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Geography

Stakeholder perceptions on community governance efforts: A case of a project implemented in Sri Lanka

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Abstract
Community participation in governance has now become an integral principle in development thinking. In practice also, efforts are being made to apply this principle in various aspects of governance. However, the sustainability of community participation in governance is highly determined by the stakeholder perceptions concerning the change made by that effort. This study investigates the stakeholder perceptions on the governance structures and procedures introduced in one selected area in Sri Lanka. The project implemented in Hambantota and Monaraga districts with the aim of establishing community level structures below the local government level and links them with the overall system of governance through the project in order to fill the gap of an absence of a governance structure for the people to participate at grassroot level. The project introduced two additional governance structures, Village Organizing Committee (VOC) and Rural Coordinating Committee (RCC), in order to work with the existing system of governance. This study aimed to comprehend the way people perceive the newly introduced governance structures and the things related to them.

The study found that all stakeholder categories were in a highly positive perception regarding the new governance structures. The government officials were the most satisfied regarding the importance of the new change. Women and poorest of the poor are were highly satisfied among the marginalized groups. The three main activities, improving governance and participation, promotion of sustainable development and resource mobilization and infrastructure development were identified as the key drivers of satisfaction. However, the respondents were relatively less satisfied on the provision of adequate information on marketing and promotion of linkages.

Keywords: Community participation, Community governance, Stakeholder participation, governance structures.

1. Introduction
Governance as a theory generates many concepts throughout the social science domain. Stoker (1998) [8] mentions that the Anglo-American political theory uses the term governance to refer the formal institutions of the state and the monopoly of legitimate power. Such a governance may remain with no participation of the community in the main processes of governance. However, the development thinkers worldwide at present in a consensus that community participation in governance as an integral part of development (Mallik, 2013: Hunt & Smith, 2005: Barker, 1991) [7, 6]. The participation of community in the governance will fulfill the requirements necessary for an inclusive development. All communities, despite their economic status or ethnic, regions, political, cultural or language differences, should participate in decision making and implementation processes related to their development. Such a broader concept can be known as the community-based inclusive development (Heinicke, 2003).
Helling et al (2005) [5] presents a local development framework for the policy makers and program managers in developing countries in order to help and promote participatory decentralized development. This means that the existing local development framework is not of the kind of community participatory and does not address the development issues of these countries. Even though some governments attempt to initiate community based development, it fails due to lack of

knowledge and skills of the personnel which is needed for such an approach. Lorenzo et al (2015) [2] mentions that such an approach requires a workforce equipped with skills to work intersectorally and in a cross-disciplinary manner to provide services in remote and rural areas.
According to the existing system of governance in Sri Lanka, there is no way for the village communities to participate in governance and the development process. Even if the main governance bodies exist at the upper level, namely *Pradeshiya Sabha* at local level, Provincial Councils at intermediate level with a link to the national level, there is a gap that prevents the community from participating in governance due to the absence of a link to the upper level governance structures. The literature shows this problem exists in most of the developing countries. Dukeshire and Jennifer (2002) [1] show that the absence of rural representation and some community groups in the decision-making process is one of the most common barriers to policy development. Thurlow Sri Lanka experiences the results of a very recent attempt to address this problem. A leading INGO, CARE International Sri Lanka, introduced new governance structures with the aim of ensuring participation of people at grassroot level, with the support of the Government (Heenkenda et al, 2013) [3]. It has attempted to get the village community participated in governance introducing new strategies and procedures. The project involved in organising all the stakeholders of local governance including the local