

Effectiveness of social capital for empowerment of women: a study on *Neethra Samadhi* women's foundation

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Social capital means the relationship between two or few individuals to share common values or norms. In other words, it is the cooperation between individuals based on shared norms to be further strengthened as a group. By being a group it is possible to efficiently achieve economic, social, political and cultural needs. The use of social capital to achieve those goals in the developed countries is substantially higher than in the developing countries. However, from the recent past, the creation of cooperative organizations based on trust is very much popular among women in Sri Lanka. Though there is enough literature from the Sri Lankan context on gender and politics, women's political participation and domestic violence against women, there is no adequate literature on how social capital has proceeded to empower women in terms of economic, social and political development. Therefore this study raises the question as to what extent social capital has affected the empowerment of women in Sri Lanka, by focusing on *Neethra Samadhi* Women's Foundation (NSWF) as the case study. The NSWF provides membership for all women in the age group of 18 to 55. Its membership is totally free. Women have gathered to understand the economic and social backgrounds of each other and to help each other by sharing their economic and financial capabilities. The study was conducted basically focusing on the NSWF which carries the membership of women in the *Kesbawa* Divisional Secretariat area. Both primary and secondary data were used in this research. Content analysis, focus group discussions, open-ended questionnaire survey and few case studies were used as the means of data collecting. The sample size for the questionnaire survey was 40. Following the purposive sampling technique, out of the total 73 *Grama Niladhari* Divisions, four *Grama Niladhari* Divisions, i.e. *Boralesgamuwa* East A, *Diulpitiya* East, *Pepiliyana* West and *Pepiliyana* East B, were selected for the questionnaire survey. The data which could not be collected from the questionnaire survey, were gathered through focused group discussions and case studies. The data were analyzed using the descriptive analysis method. Due to lack of socialization, more than 80% of women have become poorer. Though some of the young women have developed their knowledge and skills by studying professional courses such as pharmaceutical, computer literacy, dress making, shoe making and handicraft, most employers hesitate to offer job opportunities to them due to their social status and poor family backgrounds. By becoming members of a women's foundation, they interact and help each other by playing the advisory role in settling family matters, finding job opportunities, providing financial and material support for self-employment; for instance when some women have skills to be a tailor or a dressmaker but do not have basic necessities such as a work-place, tools, machines, publicity, clients and selling facilities. After being a member of the NSWF, the women have increased their monthly income levels to 15000 rupees from 4000 to 5000 rupees due to the increase in income generating opportunities. The foundation has only the collective participation to bargain and to receive the services from the public and private sector institutions.