

**SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF DEVELOPMENT
DEMOCRACY: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE UMA
OYA MULTI-PURPOSE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT
(UMDP)**

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Introduction

Neo-colonial liberalization with rigorous economic conditions was introduced to Third World countries post decolonization, as an appropriate approach to achieve high social development. However, reflexive behavior of rural communities is a major constituent of modern development and sustainability policies in contrast to earlier neo colonial policy discourses. People's reflexive behavior indicates the acceptance or rejection of large development projects within communities. Sustainable development is not only a social challenge, but also a policy matter in developing countries. This study mainly focuses on the inconsistent relationship between the reflexive comportment of communities and administrative systems with special reference to Uma Oya Multi Purpose Development Project (UMDP).

The objective of the study is to identify the ways in which societal reflexive behavior is inspired and influenced by the implementation of state administered multipurpose development projects in Sri Lanka. Development democracy specifies maintaining the equilibrium between acquired results (ends) and communities' real expectations (means). Resistance against development projects is often considered to be a consequence of the empowerment of civil society, and the growing awareness of development agendas by local communities. While, generally, 'beneficiaries' and 'victims' of development projects are considered by policy endeavors, there are some communities who get left out. As a result, administrative authorities may not

contemplate societal responses of these non-specified communities when compiling policy agendas and therefore may not be able to resolve problems related to development projects. Since resistance could be the cause of social instability, it is crucial that incongruities between communities and administrative authorities are resolved, in order to reinforce social development in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the study attempts to examine reasons for disputes between communities and administrative authorities within rural societies affected by multi-purpose development projects.

Many resistance movements related to sensitive phenomena such as the environment and culture illustrate the matured consciousness of communities when dealing with complications that arise due to development projects, particularly when they are perceived as threatening to their existence (Shiva, 1991). However, modern development policy approaches do not always encourage administrators and engineers to be sensitive to non-economic aspects, which can generate an imbalance between community tolerance and administrative processes. Therefore, in a situation where a particular community does not acquire any development – justice or benefit, the community should have an opportunity to challenge the policy process and create a public discourse on how a balance could be struck between development and community expectations (Habermas, 1975). However, due to complex socio economic factors, equal opportunity for discussion is rarely afforded to communities. As a result of extremely strong hegemonic intervention and power - knowledge continuums, many communities are not able to reap full benefits of these developmental projects.

Strengthening development democracy can positively impact civil resistance, and community empowerment. As Scudder (1993) asserted, in India, resistance movements by local communities against the Narmada River Basin Development Project illustrates the critical imbalance among cultural values, societal integration

and administrative policies. However, little is known about the relationship between administrative interventions and resistance behavior in the case of development projects in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study examines sociological determinants affecting development democracy with special focus on the UMDP.

Methodology

The study is conducted using the grounded theory approach due to its compatibility with the theoretical issues being addressed. Accordingly using unstructured interviews, 41 respondents were interviewed and 4 case studies were conducted. Apart from the interviews, 6 direct observations were also employed to gather data. Data thus collected were analyzed using the case grounding approach and thematic system analysis.

Results and Discussion

A highly stigmatized and inefficient bureaucratic system is a critical cause of civil resistance against development projects administered by the state. There is a clear detachment between the state administrative system and the project's management system; hence locals are confused as to where failures of the project should be reported. This is reflected in the resistance to the UMDP. Grassroots level entities are therefore unable to approach a relevant authority to submit their queries. This automatically generates a situation that leads to resistance. Civil resistance also results from unacceptable decisions implemented by administrative authorities. For example, administrator roles were modified after the disaster caused by UMDP. However, local level bureaucrats were reluctant to accede to these modified roles. This confusion also influenced resistance movements. Civil society is empowered as a direct consequence of the imbalance between expectations of people and administrators. Therefore, people strive to resolve issues that arise from a project using nonviolent resistance movements against administrative authorities.

Once a catastrophe has taken place as a result of a development project, social systems become unstable. Additionally, it is also unrealistic to expect an instant transformation of administrative systems to deal with the ensuing chaos. However, this delay can create resistance behavior in communities. There may also be ulterior motives during negotiations among stakeholders that may further precipitate the negative impact of such a situation. Further it may also not lead negotiations to reasonable and agreeable solutions. On the other hand, avoiding responsibility can also be considered a major hidden social factor in this process.

Conclusion

The objective of the resistance or reflexivity is not just to resolve issues, but also to redirect attention of the administrative systems to local communities. It is inappropriate to see civil resistance or reflexive behavior of rural communities as something to be suppressed by administrative authorities, or to be neglected, since it helps the administrators redefine and correct the development paradigm.

References

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