



Inside-Out Development: Sankadayagama People Employs a *Maranadhara Samithi*

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Immediately after my bachelor's, in 2009, I joined a survey team that worked for the international NGO, World Vision. The survey team had two main tasks: first, to conduct awareness sessions about 'good governance principles' for communities in two Divisional Secretariat Divisionsⁱ in rural Sri Lanka: Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama. World Vision worked with select villages within these Secretariat divisions. Unless there is a need to single out villages within these, I will use the Division's name to identify all the villages that World Vision works with in that area as a whole. The second task was to measure the level of satisfaction among the villagers in regard to the services provided by the NGO. In Mahakumbukkadawala, World Vision had provided a water supply network, sanitary facilities for households, houses, educational supplies for childrenⁱⁱ, and training programs such as leadership for community members for fifteen years starting in 1997. In contrast, at Nawagattegama, the project had just begun a year previously, but World Vision had provided some sanitary facilities for a few households and educational supplies for children.

During preliminary visits, some people in Mahakumbukkadawala told the survey team that they were unable to continue their lives without the assistance of World Vision. They did not want the NGO to leave. At Nawagattegama, the people reported that they did not need any special assistance for survival. I wondered whether development aid and projects have made Mahakumbukkadawala people dependent, contrary to the objective of developing the community. I was driven to investigate this issue.

In this paper, I question a widely held faith in the ability to provide development from outside, using external knowledge and

developmental aid packages. First, focusing on Mahakumbukkadawala, I map out the impact of the World Vision project on community life. In so doing, I question whether World Vision is liberating or producing poverty (as well dependency) in Nawagattegama. I realized that the people's dream of development had collapsed in Mahakumbukkadawala with the withdrawal of World Vision's assistance.

During my research, it became evident that empowerment is an inside-out process, which comes from within the community rather than through outside aid and assistance. This became evident through a third community: Sankadayagama. A nearby village was neither a part of World Vision project, nor any other development program, but achieved a high-level of "development." Located three and ten miles, respectively, away from Nawagattegama and Mahakumbukkadawala, its progress, transformation, and development were locally produced. Based on empirical evidence, the paper examines the development process from a people's (local) vantage point and explains how the concept of development and local (indigenous) knowledge have come to terms in practice.

The development discourse is systematically sketched in the Introduction of this volume. However, as a point of entry to this paper, I begin by highlighting a few critical aspects of the development discourse that are relevant to this study.

Development Discourse

The dominant notion of development is fundamentally predicated on economic growth. The practice of it was instigated, established, and headed by global institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the United Nations set

under US leadership. Most national governments in the developing world followed this model. So did Sri Lanka. (See Introduction, this issue, for an elaboration.)

When compared to modernization and dependency theories, post-development scholars in general, and Escobar (1995) in particular, do not see development as an unavoidable fate that keeps the developing nations in the status of underdeveloped. He (Escobar 1995) goes beyond the analysis of mainstream development practice and the critiques of existing structures, yet he pays less attention to the peoples' response to their predicament in the developing world.

Postcolonial scholars have also enriched the discourse by acknowledging the people's agency. This study focuses on this aspect (See also Perera 2016). Hence, I would like to review the idea of development and its dominant politics, cultural values, and practices from a postcolonial perspective. I primarily draw on Ilan Kapoor's (2008) *The Postcolonial Politics of Development*, which focuses on the West's solution to underdevelopment that was its own creation.

The solutions, usually referred to as 'development policies and projects,' were produced and implemented through international aid organizations. These policies and projects have particular foci, these days on structural adjustments, good governance, and human rights. Although policy formulation seems like a pure 'technical process,' Kapoor (2008) argues that it is highly influenced by Western culture. These policies are based upon the West's industrialization experience, and they prioritize economic growth in the Third World. Through the policy formulation process, the programs have homogenized the Third World and ignored the rich diversity, priorities, and potential of the societies so combined into a single group.

Kapoor (2008) also generates a conversation between development theories, particularly the dependency theory, Escobar's (1995) arguments, and postcolonial theory. Most development theories focus on economic concepts like 'exploitation,' 'capital' and the political dominance of the developed nations

over the developing world. Furthermore, both dependency and postcolonial theories are essentially anti-modernization theories; they oppose the West's dominance over the rest of the world. Most significantly, both theories urge their beneficiaries to focus on nations in the 'periphery' instead of the 'core'.

There are also differences: In contrast to the economic focus of development theorists, postcolonial scholars focus on the 'culture' and 'representations' of people, mainly the colonized. Dominating the non-West by attributing an inferior identity on them is a deep concern for postcolonial theory. According to Edward Said (1978), *Orientalism* characterizes Westerners as rational, peaceful, liberal, and logical, but the people in the East as irrational, degenerate, primitive, mystical, suspicious, and sexually depraved. Escobar (1995) has demonstrated that the developing world itself is product of the development discourse, created through this 'othering' process.

There is a substantive difference between dependency and postcolonial scholarships: Although the dependency theory criticizes the West, it still considers Europe as the universal model (Kapoor, 2008). In regard to power relations among nations, dependency theorists limit or elude the power of imperialism and capitalism and consider the Third World "a passive bystander in the imperial/capitalist game, with no will or ken to resist it." (Ibid: 12) Therefore, dependency theory is unable to appreciate the socio-cultural and political diversity and the resistance of the Third World.

Escobar (1995), who is essentially a cultural studies scholar, does not see the peoples' resistance to the (mainstream) development discourse. However, postcolonial scholars have a sense of appreciation and empathy for people's resistance to power. Postcolonial theory, refers to the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging and resisting the imperial power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2008; Kapoor, 2008). The central concern of both the eminent postcolonial theorists: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1994) is the individual's agency; they both emphasize

(subaltern) agency as a form of ‘negotiation’ (Kapoor, 2008). Dependency theory and Escobar’s work have not addressed this particular negotiation. According to them, disempowerment and underdevelopment are inescapable destinies of the developing world.

Besides the agency, these development theorists have not been able to account for the heterogeneity of Third World communities. The dialectical or binary structures that these scholars use, have homogenized Third World people. According to postcolonial theorists, through their agency, as we shall see this below, people in the Third World create their own identity instead of being subjects of homogeneous categories such as dependents or victims. In order to challenge the homogenization of Third World subjects, Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of ‘third space,’ i.e. a non-oppositional space standing in-between the binary structures of orientalist (traditionalist) representations and imperial power. In his concept of third space, Bhabha preserves the heterogeneity of dissonant or even dissident histories and voices.

In contrast to development theories, postcolonial analysis has downplayed the role of the state and capitalism. This critique is valid for Said and Bhabha (Kapoor, 2008), but less valid for Spivak, who has referred to ‘multinational capital’ and ‘multinational division of labour’ in her work. However, ‘neither Said nor Bhabha focus on capitalistic transactions or economically-oriented subversive agency by the subaltern’ (Ibid: 15). Postcolonial theorists have also ignored poverty and the key ‘material’ issues in the distribution of resources.

Nonetheless, postcolonial theory provides critical insights into the development discourse. It trains our vision beyond the dualisms employed in the dominant discourse and the outside-in vantage point that identifies underdevelopment is caused by developed countries, opening up room to account for the agency of people in the developing world. The point is, not to skip the discourse or the theories of underdevelopment, for they are useful, but to account for people as active agents of change and development rather than passive victims of the discourse. (See Perera

2013; 2016 for this strategic shift. See also Vidyarthi 2015).

In the following section, the paper discusses the influence of the World Vision project on the everyday life of the communities in Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama. It questions the genuineness of the practice and the future uncertainty of the community that may happens in the absence of development aid. The discussion continues through a third space, Sankadayagama to view development from the vantage point of the people. The discussion will highlight how the community remarkably empowered itself through building a community organization.

Development in Action

My second visit to Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama occurred in March 2013 to conduct fieldwork for this project. Changes over the three years were profound: World Vision had left Mahakumbukkadawala, and the people had survived without external aid for three years. In Nawagattegama, people were actively taking part in World Vision programs (discussed below) and aid has become a part of their life. The previous three years had also changed my intellectual approach: I no longer intended to impose mainstream development on people. Without taking either side, I wished to learn about the ways in which communities encounter and engage in development.

The larger goal of World Vision’s development program is to build self-confidence among people so that the community will overcome poverty. It pays special attention to protecting children. World Vision thus approached the community with its standard, fifteen-year commitment. It not only launched a process of development but also created mechanisms for the process and the momentum to continue beyond its fifteen-year commitment.

During my fieldwork, at the first meeting with the staff at World Vision’s regional office in Anamaduwa –the larger urban centre close to the sites-- exposed me to the NGO’s intentions and approach to development. Samantha, the employee of World Vision who accompanied me to Nawagattegama, gave me a preliminary

overview of the NGO's development projects and introduced the fundamental issue that affects the community:

Poverty is the main issue that we have to overcome. As our key interest is the wellbeing of children, we help all poor families to overcome poverty. We strongly believe that a child could have a better life, only if the child's family has a better income. Actually, what I am doing is not just a job, but also a great commitment to the future generation. (Author's translation)

World Vision's employees are certain that poverty is the main issue for people. During my conversation with Malcolm Perera, the Area Manager, he responded to my question: "What made you think that these people need your help?"

If we do not recognize and help them, they will be ignored by the society forever because of poverty. We are here to introduce a better life for these people. Make them stronger to achieve their targets and overcome all the miseries of their lives. (Author's translation)

To identify an area, World Vision employs government statistics to identify communities where the majority of the population lives below the poverty line. Apart from poverty, it is essential to have a substantial number of children (16 years and below) in the particular area for World Vision to establish a project. World Vision assumes that there is a greater role for them to play in areas where the majority is poor and takes up the responsibility to ensure a better future for children through eliminating poverty.

The process is complex: Once a community is identified, World Vision informs the Divisional Secretariat of the particular area about its interest to carry out a development project. If the Divisional Secretariat accepts World Vision's intended intervention, the latter expects the former to invite them or request that they carry out the project. Then, World Vision begins work, giving individuals in the community the impression that the

project is carried out at the invitation of the state. In the next phase, before launching the project, World Vision connects with community-based organizations (CBOs) of the area such as farmers' societies, women's associations, and youth clubs. It utilizes these connections to localize the project and make the grassroots community aware of its development programs. Simultaneously, World Vision also acquaints itself with the community, especially how people can benefit through its development projects.

During preliminary awareness sessions, it strongly encourages the selected community to involve their children in the child sponsorship program. In this, World Vision makes a profile of every child who would like to get a sponsor and sends these profiles to donor countries such as the USA, Australia, and Canada. Various individuals, groups, and organizations from these countries offer to help the children. These child-sponsors are required to make a monthly payment of about \$30-50 to World Vision. The child and the sponsor are not directly connected; instead, the money goes to a common fund that is managed by World Vision. World Vision then uses money from this pool for the betterment of the children in the entire community. In this, World Vision does not discriminate between the children who received and did not receive sponsors.

In the next phase, World Vision categorizes the households in the village into four types according to their economic status: 1) the poorest 2) not the poorest, but still facing substantial economic hardships, 3) lower-middle class, and 4) well off families with wealth and material possessions. In determining the categories, people are asked to choose their own category considering criteria such as having a house built out of permanent material, a permanent roof on the house, and/or electricity supply.

Prior to World Vision's labeling them as poor, people used to experience poverty through the government's poverty alleviation program, Samurdhiⁱⁱⁱ. People are familiar with the families that receive Samurdhi benefits. Labeled as poor by the state, these people were already viewed as poor people in the village. Once World Vision expanded support

for more families, many villagers who were not recipients of Samurdhi benefits were also labeled poor.

Kusumsiri, a farmer in Samurdhigama, in Nawagattegama DSD, reflects this transformation:

We are poor. According to the World Vision's categorization, my family belongs to the poor category. Through that, we realized how poor we are. Also, we know that we need some [external] support to achieve a better life. World Vision is doing a great service in this area. It helps people to overcome poverty. (Author's translation)

According to Kusumsiri, before the arrival of World Vision, villagers were not conscious of their economic conditions, but now they feel poor. In addition to Kusumsiri, several other villagers believe that they are poor and need external support to survive. Most of them have experienced many hard times during their lifetime, but they have never felt the anxiety they now feel about their new identity. In fact, World Vision has redefined and expanded poverty in Nawagattegama, and the people labeled poor thus became the subjects of this discourse. This is precisely what I heard at Mahakumbukkadawala three years ago. Most of them then joined the World Vision's program with the hope of a better life but at first the process made them poor.

World Vision works through an institutional structure that can facilitate its development process. It first forms Village Development Committees (VDC) in every village. The villagers elect its committee and a chairperson. To eliminate poverty, World Vision promotes 'micro-entrepreneurship' and encourages villagers to form small savings groups. This helps people to develop their own micro-finance societies and save money by themselves. These little organizations are connected to World Vision through the VDC. Members of the VDC are eligible to receive short-term loans (from their own savings) at a low interest rate. The interest from these loans is one of the main income sources of VDCs. The Committee uses this money for specific development activities in the village such as

repairing a road or building an irrigation channel to supply water to paddy fields.

The key objective of these programs is to liberate people from the adversities of poverty. According to my informants, over the five years of this project, the villagers have become more concerned about their economic wellbeing. As they learned that they are poor, most of them desired to liberate themselves from poverty. Most of them attended World Vision meetings, workshops, and awareness programs on entrepreneurship, micro financing and saving.

Compared to Nawagattegama, the story of Mahakumbukkadawala is in sharp contrast. World Vision had left after its full term of fifteen years and the people no longer have external support to 'uplift' their lives. During my fieldwork, they were in a transition period.

Some people I met were very critical about World Vision's development process. Keerthi Rathnayake, former Chairman of Kandayaya VDC (a village in Mahakumbukkadawala DSD area) for the first ten years of World Vision, became nostalgic when he recalled his past with World Vision. As he described, the first ten years of the project following 1997 was a time of great happiness, success, and full of achievements for all twenty-five villages in the Mahakumbukkadawala area. Children in poor families got priority in the development process. World Vision continuously provided stationery for them to use in school. It also trained social mobilizers from each village to associate and involve with the children in their villages, helped the young generation to overcome their self-confidence deficit, especially stage fright, and provided them a stage to expose their talents in singing, dancing, and acting.

In collaboration with VDCs, World Vision carried out many development projects. One project involved the construction of 'amunu' (a small weir) to hold water of the stream that crosses Kandayaya village for agriculture and the repairing and modifying of community halls and old school buildings. In Kandayaya, World Vision built a water tank and a pipe network for the distribution of portable water as a solution to the lack of drinking water. Apart from physical improvements, World

Vision also organized various training programs and workshop for the villagers to inculcate positive thinking, good governance principles, and community leadership.

World Vision wants its development process to continue beyond its fifteen-years with the community. The NGO formed a private company, Green Vision in Mahakumbukkadawala, in 2004. A Managing Director and a board of directors manage Green Vision. Since there were twenty-five Village Development Committees in Mahakumbukkadawala area, three members from each committee were elected to the main council of the company. The seventy-five-member main council then elects nine of them for the board of directors of the company. The director board appoints one of them as the Managing Director. While the main governance body meets periodically, the day-to-day activities of Green Vision are conducted by an office staff including a Manager, an Accountant, and a number of Project Officers.

At the beginning, World Vision provided the initial capital for Green Vision to begin a facility for cashew nut and wood apple-processing known as Rathmalgaswewa Cashew Company. World Vision expected Green Vision to settle the loan once it became stable. As cashew and wood apple are native to Mahakumbukkadawala, and most villagers had these plants in their gardens and back yards, they were to supply fruits to the factory. World Vision also arranged one of the national grocery store chains to buy the Green Vision products.

In addition, Green Vision invested in an animal husbandry project. Under this project, members of the VDCs were given various animals such as goats, chickens, and cows. The people were expected to take care of them for two years and return a specific number of animals, including the offspring, to Green Vision. Green Vision reinvested most of its profit to continue these businesses and established a fund to provide scholarships to the children of poor families to continue their education.

World Vision withdrew in phases, transferring its responsibilities to Green Vision. The villagers dreamt of a better future, a future without poverty and the misfortunes of their current life. Through establishing VDCs and, later, a supporting body with capital and broad reach, i.e. Green Vision, World Vision expected to see the continuation of the development process it began. It expected the community to be capable of managing Green Vision and continuing the development process alone after it left.

Despite the good intentions of World Vision to get rid of poverty and empower the community, not only by setting up mechanisms, but also ensuring their continuity and sustainability, the impact of its intervention that I observed in Mahakumbukkadawala is very different. Although, they were organized to face their challenges, people lost their confidence immediately after the withdrawal of World Vision. Even Green Vision could not prevent this slide. Nuwan Samaranayake a founding member and an employee of Green Vision explained:

Actually, we had no reserve capital to continue the investments. When World Vision was in action, it pumped money into Green Vision. Since World Vision left us in 2011, Green Vision went bankrupt. The greatest issue was the lack of awareness of the director board. Of course, they had worked hard in their VDCs, but those experiences were never enough to manage a company. (Author's translation)

Green Vision was established through a bottom-up process. The representatives of the village made all the decisions. It had a strong connection with the community at the grassroots level. In this sense, Green Vision is a mascot for bottom-up development. In practice, Green Vision was unable to protect any of these unique characteristics. As the directors did not have enough experience to manage a company, the position of the Manager was established to help the directors to make practical decisions. Eventually, the Manager became more powerful than the

board and eased into the position of Managing Director. When Green Vision moved away from its original objective of empowerment of the community, World Vision refused to support it. As a result, Green Vision lost its reputation within the community. Once World Vision left Mahakumbukkadawala area, Green Vision became a powerless organization.

People were stuck between two models. The former village institutions, structures, and organizations were largely ignored by the World Vision program. They have deteriorated. From a mainstream development perspective, it is good to replace primitive institutions with modern ones. As evident in the demise of Green Vision, this replacement of these organizations has not happened. So, Mahakumbukkadawala area was left with a mixture of dysfunctional social organizations from its past and those introduced by World Vision.

According to Chandra, one of the founding social mobilizers of the project in Miyallewa village, the people who used to work together are no longer friends; they do not even talk to each other. Adopting new external values, and competing for the resources brought from outside, they have become bitter competitors. Yet the new institutions were unfamiliar to them and they were not able to internalize them. By the time, World Vision left, the old structure, social relationships, and social capital had collapsed, but the new ones were not able to replace them.

In sum, World Vision's development program in Mahakumbukkadawala was highly successful at the beginning. It gave hope to the community, particularly about its development. Although World Vision had aspired for the community to continue the development process after its departure, this proved to be impossible in the absence of World Vision. All of its assumptions about development became fallacious. In fact, the community had become poor and dependent. With the withdrawal of World Vision, the entire dream of development has become distorted and even the village had become unfamiliar to its inhabitants. After three years, while they have some good memories, and some have gained, the community at large is keen to move on rather than talk about that

experiment, although it was a long fifteen years. If this conclusion is transferrable, Nawagattegama will have the same experience.

The Agents of Development

During my fieldwork, I lived with a family in Sankadayagama, a village of thirty-five families comprised of about hundred individuals. A Nawagattegama resident shared what then looked like a strange observation about this village: "People in Sankadayagama," he said, "have a good life. One day we also want to be like them." According to this statement, Sankadayagama has become a development model: even some of its neighbours wish to develop their villages like Sankadayagama. From what I have heard (and not been able to find the exact details), people in Sankadayagama belong to a lower caste and were also discriminated against by the ruling political party for a long time. It did not receive much external aid from international agencies or the government. Hence the question: What turned this village into a model for others to follow? This made me include Sankadayagama in the study.

Sankadayagama was heavily discriminated against by politicians. According to Senaka Dasanayake:

As we are devotees of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party for years, we were labelled as SLFP supporters. When the United National Party (UNP) controlled the country between 1977 and 1994, our village was highly marginalized. During that time, Sankadayagama did not receive any support from the government's development programs. Being ignored by mainstream political activities for over a decade was a great stress for the community. (Author's translation)

UNP supporters in neighbouring communities not only ignored Sankadayagama but also prevented it from benefitting from any government development programs such as infrastructure improvements. Instead, most of these neighbouring communities diverted these projects to their villages and enjoyed the

fruits of development such as electricity and pipe-born water in their villages.

Part of the reason for discrimination was caste related. A villager told me how one of the teachers of his school removed him from his role of offering a garland to a politician who visited the school when the particular teacher realized the kid belonged to a lower caste (see below). Hence, people in Sankadayagama had to achieve everything on their own, overcoming immense negative pressure.

Sankadayagama has created its own destiny. Instead of being frustrated or waiting for external support, it has organized itself to resist the limitations of social opportunities imposed by external agents. They formed their own community organizations to fight against the deprivation of “development.” According to the villagers, the key strength behind the accomplishments of the community is the “Sankadayagama Maranadhara Samithiya” (Sankadayagama Death Benevolent Society), an ordinary organization that is found in any village or neighbourhood (even in work places). It was formed by people to assist its members in the event of death. This raised several questions: How did this ordinary organization become such a progressive force in Sankadayagama? Further, how has death become such an important factor that organizes life in a community?

The *maranadhara samithiya* (hereafter I call it *samithiya*, meaning society) had a very ordinary birth. According to Milton, a founding member, the *samithiya* was formed in the early 1980s at one of their relative’s funeral to assist his family. The purpose was immediate, i.e., to assist villagers in the event of death and funeral services. During the first meeting, villagers elected a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and an executive committee. Everyone agreed to meet on the last Saturday of every month. They also decided to collect a monthly membership fee of LKR 3 (approx. USD 0.02) which has been increased to LKR 30 (USD 0.25) by 2015. Although the *samithiya* was formed to address the issues related with the death, villagers expanded the role of the society to strengthen their lives. Gradually, *samithiya* became a strong community organization.

The present Chairperson Dasanayake shared the trigger point at which the death benevolent society began transforming into a community development organization:

In the early 1980s, there were three families that were relatively more affluent than others. They began to cultivate their paddy fields right at the beginning of the rainy season, using water from the village reservoir. The other villagers were not financially strong enough to begin cultivation immediately after the first rain; they had to wait for some time. By the time they began to cultivate, there was not enough water in the reservoir, since those three families had already taken the bulk of it. The water issue thus became a main topic at the monthly meetings of the *samithiya*. (Author’s translation)

At the beginning, members used to convene every month at one of those above-mentioned three houses, as their large houses have enough room for all the members. When the water issue came for discussion, people noticed that their meeting location could be a constraint to making a balanced decision. Therefore, they built a temporary structure on a piece of land by the village reservoir for meetings. This way the hold of the elite on the *samithiya* reduced. They then took up the water issue for discussion. The elite also realized the injustice of the others not getting enough water to cultivate. They came to an agreement.

Eventually the meeting place became the village ‘community hall’. The community hall was constructed through the collective effort of all members. After the completion of the community hall, the *samithiya* elected a committee from the villagers to address the unequal distribution of water from the reservoir. Since the particular water management committee started to decide on the suitable times to release water for paddy fields, the issue was resolved.

The death benevolent society is not a community development organization, for

there are so many death benevolent societies across the country and most deal with death and funeral related issues. The one in Sankadayagama too was formed to help families who were troubled due to a death in the family.

Yet it was the place where the villagers met, i.e., at funerals; so it was where they talked about the water issue. Although the *samithiya* was not set up to take on the water issue, the villagers transformed it to do so. So, the drive came from within the community. The good faith and the community feeling made the *samithiya* a platform of the villagers to negotiate other issues related to their lives instead of limiting it to matters of death.

As mentioned above, besides the water issue, the mainstream political practice in the country posed a barrier for the community. Because they were continuously rejected by the mainstream political practice starting in 1977, the villagers realized that they could not sustain themselves as individuals, but as a community. People's interest to collaborate with and through the *samithiya* grew stronger. As the villagers looked to the *samithiya* to resolve community issues, the role of the *samithiya* expanded into the area of development. Consequently, instead of waiting for state intervention, the villagers organized a '*shramadana*' (self-help group) through the *samithiya* to address basic issues such as patching up roads.

However, the tables turned in 1994 when the SLFP won a landslide victory in both presidential and parliamentary elections. Since then, Sankadayagama gained priority in most government development programs in the region. The *samithiya* thus took on the (new) role of representing the village to the outside world, including the state, bringing the maximum benefits to the village.

Sankadayagama received electricity in the mid-1990s. As many other villages in the area, Sankadayagama suffered from inadequate drinking water during droughts. In the late-1990s, with the help of the government, a small-scale water pumping station was built in the village to provide drinking water for the households. Even the neighbouring villages use this water.

Sankadayagama was disregarded by the mainstream society not only for supporting the SLFP, but also their caste, which for the neighbouring villagers is lower than theirs. During my study, the villagers did not mention the name of their caste. Dasanayake described his experience as a member of a lower level caste:

Most villagers in my generation were mistreated by the society, due to our caste. Even when I was in the high school in the late 1970s, I was insulted and humiliated by some teachers. Once, three students including myself were selected to welcome guests to a school ceremony. Believe me, in front of the guests one teacher stopped me and took the welcome garland away from me as I belong to a lower caste. (Author's translation)

Since their caste and its consequences were already fixed by the mainstream society, the people in Sankadayagama had to struggle to overcome this burden on their lives. The elders were determined to stop this discrimination at their generation. They discussed the issue several times at the meetings of the *samithiya* and recognized higher education as the best way for their children to overcome the humiliation. The members were thus encouraged to give the best education to their children. Simultaneously, children were encouraged to continue the education and think of it as the only way to earn a dignified life.

The *samithiya* decided on a code of conduct to ensure that the members create a disciplinary and exemplary community for the younger generation. It does not allow anybody to make or sell illicit liquor in the village. There is no prohibition on the consumption of liquor, but nobody is allowed to make noise or disturb others. Moreover, after 7 pm, the villagers are not allowed to play their televisions and radios with high volumes even in their own houses as the loud noise would disturb the children who should concentrate on their studies.

The main success is that most children complete their higher education. A family in Sankadayagama sends their daughter to the

medical college. Although Milton has not studied beyond grade three and cannot read or write, his only son graduated from a national university. According to the Sri Lanka university statistics (2014) it is highly competitive to get into a Sri Lankan national university; only 17.5 percentages of all eligible students are admitted. For the younger generation of Sankadayagama having a university education is a huge achievement. This may or may not work well for the community, but it was the wish of the community, and the results are nearly perfect.

As these examples indicate, Sankadayagama *maranadhara samithiya* is one of the most effective community development organizations, developed from within the community. World Vision introduced the concept of community organization to the people of Mahakumbukkadawala, but it destroyed the unity of the community. Also, the people began to feel poor and the external aid made the community dependent. After World Vision left the area, the VDCs and the Green Vision it created collapsed. Yet the *samithiya* at Sankadayagama kept growing. Although, it was initiated to deal with deaths, the Sankadayagama people changed its role according to their requirements. They were able to change its objectives and lead the organization to achieve their own aspirations of life.

It was the community drive at Sankadayagama that transformed the *samithiya* into a community development organization and made it achieve what it achieved. People trust their own strength over any other external aid. They received some benefits from the government but did not become dependent even on the government; instead they maintained their voices and negotiated with the government. This was precisely what was lost with external aid in Mahakumbukkadawala. Although the people participated in the new structure, especially the VDCs, with great passion, they did not trust in themselves, but in the helping hand of World Vision. In result, the people became dependent; they abandoned the VDCs after the NGO left. Although the VDCs are still functioning in Nawagattagama, there is no guarantee that the people would continue them

in the absence of aid from World Vision similar to the *samithiya* in Sankadayagama.

Conclusions

This study reveals that development is place and community specific. At the most fundamental level, the study reveals the impossibility of applying a universal development model. If this is possible, World Vision would have done it, especially with its good intentions, resources, and the long-term commitment. Yet, at Mahakumbukkadawala, World Vision's intervention destroyed the community, particularly its social capital, and the intended replacements, i.e., the more modern organizations such as VDCs and Green Vision, never flourished, nor did the contractual relationships they espoused, and when World Vision left, the people had become poor, dependent, and helpless.

From the opposite angle, the study demonstrates that development is an inside-out process. Sankadayagama was not only developed without external aid but, when aid began to flow in, the *maranadhara samithiya* negotiated the most appropriate inputs into the village based on the villagers' needs and wants. Unlike in Mahakumbukkadawala where the people could not maintain the VDCs or the Green Vision, Sankadayagama inhabitants developed their own organization from scratch.

Yet Sankadayagama does not offer a transferable model. The key to development was the players, the villagers who took their faith into their hands, not any procedure. The process was not error-free, but significant decisions were made and negotiated at every juncture, with powerful actors such as the elite and organizations such as the state, as in the branch method of Lindblom (1959). There are *maranadhara samithi* everywhere in Sri Lanka, but most do not have comparable achievements of community-development nature. It is not what the *samithiya* brought to the community, but the key is into what the community made the *samithiya*.

Hence the key is the community leaders who emerge from within (not created through structures imposed from outside).

Theoretically, the villagers at Mahakumbukkadawala also could have appropriated the VDCs and Green Vision, but the drive needs to come from within. Without this, external interventions weaken the community.

I also learned a few things about research and knowledge production. Had I confined my research to the two original villages, as in the original research design, I would have never been able to develop this understanding. It was by the accident of living in Sankadayagama and then my advisor asking, “how come Sankadayagama is developed? Can we investigate that also?” that took me on this route.

I also found the *samithiya* by accident; it was never obvious; never easy. If we opt for new findings, we should not religiously follow the original research design, nor should we develop a perfect research design before embarking on fieldwork, as we cannot know our community before research.

If we do, the research design, especially the focus, the framework, and the vantage point will restrict the outcome of the research (See Perera 2016). Keep the research-mind open and alert all the time. It is useful to let the research design “grow” while conducting research and fine-tune it through learning by doing.

Notes

- All participants’ names are pseudonyms.

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ⁱ In Sri Lanka, there are twenty-five administrative districts organized into nine provinces. Further, every district has been divided into administrative sub-units known as Divisional Secretariat Division and administrated by a Divisional Secretary.

ⁱⁱ Well-being of the children is a main concern of World Vision, since the NGO identifies itself as a Christian humanitarian organization (www.worldvision.org) dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice

ⁱⁱⁱ Since 1994, Samurdhi has functioned as a leading government funded program to assist the people live under the poverty line, for instance, income transfer (food and income subsidy), and nutrition package for pregnant and lactating mothers and milk feeding subsidy for children between two and five.