local policy

planning. Although NGOs have this potential, this book also reveals that there are challenges. Most of these challenges, again, are connected with central government control over foreign aid and NGOs. But such problems again can be resolved by empowering local government bodies to use their remaining functions and power to obtain NGO support directly. Despite their political party affiliations and provincial differences, the potential for many local government representatives to obtain NGO support and work for local communities is encouraging. After empowering local government and people in this way, it can be expected that reforms will emerge from the local level to address the actual needs of communities, which will challenge further the highly centralised power structures in Sri Lanka.

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