EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES OR CREATING DEPENDENCIES:

PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF A DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IN SRI LANKA

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ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

CBO - Community Based Organizations
DSD - Divisional Secretariat Division
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GNP - Gross National Product
IMF - International Monetary Fund
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
PRA - Participatory Rural Appraisal
PWR - Participatory Wealth Ranking
Rs. – Sri Lankan Rupees
SLFP - Sri Lanka Freedom Party
UNO – United Nations Organization
UNP - United Nationals Party
USAID - United States Agency for International Development
USD – United States Dollar
VDC – Village Development Committee
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Somewhere ... I read about an Eskimo hunter who asked the local missionary priest, “If I did not know about God and Sin, would I go to hell?” “No,” said the priest, “not, if you did not know”. “Then why,” asked the Eskimo earnestly, “did you tell me?”(Dillard, 1974:123).

It is clear that if the Eskimo did not know about God and Sin, then his life would have been more tranquil and, according to the priest, he would not have gone to hell. Since he was exposed to this new knowledge, he must somehow deal with the new reality that it brought about and figure out a way not to go to hell. Poverty is not too different:

While I knew that I did not grow up in a 'rich' family, I never knew that I was very poor until I learned the definition of poverty put forth by economists such as the World Bank. I got the same reaction from many agropastoralists with whom I worked in Africa. ... Local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have said the same thing: many communities did not know that they were poor until development agencies told them so (Nandy, 2004:96 quoted in Singh, 1996:12-13)’.

As the Eskimo had to deal with God and sin, and the psychoanalyst Ashis Nandy faced unexpected poverty, another scenario has disappointed over two thirds of the world population since the Second World War. That scenario is ‘development’:

Since the late 1940s, “development” has become one of the most influential and dominant concepts in global political and economic discourses (Escobar 1995, 1997; Esteva 1992; Kapoor 2008; Sachs 1992, 2010). The entire non-Western world has pursued development at a national scale. As the “developed” nations - The United States of America and West European states - brag about their achievements, the so-called “developing” nations’ struggle to match the former. The predominant theories and practices of development focus on
infusing specific communities with industrial culture, thereby increasing their technological capacities, and their capitalist work ethic that supports it. Instead of being appreciative of the lives of their citizens, aftermath of decolonization, most non-Western states plunged into a competition for wealth and power. Moreover, an institutional culture, which has developed with the discourse, operates freely across national boundaries. Global organizations such as the United Nations Organization (UNO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) provide development aid to developing countries and expect the entire globe to be developed according to Western standards one day. Apart from these organizations, many Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) also joined the development industry to promote the notion of development, but operating outside the nation state.

Sri Lanka - an island in the northern Indian Ocean, located south of India - is not an exception. Since the country gained political independence in 1948, development has become one of the broadly used terms in Sri Lanka. Since the 1950s, there were many elections and the government shifted several times. All political parties that contested the elections made fashionable promises using buzzwords such as progress, improvement and, ultimately, development. Constantly, the political authorities and the bureaucrats who assumed themselves as development experts asked the people to believe in “development” as a potential future achievement the success of which depends on the people’s commitment and sacrifice in the present. Many development projects launched since independence include the Mahaweli Development Project, Sri Lanka’s largest-ever single development project. The Mahaweli Development Project primarily aimed to harness the water resources of the country’s longest river, the Mahaweli, and six allied river basins (Perera, 2010). Therefore, the project
included the construction of six massive dams, large reservoirs, and new agriculture based settlements to relocate a larger number of families from various parts of the country. Begun in the early 1960s, most large structures such as dams and canals were constructed under the Accelerated Mahaweli Project in the 1980s. Through this project, the government expected to achieve a massive growth in the agricultural production and more than double the hydro-electricity production of the country. Characteristically, the Mahaweli Development Project depended on foreign capital, knowledge, and direction (ibid). Although, this project makes a considerable contribution to the country’s economy, it has not achieved the targeted development, i.e., to move the country from the developing to developed nation category, or even make it self-sufficient in rice and electric power production.

Apart from that, dominant global organizations like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), have launched several development programs to elevate the country to the state of so-called developed. In 1954, the World Bank gave its first development aid of US$ 19.10 million to Ceylon (Sri Lanka from 1972) to construct a storage dam across the Kehelgamu River, adding 25,000 kw per year of hydropower to the national grid (World Bank, 2013). Since then the World Bank has become one of the largest development partners of the country. Currently (in 2014), it is funding $1.068 billion on thirteen different ongoing development projects in the country; these include Metro Colombo Urban Development Project, Sri Lanka - Second Health Sector Development Project, and North East Local Services Improvement Project (NELSIP). The World Bank is not alone; the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has been functioning in Sri Lanka since 1967. During the last six decades, UNDP has engaged in
community-based development programs such as establishing productive livelihoods in the rural sector, organizing community empowerment programs, and upgrading small-scale infrastructures.

Although, many actors engage in development projects, which promise large national-scale results, it is questionable whether Sri Lanka has achieved the expected development and prosperity. More importantly, it is questionable whether the sixty-years of external support have actually improved the quality of life of the people of the country. This gives rise to a significant questions: How do these external involvements in the name of development affect communities and individuals? Do these involvements have the honest intentions of encouraging people to meet their own aspirations? From their vantage points, how do people experience and respond to these external initiatives?

The Issue(s)

In mid-2009, immediately after my undergraduate studies, I was employed by a project consultancy group as a member of their survey team that worked for the well-known international NGO: World Vision. Since 1977, World Vision has been focusing on children, sustainability, participatory and area-based development. World Vision delivers its services to economically weak communities: It first selects a Divisional Secretariat Division, and then identifies communities within it (villages, in rural areas) with a larger number of people under the poverty line. In these areas, World Vision carries out Area Development Programs (ADPs)

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1 This consultancy group was made up of two faculty members of the University of Moratuwa where I completed my undergraduate degree.

2 This is as administrative sub-unit in Sri Lanka.
the purpose of which is to develop and empower these selected communities. The normal life span of an ADP is 12 to 15 years; once the project is completed, World Vision moves onto another location to initiate a new ADP.

The survey team had two main tasks: First, to conduct awareness sessions about the ‘good governance principles’ for communities in two selected divisional secretariat areas: Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama. Both these are located in rural areas, in close proximity. The second task was to conduct a feedback-survey measuring the satisfaction of the people in above villages in regard to the services provided by World Vision. In Mahakumbukkadawela, World Vision had provided a water supply network, sanitary facilities for households, houses, education supplies for children, and leadership training for community members for almost fifteen years. World Vision has only been for one year in Nawagattegama, but had provided some sanitary facilities for a few households and education supplies for children and project was just beginning.

During preliminary visits, some people in Mahakumbukkadawela told the survey team that they are unable to continue their lives without the assistance of World Vision. In Nawagattegama, however, the people did not need any special assistance to survive. I wondered whether development aid had made Mahakumbukkadawala people dependent, i.e., as opposed to the objective of empowering the community.

The key question is: does the discourse of development which reaches ground in terms of development projects empower communities or make them dependent particularly, how did people live before the NGO arrived? Is it a matter of time before Nawagattegama people will also become dependent? In this context, does development aid cause dependency and
impoverishment? Then, what exactly makes people dependent? Are people manipulating dependency on their own? These questions inspired me to focus my graduate thesis on “development” and its impact on the communities, particularly the World Vision projects in Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama.

The Project

This research project focuses on three main concerns: development, dependency, and empowerment. ‘Development’ refers to the ‘dominant discourse of development’ that spans from intellectual debates to institutional practices, since World War II. This is viewed from the side of the creators and practitioners of the discourse, particularly focusing on World Vision. In order to elaborate the idea of ‘dependency’, this project explores discusses how the development discourse and its dominant representations make communities dependent on external assistance and development aid. ‘Empowerment’ is viewed from the people’s end; it is argued that empowerment is an inherent achievement, which develops people from within rather than only being possible with outside aid. Further, the research focuses on what development and empowerment are meant to the people of these villages. For this reason, this project incorporates a third village that was not a part of World Vision work: Sankadayagama. The research considers how above concepts influence the villagers in Mahakumbukkadawela, Nawagattegama, and Sankadayagama. It focuses on how the villagers encounter these concepts in their everyday lives.

The research will examine the notion of development adopted by World Vision and its effects at the community level, particularly examining whether World Vision’s involvement
empowers or makes communities dependent on aid. The third village, Sankadayagama is located three miles away from Nawagattema and ten miles from Mahakumbukkadawela. Compared to most of its neighboring villages Sankadayagama does not receive external assistance from any NGO. Therefore, this village is included into the discourse as one that has sustained itself independently, without any external assistance.

Moreover, this research examines the significance of these three villages in terms of how the people in these villages appreciate the discourse of development in their everyday life. Based on empirical studies, the research perceives development discourse through the people’s vantage point. Further, it deliberates how the concept of development and local (indigenous) knowledge has crossbred in practice. Instead of (simply) assuming that people become mere victims or dependents of the dominant institutional practices and projects, this research accentuates the peoples’ agency in involving mainstream development practices.

The Research Methodology

The research has two major components:

1. The review of scholarly literature in order to understand the concept of development, its practices, failures, and achievements

2. Fieldwork in the above three villages to understand the people’s perspective and practice of development.
Literature Review

The literature review of this thesis lays the analytical framework for the research. Moreover, it will provide a deep insight into the development discourse, allowing for greater understanding of what occurred in those villages. It focuses on the following concerns of the concept of development:

a. The metaphorical usage of the term ‘development’ during the pre-World War II period

b. The emergence and the transformation of the concept of development between early post World War II and the end of Cold War. It focuses on the generalization of the image of development, modernization theory, the critique of the dependency school, and the world-systems perspective.

c. Post-development discourse. The discussion goes deep into the argument that Wolfgang Sachs (1992) brings into discussion and Arturo Escobar (1995) further elaborates, i.e., development is an intentionally constructed discourse by professionals, experts, institutions, and the leaders of the so-called developed world to continue their domination over the rest of the world.

d. Apart from these readings, the literature review draws on alternative readings about the concept of development by scholars such as Amartya Sen (1999) and Ganesh Devy (2005).

e. Further, it brings the ideas of key postcolonial theories such as orientalism, subaltern agency, and the third space into the discussion in order to understand the new paradigms about the concept of development.
The literature review will thus examine the development discourse, explore compatible examples from other times and places, and develop an analytical framework to conduct fieldwork and to use in interpreting the observations.

**Fieldwork**

Fieldwork of this project was conducted in Mahakumbukkadawala, Nawagattegama, and Sankadayagama in two phases. The first phase was from March to May of 2013. The second phase of field study was conducted in May-June 2014. Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama were selected because they were location of World Vision programs. The NGO had carried out a development program for fifteen years in Mahakumbukkadawala until 2009. Its Nawagattegama project began in 2008 and is considered one of the best ADPs of the World Vision. In contrast to these two areas, the third, Sankadayagama is not a divisional secretariat area, but a village with thirty-five families. It has no direct connection with any external development agency. However, the villagers in Sankadayagama have formed their own association to make decisions regarding welfare activities of the village.

During fieldwork, I resided in one of the villager’s houses in Sankadayagama. Apart from the standard social research methods such as field observations and in-depth interviews, I employed the method of ‘living in-experience’ to study Sankadayagama. Instead of being an outside researcher, I expected to enrich my insights into the villagers’ lives by becoming ‘one of them’. This method, one that depended on lived experience and close interactions was introduced by an eminent anthropologists, Nandasena Ratnapala (1976), during his research on the ‘beggars’ in Sri Lanka in 1976. This method is different from the well-known participant
observation: Usually, in participant observation, the researcher frames her/his observations to the research hypothesis. Ratnapala states:

While in the participant observation method you become a participant and an observer without forgetting the fact that you are a researcher and an observer … In a research where you become a participant observer, you chose your problem and have a conscious or unconscious structure of observation that is like the one in the script (1999: xxvii-xxix).

In contrast, lived experience helps the researcher to observe more than what s/he expects to see in the field and branch off in new directions. The best option to understand development from the people’s vantage point was to live with them.

This method made me more humble. During the three weeks period in Sankadayagama I became a friend of most of the villagers. All the elders used to call me putha (son) and their children used to call me as ayya (elder brother) or malli (younger brother). This is common in Sri Lanka, but was not sure whether I could become an ‘insider’, whether the villagers will accept me as one of them, that fast. When some of their relatives or a friend came from another village and asked about me, Sankadayagama villagers introduced me as ‘me ape kenek’ (he is one of us). This way, living in-experience offered me a great access to understanding of people’s perception about development, both the discourse and practice, from their subjective point of view. It afforded me an in-depth experience of the daily routines of the villagers in Sankadayagama.

However, I could not apply the same method in the other two locations due to time limitations and they are also relatively larger than Sankadayagama. In Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama, I conducted semi-structured interviews in Sinhalese (local language). I interviewed around thirty residents of both areas from a mixed combination of gender,
religious, and class backgrounds. During my interviews, I focused on individuals from following categories: members of World Vision beneficiary families, former and existing local representatives of World Vision, i.e., the people who had worked with or for World Vision as grass root level agents, and the villagers who have not engaged with World Vision activities or programs.

Apart from the residents of these three places, I interviewed some executives, program officers, and field officers of World Vision. At this point, I relied on networks that I had established during my consultancy works for World Vision in 2009. At the end of the empirical study, I transcribed the interviews.

During the second phase of the fieldwork in 2014, I revisited above areas with the findings of my study. Before, I concluded the study I wanted to share my findings with the people who I met during my first visit. This way, I filled some gaps in my knowledge and checked the findings of the research with the people.

The organization of the thesis:

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter two examines the concept of development. It discusses the origin of the notion of development and emergence of an institutional culture to continue development as one of the most dominant discourses in the world. Further, it argues how the West and these institutions dominate non-Western nations under the rubric of development. Chapter three examines the notion of development that was adopted by World Vision in Mahakumbikkadawala and Nawagattegama areas and how World Vision aims to bring development to the people through formation of Village Development
Committees (VDC) in every village. It argues how people in above areas become a part (maybe victims) of the development discourse through World Vision’s development approach. Chapter four examines social issues that Sankadayagama people suffered for decades. It demonstrates how they used the Death Benevolent Society in their village as the mean to overcome these barriers and empowered the villagers. Concluding the thesis, chapter five, outlines significant differences between the perception of development between the World Vision and the people in Sankadayagama. It argues that it is difficult to export development as an achievement but needs to grow from within.
CHAPTER 2
THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

This thesis focuses on development. Yet it is a loaded concept, which is impossible to neither define nor explain in a few words. Laying the foundation for the rest of the thesis, this opening section discusses the origin, transformation, and the dominant representations of the concept of development.

The *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines development as “the process of developing or being developed” (2011: 392). As a verb, it is to ‘grow or cause to grow and become more mature, advanced, or elaborate’. In this sense, development is a maturing process and continuous growth. The foremost belief about development in the contemporary social sphere is its pivotal (perhaps the only) role to bring about prosperity and well-being for societies across the world.

Development as a Metaphor

Until the concept of development was ‘baptized’ as a hegemonic design of the United States authorities in the late-1940s, the term was mostly used in natural sciences to describe a process of improvement or the growth of objects or organisms. Describing the epistemology of the term Gustavo Esteva (1992) indicates that development, especially during the nineteenth century, development was used as a metaphorical term to explain the natural growth of plants and animals. After Charles Darwin (1859) published his well-known thesis, *On the Origin of Species*, he describes the ‘theory of evolution’ of species and humankind, both terms ‘evolution’ and ‘development’ were used interchangeably by scientists (Esteva, 1992).
Apart from the natural sciences, classical economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo also provided a background to the concept of development (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). They focused on emerging economic practices in contemporary Europe: i.e., capitalism. They mostly addressed social and political issues and theorized the practice in the extant society from an economic perspective. These theories laid the foundation for some of the hegemonic development theories of the mid-twentieth century.

The well-known cleric and political-economist Thomas R. Malthus (1798) mapped out the relationship between the growth of population and production of food. Based on his observations, he argued that the existing resources, especially the food supply, will not grow at the same rate as the population and it will cause a crisis of food and other resources. In his thesis *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, he elaborated his idea about population and growth:

The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race. The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction, and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array, and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world (Malthus, 1798, Reprint 1985, p. 118).

Malthus's thinking was highly debated, especially after the industrial revolution, which boosted production. During that time, a huge demand for labor emerged all over Europe. While Malthus emphasized the growth of population as causing pressure on the production system and the national economy, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels saw people as a great asset to the production process. For them, labor is what produces value. They emphasize that the economic
prosperity (of the capitalist economy) depends on labor. Criticizing Malthus’s principle, Engels (1844) portrays Malthus’s hypothesis of population growth and production of food as,

The crudest, most barbarous theory that ever existed, a system of despair which struck down all those beautiful phrases about love thy neighbour and world citizenship.

Engels (1844) further argues that the increase in population would not be a problem because the enhancement of science would provide adequate food production for that population. Although, Malthusianism has been heavily criticized as a ruthless and obsolete principle, Malthus’s argument has influenced many popular topics (even at present) in the field of development such as “carrying capacity”, and “limitation of resources”.

Besides these classical political economists, the concept of development becomes the central category in Marx’s works. In the chapter “Development” in The Development Dictionary (1992), Esteva highlights “both the Hegelian concept of history and the Darwinist concept of evolution were interwoven in development, reinforced with the scientific aura of Marx”(pp 4). Following Darwin’s theory of evolution, Marx developed his argument based on the necessity of (a linear) evolution of biological species (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). According to Marx, the greater the achievement [or the development] of humankind, the closer to a (ideal) communist society, or a stateless human society.

Contemporary European cultural, political, and economical transformations were the basis of this thinking. The industrial revolution in Europe caused the rejection of many conventional beliefs, rituals, and many theories in contemporary Europe. On the one hand, the industrial revolution challenged to the existing feudal social and economic system. On the other hand, it made a huge impact on the intellectual arena by producing new knowledge. At the end
of the nineteenth century, there was a massive attraction of population to urban centers of countries and urbanization became widespread all over Europe. During the particular period, the term development combined with the urbanization process formed the term ‘urban development’ (Esteva, 1992). Although the notion of development was discussed in many disciplines, it still did not succeed in establishing the generalized (hegemonic) image that is associated with the world since World War II.

**Universalization of the Notion of Development**

Since the end of World War II, the entire non-Western world has pursued development at national scale, highly focusing on the growth of national income. After Harry Truman, the President of the United States of America introduced it, in his inaugural address in 1949; development became a dominant term in social discourse³ (Esteva 1992, Escobar 1994). According to Esteva (1992) through his speech, Truman opened a new era of human history: the ‘era of development’. Europe was rebuilt immediately after World War II. It was the Marshall Plan that helped the transformation of many European cities from rubble to modern cities. The Truman Doctrine proclaimed science, technology, and capital as the main ingredients of development, and that the ‘American Dream’ of peace and abundance could be extended to all peoples on the planet (Escobar 1994: 3 - 4).

In his speech, Truman highlighted poverty and lack of modern scientific knowledge as the main obstacles to the development of people, communities and nations in the world. Those

³ Although development became more popular after the President Truman’s inaugural speech, the concept was already politicized under President Woodrow Wilson’s period. At the same period, Vladimir Lenin as the first president in USSR also mentioned the importance of progress and economic development.
states with such obstacles came to be known as developing nations. According to this doctrine, development is only possible through the enhancement of technology and capital investment (from outside, mainly developed nations). The Truman doctrine, i.e., achieving rapid economic progress through a substantial technological and industrial enhancement and external capital investment, defined the modern (post war) discourse of development. Development became a central goal for every nation which did not have access to expensive technology.

The concept of development is predicated fundamentally on the notion of economic growth. In the early 20th century, the British (and larger European) hegemony had declined and the USA has emerged as the new world hegemon (Wallerstein, 1974). In this context, the Truman doctrine nourished the idea that the USA is the world’s leader; it also cultivated the idea of development into a dominant discourse to ensure US hegemony. Multinational agencies such the World Bank, the IMF, and the UNO undertook to “continue and spread out” this discourse all over the world.

**Modernization Theory**

During the 1950s and 1960s, economic growth and modernization through scientific and technological advancements became the most influential ideology of development. Interpreting the particular circumstance, Norman Long (1992) reveals the idea of modernization as one that ‘visualizes development in terms of a progressive movement towards technologically more complex and integrated forms of “modern” society’ (Long and Long, 1992: 18, cited in Gardner and Lewis, 1996:12). According to this visualization, developing nations were urged to believe in industrialization as the only way to approach the well-being of the entire nation. Further, the
mainstream development practice asked them to leave behind their traditional beliefs, rituals, economic policies, and education methods and enter an era of modernization. In this context, scholars, professionals, and economists came up with theories and different perspectives to “support” this discourse.

Based on the theory of evolution, modernization has been theorized as a linear, historical process of transformation. According to modernization theorists, Northern nations are generally better than the poor neighbors in the South and it assumes that all countries will eventually experience economic growth (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). In the vein of industrialization, transition from subsistence/traditional agriculture to cash crops and urbanization also became key principles of the theory of modernization.

The well-known neoclassical economist, Walt W. Rostow (1960) brought the idea of ‘stages of growth’ into the discourse. To develop his model, Rostow takes the Western nations and their economies as the model of development for the entire world. He organizes economic transformation of a nation into five distinct stages. He uses this five state model to illustrate the economic evolution of history from an agrarian society to the modern era through the industrialization and the enhancement of technology. He argues that through technological advancements, it is possible for underdeveloped nations to propel an economic “take-off”, moving them from their exiting traditional and poor economic condition to a modern and matured stage.

According to Rostow (1960), all nations will eventually develop, and the whole planet will be industrialized one day. Most notably, Rostow believes that economic growth can characterize a whole society (Esteva 2001:29). Also, the national economies are independent of
each other and the development trajectories are national. Each country can develop independent of others and the failure of one nation to develop does not affect another.

However, the idea of modernization and economic independence has been criticized as an ethnocentric, Western-biased theory, and homogenizing of non-Western societies. Katy Gardner and David Lewis (1996) further elaborate this point: “by presenting all countries as being on the same linear path, they [the modernization theorists] completely neglect historical and political factors which have made the playing very far from level’ (Gardner and Lewis, 1996:15).

Dependency Theory

As mentioned above, the idea of economic independence (proposed by the modernization theorists) was heavily criticized by scholars who studied the causes of the ‘backwardness’ of Latin American economies. These critics were collectively identified as the Dependency School. Dependency theory developed in the mid-1960s under the leadership of Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Cordoso, and Enzo Faletto (Kapoor, 2009). In fact, dependency theorists – who were influenced by Marxism – were the first group of scholars to explain development in terms of political and historical structures (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). The key attention of dependency theorist goes to the economy and capitalism, especially the exploitative nature of the capitalist mode of production. The central argument of dependency theory is that economic inequality is shaped by global capitalist development. It arises within a structuralist and socioeconomic perception of perceiving development (Kapoor, 2009).
Frank (1967) came up with a radical insight into underdevelopment. He criticizes the idea that people of underdeveloped countries are responsible for the failures of their societies to develop. In his celebrated thesis *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, Frank (1967) stresses that ‘Economic development and underdevelopment are the opposite faces of the same coin’ (p. 09). According to Frank, the so called “underdeveloped” countries were created and sustained by the developed (core) states as part of their development process. The underdevelopment of peripheral states (economies) is a part of the same process of development of the core states. Furthermore, he argues that the peripheral nations are intentionally kept underdeveloped because the core states require cheap raw materials, labor and new markets for their products (Frank 1967). This process of underdevelopment, according to him, began with the beginnings of modern slavery and colonialism in the 1500s and still continues through the Western dominance in trade and market activities. At the beginning, Western states used weapons to conquer other societies and to hold them as colonies. Even after they became politically independent, the West continues to control the world economy. Therefore, neither the core nor the peripheral nations could survive independently; they necessarily depend on each other, but the disadvantage goes to the periphery.

Further elaborating the idea of dependency Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) proposes the ‘world-systems perspective’; he views the core and peripheral nations as forming a single political-economy, organized around a single division of labor, which he calls the capitalist world-economy. Wallerstein asserts the world economy emerged in the long-16th century in Europe (1450s – 1650s). By the late 1850s, he affirms that every country of the world had become a part of the world-system. According to Frank (1967), communities, which are not a
part of this system, can be ‘undeveloped’, but not ‘underdeveloped’, for underdevelopment happens as part of the development process of the West. For Wallerstein (1974), before the incorporation into the world-system, the societies are in the ‘external arena.’ After the incorporation, no state can completely give up the Western influence (control and exploitation) at will and achieve its (independent) national development. Whatever development takes place, occurs as part of the larger world-economy.

Dependency theory deeply criticizes the idea of modernization, but still argues that underdevelopment is unavoidable. The only way out they propose is a radical structural change: delinking from the core states or a revolution (as Marx proposed) to liberate the underdeveloped nations from this depraved reality. At the same time, it tends to treat the peripheral states and their populations as passive, being blind to everything but their exploitation (Gardner and Lewis, 1996, Kapoor, 2009). Moreover, dependency theorists have not given attention to culture and representation.

Simultaneously, dependency theory is unable to overcome ethnocentrism in its historical analysis. Although, it criticizes the West, dependency theorists still consider Europe as a universal model. Since it is too much biased towards economistic explanations and is partial to totalizing narratives, dependency theory is unable to encounter non-economic issues such as ‘gender’ and ‘race’. When it comes to power relations, dependency limits or elides the power of imperialism and capitalism (Kapoor, 2009). Moreover, it is prone to erasing sociocultural and political difference(s). This totalizing process of dependency theorists’ portray the Third World ‘as passive bystanders ... with no will or ken to resist it’ (Ibid: 12).
The modernization theory and the dependency theory are built upon completely different political and economic ideologies. Moreover, there are some overlaps: Both theories are structured on a linear evolutionary process, which is heading toward a great economic progress for the people. At the same time, both theories assume this progress is only achievable through a ‘top-down’ change that comes from the state to the people. Although these theories were most active until the 1990s, they were unable to provide a viable paradigm for the understanding of poverty and inequality in the developing world. Therefore, both modernization and dependency theories are considered ‘out of fashion’ in more recent intellectual debates.

**The End of the Forty Years Journey**

The 1990s began with many revolutionary changes in the political, economic, cultural, and geographical affairs of the world. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) collapsed in 1989, the Cold War between two opposing socioeconomic systems had come to a close, and the clash between the capitalist world and the communist world had come to an end.

Remarkably, some intellectuals argued that the (hegemonic) development discourse is almost dead, because its founding premises have been outdated by history (Sachs, 1992; Esteva, 1992; Escobar, 1995, 1997; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). They further claim that the USA may still feel that it is running ahead of other countries, but it is clear now that the race is leading towards an abyss (ibid). In his edited volume *The Development Dictionary*, Wolfgang Sachs (1992) analyses the key concepts, the principles of the development discourse such as market, planning, poverty, progress, equality, etc. Each chapter indicates the transformation of
those concepts from the 1950s to the current day. Also, it clearly emphasizes how those key principles fail to meet their original objectives. Sachs (1992) begins *The Development Dictionary* by declaring the death of the concept of development:

The last forty years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary. The lighthouse of development was erected right after the Second World War. Following the breakdown of the European colonial powers, the United States found an opportunity to give worldwide dimensions to the mission their founding fathers had bequeathed to them: to be the ‘beacon on the hill’... Today, the lighthouse shows cracks and is starting to crumble. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes, have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work (Sachs, 1992:01).

The post-development scholars argue that the supposed benefits of the original idea of development through modernization are largely an illusion. In reality, many parts of the world are still unable to meet those proposed benefits of economic growth, technological advancements, and scientific-rationality (Sachs, 1992; Escobar, 1995; Gardner and Lewis, 1996, Collier, 2007; Kapoor 2006). However, most of the workers in the development industry are still unable to give up this illusionary concept of development. This is because most of them are not interested in problematizing the discourses within which they work; their livelihood and identity depends on it. Therefore, they still continue the discourse with their practice (Gardner and Lewis, 1996).
Development as a Discourse

A key argument made by post-development thinkers is that development is a deliberately constructed discourse to maintain the so-called Third World as a development zone of the West. Elaborating this position, Arturo Escobar (1995) has encapsulated his ideas about development in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Employing Michel Foucault’s ideas of power, knowledge, and discourse, Escobar criticizes the larger edifice of Western ideas that supports development. He argues that the development discourse continues through dominant representations and prevailing institutional cultures that create the relationship between the West and the Third World. According to him, the West, especially the USA, discovered mass poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America during the early post World War II period. Based on their discovery, the “West” came up with a mechanism to manage so-called poverty in the Third World. Even they defined their intervention in the Third World as an involvement to eradicate social issues. He argues that the West’s real intention was not to help the Third World to overcome its problems, but to reassert its moral and cultural superiority in supposedly post-colonial times (Henry, 2012).

Therefore, Escobar argues

‘... poverty became an organizing concept and the object of a new problematization. ... That the essential trait of the Third World was its poverty and that the solution was economic growth and development became self-evident, necessary, and universal truths’ (Escobar, 1995: 24).

Escobar characterizes three main elements that make up the discourse of development: 1) the process of capital formation, 2) a series of cultural considerations, and 3) the creation of institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and USAID to facilitate the smooth operation of the First World. According to Escobar, the development discourse is not simply the collection of the
above elements, but a system of relations established among them. For him, the idea is encapsulated in the belief that cultural, social, and political progresses are only achieved through material advancements. At the same time, development discourse is not a single or individual phenomenon but ‘... a system of relations ... [that] ... establishes a discursive practice’ (1995:45). This particular ‘discursive practice’ of development comes through newly formed international organizations, government offices in distinct capitals, universities and research centers in developed countries and institutions in Third World countries. In reality, these ‘experts’ involved in ‘abnormalizing’ the normality of development would then be the same team coming up with the treatment and solutions to the problems and reforms created by them.

When compared to other paradigms (modernization and dependency theory), Escobar’s argument of development as a discourse is more sophisticated and radical. He goes beyond the analysis of mainstream development practice or a critique of the existing structures, actors, and the institutions of development. Describing the controversial nature of the development discourse, he argues that development planning was not only a problem due to its failures, but was a problem even when it succeeded: so strongly set the terms for how people in poor countries should live.

Even though the development discourse has experienced several structural changes during last six decades, its original form of the discourse has not changed. Escobar writes:

... although the discourse has gone through a series of structural changes, the architecture of the discursive formation laid down in the period 1945-1955 has remained unchanged, allowing the discourse to adapt to new conditions. The result has been the succession of development strategies and sub strategies up to the present, always within the confines of the same discursive space (1995:42).
However, I see Escobar’s above statement as a pessimistic conclusion about the future (destiny) of the developing world. It is because he sees the conceptualization within the dominant development discourse of the people of the developing world as helpless, and also in front of the hegemonic representations of the developed nations and dominant institutional practices. Escobar sees the development discourse as an unavoidable fate, which keeps the developing nations in the status of underdeveloped. He exposes the real intentions of construction of the development discourse, which is to continue the Western hegemony perpetually through the victimization of developing nations. However, he has no sense of appreciation about the peoples’ response in the developing world to this hegemonic discourse. Therefore, I think it is essential to look for other directions, alternative perspectives, new insights, and paradigms of development to understand the concept of development beyond the development discourse.

**Reading Development through a Postcolonial Lens**

Development discourse has an unbreakable connection with colonialism. The history of development discourse has strongly combined with the history of European colonialism. As Gardner and Lewis (1996) mention during the contemporary era of development there are no such dichotomies as ‘primitive’ and ‘civilized’, but rather contemporary equivalents in the notions of ‘underdeveloped’ and ‘developed’ or ‘peripheral’ and ‘core’ nations.

Therefore, first, it is important to briefly discuss the association between colonialism and development in order to uncover the construction of global unevenness in the era of colonialism and its continuation through the privileging of the West in the subsequent era of
development. At the beginning of his Preface to Frantz Fanon’s (1963) celebrated thesis *Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre (1961) writes ‘not so long ago the Earth numbered 2 billion inhabitants, i.e., 500 million men and 1.5 billion "natives." The first possessed the Word, the others borrowed it’ (1961: xliii). According to the European colonizers, natives in their colonies across the world were uncivilized; many times, cannibals. This was the basis for their civilizing mission. In reality, those ‘civilized’, ‘rational thinking’ colonizers continuously exploited those uncivilized natives in the name of civilization. Mostly, it was ruthless and many natives lost their lives during this period. For instance, Léopold II (1835-1909), as the king of Belgium, carried out his colonization mission in Congo in the name of the ‘sacred mission of civilization’. The mission led to the loss of over ten million “native” lives (Watkins, 2013).

However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the situation of the colonized areas, especially in the British colonies, was upgraded due to the policy transformation of the British government. Further describing this idea in 1939, Britain transformed its Law of Development of the Colonies into the Law of Development and Welfare of the Colonies (Esteva 1992). A ‘dual mandate’ of development and welfare came into play in the British colonies till the end of World War II.

After World War II, most European colonies were granted political independence. In fact, it was during this period that the concept of development was staged by the USA. While Truman was launching the concept of development, he clearly distinguished development from colonialism; ‘The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a program of development based on the concept of democratic fair dealing’ (Esteva 1992: 06).
However, the reality was completely different. When U.S. President Truman declared the ‘era of development’, concurrently the ‘era of underdevelopment’ was also declared. Explaining this repulsive nature of development discourse, Esteva (1992) states ‘... [Instead of development] underdevelopment began, then on January 20, 1949. On that day, two billion people become underdeveloped’ (1992:7). Notably, before the mid-twentieth century, almost all of these underdeveloped states were European colonies. Suddenly, they were labeled ‘underdeveloped’ in the era of development. Describing the particular circumstance Fanon (1961) states;

‘The formerly colonized territory is now turned into an economically dependent country. The former colonizer, which has kept intact and, in some cases, reinforced its colonial marketing channels, agrees to inject small doses into the independent nation’s budget in order to sustain it’ (55).

In reality, a new form of colonization began with development. What happened was that after the identification of the level of civilization with the level of production, the above-mentioned dual mandate collapsed into one: that is development.

Second, postcolonial studies provides a framework to understand development discourse and its dominant politics, cultural values, and practice through initiating a debate with other developmental theories and studies discussed above, in this chapter. To continue this discussion, I primarily employ Ilan Kapoor’s (2008) *The Postcolonial Politics of Development* as the framework for understanding. In his book, Kapoor endeavors to understand mainstream development practice and its dominant representations through a postcolonial perspective.

As indicated above, the West had created the problem of underdevelopment in the Third World and then came up with solutions to address them. According to Kapoor (2008), these solutions are usually referred to as ‘development policies’ developed and implemented
through the development industry. These development policies focus on four areas: basic needs, structural adjustment, good governance, and human rights. These policies are based upon the West’s industrialization experience and prioritize economic growth in the Third World. Although policy formulation seems like a pure ‘technical process’, Kapoor argues that it is highly influenced by the Western cultural experience. Through the policy formulation process, it has homogenized the Third World and ignored the rich diversity and the priorities of the societies so combined into a single group.

Moreover, ‘structural adjustment’ is also a cultural and discursive concept. It has been developed on the assumption that the Third World is in the ‘pre-modern past’ and the West is the ‘modern present’ (Ibid: 26). Furthermore, ‘good governance,’ the third major development policy, is defined according to the governance model in the West. Therefore, the donors in the West have become the arbitrators of good and bad governance in the non-West. ‘Human rights,’ the fourth policy, plays a vital role in the development mainstream. In reality, human rights are not derived from universal human nature, but from Western laws. Instead of the promotion of universal rights, Kapoor emphasizes how the entire approach simply is to ‘universalize’ Western legal traditions.

Apart from the policies, ‘development aid⁴’ from Western countries plays an essential role in mainstream development. Kapoor (2008) argues the generosity of development aid from the developed nations and the dominant institutions such as World Bank and IMF. He argues that the concept of (foreign) aid is directly associated with concepts like nationalism. Most

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⁴ Mostly these aid can be divided into two main categories: 1) Bilateral aid, transferred from one government to another; 2) Multilateral aid which involves a number of different donors acting in combination (Gardner and Lewis, 1996).
Western nations involved in the aid industry construct their own national identities as generous nations. He refers to Homi Bhabha’s perception of nationalism and argues that most Western donor countries build their national identity as generous nations through helping Third World nations. The aid industry creates a gap between the donors and recipients; the donor nations as “us” and the recipients as “others”. In fact, development aid positions those recipients-others as subordinates, less competent and ultimately underdeveloped. Indeed, the aid discourse does not exist in isolation but in relation to the larger development discourse. Further elaborating this argument Kapoor points out that most of the development aid is not real gifts to develop the Third World, but tools that create a gap between self and other; i.e., the West and the Third World.

Besides understanding mainstream development practices through a postcolonial perception, Kapoor (2008) generates a debate between development theories such as dependency theory and Escobar’s ideas and postcolonial theory. As indicated, most development theories deeply focus on economic concepts like ‘exploitation’ and ‘capital’ and the political dominance of the developed nations over the developing world.

There are some significant overlaps between some development theories and postcolonial theory. Both the dependency theory and the postcolonial theory are essentially anti-modernization theories. Both theories criticize Western superiority over the rest of the world. Most significantly, both theories urge their beneficiaries to focus on the ‘periphery’ nations instead of the ‘core’ nations.

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5 According to Babha, nationalism is the persistence ‘attempt by nationalist discourses ... to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress’ (1991:1). Elaborating Babha’s idea, Kapoor argues that ‘Nationalism is ... about constructing a single, master narrative that elides the cultural and social pluralism that makes up any nation. Faced with contradiction, the tendency of nationalist forces is to deny it, to suppress or repress anything that does not fit with the politico-cultural unity necessary for the nation’ (2008:86).
There are some significant differences between development and postcolonial theories. When compared to development theorists, postcolonial scholars focus on the ‘culture’ and ‘representation’ of people, mainly the colonized. Escobar (1995), for example, portrays the developing world as a mere construction of the development discourse. According to him, the idea of developing world is to provide identity to the non-western nations within the dominant representations and the institutional practices of the West. In other words, the inhabitants in the developing world have been made subordinates of the developed world in this subject position. Dominating the non-West by attributing an identity on them is a deep concern for postcolonial theory. In Orientalism, Edward Said (1978) articulates the construction of the ‘Orient’ and the stereotype of the East. He describes Orientalism as a ‘Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the orient’ (1978: 48). Further, he argues that orientalism characterizes Westerners as rational, peaceful, liberal, and logical. At the same time, the people in the East are projected as irrational, degenerate, primitive, mystical, suspicious, and sexually depraved beings. The development discourse is influenced by this ‘othering process’ of the non-Western ‘other’.

There is a significant conflict between the works of the dependency theorists and postcolonial scholars. 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. Since the dependency theory segregates the world simply into two broad categories as core and peripheral nations, it is unable to appreciate the socio-cultural and political diversity of the
world. This categorizing process of dependency portrays the Third World ‘as passive bystanders ..., with no will or ken to resist it’ (Ibid: 12).

As discussed above, Escobar (1995) also does not consider the peoples’ resistance to the (mainstream) development discourse in the Third World. However, postcolonial scholars develop a sense of appreciation and empathy for the people’s resistance against domination of the imperial subjugation. Postcolonial theory, refers to the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting the imperial power (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2008; Kapoor, 2008). In their scholarship, both eminent postcolonial theorists: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) and Bhabha (1994) have given central concern to an individual’s agency. They both emphasize (subaltern) agency as a form of ‘negotiation’ (Kapoor, 2008). However, in dependency theory and Escobar’s work, they have not addressed this particular negotiation. According to them, disempowerment and underdevelopment are inescapable circumstances of the Third World or the developing world. In other words, through their analysis dependency theorists and Escobar have reaffirmed the destiny of the Third World people. At the same time, both theorists argue that the Westerners, the core states, and massive institutional bodies carry out this entire unequal construction.

Alternatively, based on Spivak’s work, Kapoor brings forth another perspective to understand this circumstance, not necessarily the predicament. Referring to Spivak he highlights about an ‘elite global professional class’ which engages in representing the Third World subaltern in the development process. This class creates the link between both institutions and the Third World subaltern. At the same time, the particular class ‘also marks the new culture of international non-governmental organizations involved in development and
human rights, as they work on the lowest strata in the developing world (Spivak, 2003: 618; cited in Kapoor, 2008: 44). Most significantly, this class is not only a group of First World professionals, intellectuals, and scholars, but also that there are many Third Worlders who are part of it (Kapoor, 2008). In that sense, as postcolonial theory exposes, it is not only the First Worlders, but also the Third Worlders who contribute to the construction of the Third World and continue the Western superiority.

Apart from the agency, these development theorists have been unable to account for the heterogeneity of Third World communities. Particularly, the dialectical or binary structures that theorists use in their theories have homogenized the Third World people. For example, according to the dependency theory, peripheral nations are essentially dependent on the First World or the core states. Postcolonial theory opens up a new route to appreciate the heterogeneity of the Third World subaltern. According to postcolonial theorists, through their agency, people in the Third World create their own identity instead of being subjects of this homogeneous category such as dependents or victims. Further elaborating this idea, Kapoor (2008) employs Bhabha’s (1994) work, which challenges the homogenization of the Third World subaltern from the imperial times until today in the name of modernity and development. In line with Bhabha’s work, this emerging space will be referred to as the ‘third space’. It is a non-dialectical space standing in-between the binary structures of orientalist representations and imperial power (Kapoor, 2008). In his concept of Third Space, Bhabha (1994) preserves the heterogeneity of dissonant or even dissident histories and voices.

However, in contrast with development theories, postcolonial analysis has played down the role of the state and capitalism. Since Spivak has referred to ‘multinational capital’ and
‘multinational division of labor’ in her works, the above critique mostly valid for Said and
Bhabha (Kapoor, 2008). In their works, ‘neither Said nor Bhabha focus on capitalistic
transactions or economically-oriented subversive agency by the subaltern’ (Ibid: 15). At the
same time, postcolonial theorists have ignored the key ‘material’ issues of the distribution of
resources and poverty in their politics.

However, postcolonial theory provides a great insight into perceptions beyond the
dualistic nature of the development discourse (when a set of nations become developed others
become underdeveloped). Postcolonial theory provides a new angle to read the people’s
engagement in the development discourse. In this sense, postcolonial theory helps us to
account for agency of the people in the developing world, i.e., to see them as active agents of
development rather than passive victims of the discourse.

**Other Perspectives on Development**

While most development scholars continue their debates on economic matters
(economic growth, poverty, unequal exchange, economic dependency, exploitation, and
control the market), Amartya Sen (1999) brings a new dimension to the debate. As they pursue
economic growth, the nations have neglected some important values with regard to lives and
livelihoods. The concept of development in Sen’s “Development as freedom” goes beyond
increasing (economic) growth rate, per-capita income or materialistic improvements in a
country. Although he does not reject the importance of economic growth, industrialization,
technical advancements, and social mobilization, he defines them as the means of
development. He presents development as a process of expanding the freedom that people enjoy. He asserts:

   Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive state (1999: 3).

   Often, in the mainstream society, development refers to the growth of Gross National Product (GNP), the rise in per-capita income, or enhancement in industry and the technology (Sen 1999; 3 - 11). Sen (1999) argues that states struggle to become wealthier in order to buy social goods such as education and health, but they get away from the development of their lives represented in ‘freedom’. For Sen, development goes beyond the accumulation of wealth and increasing the GNP or per-capita income. The ultimate development is freedom: freedom of the people to live as long as they wish the way they want. To achieve development the state should remove the deprivations or the major unfreedoms that block the achievement of development, for example, poverty, poor economic opportunities, neglect of public facilities, and various social discriminations. At the same time, it supports aspirations through the provision of, for example, more economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers and enabling conditions of good health, basic education, and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives.

   Apart from Sen, a literary critic and activist Ganesh Devy (2006) also suggests an alternative perspective to mainstream development. He reads the concept of development from a Gandhian perspective and de-links the association between the concept of development and the hegemonic practices of the west.
Devy’s (2006) view of development exposes us to another dimension of development. As discussed above, Davy asserts that the contemporary development discourse (in Asia) is an import from the West. Explaining the roots of the modern development discourse, he remarks:

This concept is dominated by the widely prevalent technological and industrial culture. Nature’s law of ‘survival of the fittest’ forms the ideology means digging up the earth, turning it over, exploring it and formulating new product, metal and chemicals. It admits of war to procure unrestricted rights on those resources, it means collecting innumerable weapons to fight these wars; allows commanding these wars, spreading this ideology everywhere by strengthening the state’s power of coercion through supporting legal structures. It means feeding into the greed of human beings by institutionalizing greed! (2006: 126).

Elaborating the idea of development, Devy emphasizes that development should be unique in every country, village and community. In regard to this idea, the existence of a universal definition for development is senseless. At the same time, development should come from individuals (from within), and not from outside, nor should it depend on outside aid. Therefore, Devy explicates that development is a profound political and cultural concern. He very clearly states that development cannot be achieved through the imitation of places or the economies of other countries, but has to be done by the locals in their own way. According to Devy (2006), development is the uplifting of human beings and societies through increasing self-confidence, thoughts and ideas.

Furthermore, Devy links his idea of development to the Gandhian concept of self-reliance. He emphasizes that self-reliance is the only road to development. Once we make the decision to become self-reliant and try everything within our means to achieve it, it will not take long to achieve complete and holistic development. Therefore, Devy believes that no political system in the world can stop a society if it makes this decision.
The Changing Practice

As indicated above, during the first half of the development era, ‘projects’ became a principal term in the development vocabulary. The developing nations were encouraged by global development agencies to undertake large scale ‘infrastructure’ projects such as massive dams, bridges, and highways and helped fund these. However, by the 1960s and the 1970s the main development agencies such as the World Bank and the UNO drew their attention to ‘bottom-up’ approaches to development, promoted ‘integrated rural development,’ and encouraged community participation in the development process (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). Simultaneously, the redistribution of benefits of development among the majority of population began to gain more significance in development debates and this drove the definition of development beyond mere economic growth. Moreover, health and education were given more significance in the development process and issues of class and gender also entered the discussion.

From the late 1970’s, the key actors and the exciting nature of development began to change. In view of more efficiency, development agencies attempted to curtail the state’s influence on development and share it among private, professional development organizations and the voluntary sector. Subsequently, the conventional state-sponsored and project-based development process declined and NGOs sprang up as an alternative third sector to carry out development (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). Moreover, they extended the attention beyond the conventional economic related issues and identified new issues related to the poverty, such as intra-household inequality, the importance of local level organizations, the need to mobilize unprivileged and neglected groups of people to access resources, rights, and service (Ibid).
Conclusion

However, after Sixty years of its official launching, the concept of development is still a dream in many non-western nations. One wonders whether any of those developing nations were able to achieve their targets. A common nature in all the developing nations is the younger generation was told that they were born in a developing country, same as their seniors. However, neither the seniors nor the young have experienced the so-called development.

In the early 1990’s, scholars began to argue whether development is still valid. Sachs (1992) argues that both the US hegemony and the idea of development do not exist any longer. Going beyond this, Escobar (1995) stresses that the development discourse is the creator of underdevelopment in the world. Proposing a different perspective to read development, Sen (1999) portrays that development needs to be thought beyond monetary terms and the economic growth. Furthermore, he argues development is only achieved through ensuring the economic, political, and social freedoms in a society. Considering above arguments, we can conclude that development is not simply a concept or a theory, but a whole system of ideas that has grown since the 1950s and these have not developed any notions as such. In other words, this whole discussion indicates development as a discursively formed dominant representation. Also, this whole development discourse is embedded within capitalism and imperialism which it represents as natural.

At the same time, if development is such a massive and powerful discourse, then no individual, a community, or a nation can simply avoid that. The crux of this discussion is, not to skip the discourse but to account for people as agents of change who respond to their
subjectivity by becoming more than becoming mere objects within the discourse. As discussed, postcolonial theory has played a significant role in this scenario. Postcolonial theory sheds light on a path to perceive human agency in the development discourse. It helps this research to go beyond the simple duality between the individuals and the development discourse. It opens up a fresh avenue to address the hybridization of local knowledge and the imported concept of development in practice.
CHAPTER 3
THE FAITH IN DEVELOPMENT

The previous chapter excavated the origin of the concept of development and its dominant representations in mainstream practices. Further enhancing this context, this three demonstrates how the inhabitants’ in Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama areas experience ‘development’ instigated by World Vision.

As mentioned above, my first visit to Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama was as a member of a survey team of World Vision. The main objective of the visit in October 2009 was to raise the awareness of the communities in selected villages about ‘good governance principles’. During the visit, our team walked from house to house making the villagers aware of the wonders of ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’, ‘participation’, and ‘responsiveness’ of the government. Although, we have never been bothered about these principles in our own lives, we ‘preached’ and the villagers believed them as essentials to be good citizens. World Vision had been in Mahakumbukkadawala for thirteen years, since 1997, and had two years to leave the area. Therefore, we were supposed to get feedback from the community concerning the services the NGO provided since 1997.

In Nawagattegama area, however, World Vision had arrived a year ago and its development projects were at the initial stage. We were, therefore, not looking for much feedback. During our good governance sessions, we encouraged the community to engage in the World Vision’s development process.

My second visit to Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattegama was in late March 2013 to conduct fieldwork for this thesis project. The changes were substantial. There is no World
Vision in Mahakumbukkadawala to assist the community and the people have survived themselves for 3 years after the NGO left. In Nawagattegama, however, people positively participate in World Vision programs. World Vision project meetings have become a part of their life. Apart from the place and the people, the past three years had also changed my vantage point of observation of both the World Vision and people agency. I no longer intend to impose mainstream development ideologies on people, but desire to experience the ways in which the communities encounter development.

This chapter begins by examining how the presence of World Vision is changing the daily routines of the community: For this, it focuses on Nawagattegama area. It charts how World Vision entered the community through developing connections with Community Based Organizations in the area. Moreover, I examine whether World Vision is liberating or producing poverty in Nawagattegama. The second section portrays how the communities in Mahakumbukkadawala area have managed their lives in the absence of World Vision, since 2011. This demonstrates how the people’s dream of development collapsed with the withdrawal of the World Vision’s assistance. The chapter questions the mainstream faith in the ability to export development from outside through external knowledge and development aid. Finally, it analyzes the impacts of the operations of World Vision in above areas.
LABELING FOR LIBERATION

The Great Enemy

It was a warm, sunny afternoon in the last week of March 2013, about two weeks prior to the Sinhala and Tamil (local) New Year festival. Immediately after my first meeting with the staff at World Vision’s regional office in Anamaduwa town, I began walking a rutted street towards the central bus terminal. I was not alone: Premaratne, an Assistant Sector Coordinator of World Vision also joined me to visit some villages in Nawagattekama area. Moreover, he desired to give a preliminary overview about World Vision’s development projects in different villages.

As we walked, we began to talk about the World Vision’s contribution to the development and empowerment of the community in Nawagattekama area. The World Vision coordinator explained how he came in touch with World Vision and his experience of working with communities. He also emphasized how strongly the NGO is dedicated to their goal of empowering communities in Nawagattekama. During the conversation, Premaratne described the fundamental issue affecting the community:

Most of the people in these villages live in poverty. You can observe this everywhere in the village. Poverty is the main issue that we have to overcome.

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6 In addition to the head office in the main city, Colombo, World Vision runs regional offices in different parts of the country to handle its development programs.

7 The Area Manager is the head of the regional office. There are Program Coordinators under the manager for different sectors of concern such as education, economic development, and child sponsorship. Each program coordinator has assistants for different sectors, titled - sector coordinators to maintain a better communication between the grassroots and town office. The fourth position in the particular hierarchy is the Cluster Mobilizer who is responsible for a six or seven cluster of Grama Niladhari divisions (the smallest administrative unit in the country) in the selected DS division. For each GN division World Vision has appointed a Social Mobilizer who holds the most grassroots level position in the World Vision hierarchy.
As our [World Vision’s] key theme is the well-being of children, we help all poor families to overcome the poverty. We strongly believe that a child could have a better life, only if the child’s family has a better income. Hence, it is our duty to help the poor people to overcome poverty. Of course, we do not get a big salary for our work. Actually, this is not a job, but good enough for living. It is a great commitment to the future generation.

He sounded very confident and certain about the tasks in which he is engaged as an employee of World Vision. He highly emphasized poverty as the main source of all hardships of the community. Indeed, not only Premaratne, but also the other World Vision employees that I came across during this study were certain that poverty is the main issue of the people. They were all together in wanting to protect people from the adversities of poverty. For instance, during my conversation with the Area Manager in Anamaduwa, Deepthi De Silva, I asked; ‘What made you think that these people need your help?’ He was very precise:

It is because, they are so poor and most of them are uneducated. Thus, we are here to help them and to show them the right path to overcome poverty. Believe me; we are a team and we consider our duty to serve humanity. Since we are humans, we all have a great responsibility to help each other.

This response sounds like World Vision has a God-given responsibility and they are all united in stressing that World Vision is dedicated to ensuring a better future for the children by eliminating poverty and empowering the community. As the majority of the rural population in Sri Lanka is discounted from mainstream development practices, World Vision employees

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8 Well-being of the children is one of the main concerns of World Vision. World Vision’s official website identifies itself as a “Christian humanitarian organization dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice” (www.worldvision.org). When World Vision selects a divisional secretariat division, it is very concerned about the child population (age 16 and below) of the particular area. During the preliminary awareness sessions, World Vision highly encourages the community to involve their children in the child sponsorship program. World Vision makes a profile for every child who would like to get a sponsor. After that, it sends these profiles to donor countries such as the USA, Australia, Canada, and United Kingdom. Then any individual, a group, or an organization that becomes interested in helping these children can select a child to sponsor. As sponsors, they have to make payments of $30-$40 per month to World Vision. In the World Vision process, child does not directly receive this sponsorship, but it goes to a common pool. World Vision utilizes this money for the development of the whole community instead of the particular child.
believe it is essential to have their kind of alternative mechanisms to assist rural communities. They all believe that they are permitted and ethical to involve in people’s life in the name of development, empowerment, well-being of life, or simply the improvement of the standard of life. Further elaborating his idea, Silva explained,

If we do not recognize and help them, nobody would care for these people. They will be ignored forever by the society 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.

The Emancipatory Mission

As mentioned above, the criteria that World Vision employs to select divisional secretariat divisions to provide its services are based on its economic condition. World Vision employs government census and statistical information to identify DS divisions where the majority of the people live below the poverty line. When it identifies a DS area to continue its development program, World Vision informs to the divisional secretariat (the local administrative office) of the area about the development program. If the divisional secretariat agrees to accept the program, it is expected to officially invite or request World Vision to carry out the development projects. In this sense, World Vision continues its development projects with an invitation of the government. It also gives the impression that the project is carried out at the invitation of the state.

In the following phase, before launching development projects, World Vision connects with community-based organizations (CBOs) such as farmers’ societies, women’s associations, and youth clubs in the particular area. It uses these connections to make the grassroots community aware of its development programs. Simultaneously, World Vision also acquaints
itself with the community, especially how people can benefit through these development projects.

During these preliminary awareness sessions, World Vision groups the households in the village into four categories: (1) **poorest of the poor** – the poorest families in the village, (2) the **poor** – families which are not the poorest, but still facing substantial economic hardships, (3) **moderate** – most of the lower middle class families in the village belong to this category, and (4) **well off** – families with wealth and material possessions, assessed through the employment of the Participatory Wealth Ranking (PWR) method. Furthermore, the program coordinator of the economic development sector in Anamaduwa, Sumithra Morayes elaborated the methodology:

During awareness sessions, we encourage participants to categorize the families in their village according to economic conditions. Typically, we ask people to carry out their own categorizations through considering criteria such as having a permanent roof on the house, electricity supply, and a house built of permanent materials. Here, we give priority to people’s voices; they determine who is poor and who really needs our support.

After categorization, World Vision’s focuses on the families belonging to two categories: the “poorest of poor” and the “poor” who needs aid the most to achieve a better life. This categorization process permits people to decide which families in the village should benefit from the NGO’s programs. In this sense, people are given an opportunity to actively participate in the selection process, thus ensuring public participation in the NGO’s development approach. More importantly, this categorization process provides World Vision access to the community.

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9 This method is derived from Robert Chambers’ Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) context employed by the mainstream development agencies and a larger number of NGOs around the world to ensure public participation in their projects. By using Participatory Wealth Ranking these organizations cluster households in their selected territories according to well-being criteria. In this process, NGOs let CBOs to apply the well-being criteria and categorize the households in the particular area.
In this sense, economic impoverishment or the poverty of the people has legitimized the external involvements of the NGOs in the community.

After the meeting with Morayes, I tried to apply above categorization process on myself. I pretended; what if World Vision categorizes my neighborhood someday? To which category would I belong? Subsequently, I tried to look at this scenario from their point of view. I was curious about how people feel and respond when they become conscious that they are poor. I also wondered how people accept these categories and their impacts over the community.

Gunapala, a farmer and former Chairman of the World Vision’s Village Development Committee (VDC) in Samurdhigama in Nawagattegama area resonated the larger development discourse:

We are poor. According to World Vision, my family is in the poor category. Based on its studies World Vision has identified the poor families in this village. Through that, we have 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.

Before he became a farmer, about ten years ago, Gunapala had owned the only retail (grocery) shop in the village. Most of his customers defaulted on debts and Gunapala had no alternative other than closing his shop and became a farmer:

Most of the villagers are seasonal farmers. If they do not get enough rain, they would not receive enough harvest. Then, they are unable to manage their old debts, but get a new loan to survive.

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10 Every village has a Village Development Committee to carry out the development projects at village level. The Chairman and committee members are appointed by the villagers. On one hand, these committees incorporated the villagers in the development of the village. Since, committee represented the majority of the villages, people's voice is represented in the development process. On the other hand, committees function as the community banks in the villages. In that sense, committee members are eligible to received short-term loans with a reasonable interest rate. The interest from those loans was one of the main income sources of village development committee. Committee uses this money for the development of the village.
Due to World Vision’s categorization, he was made to believe that his family belongs to the *poor* category in the village. Gunapala and most of his neighbors have experienced many hard times during their lives, but they have never felt the surge of anxiety about their new identity. According to his memory, before the arrival of the NGO the villagers were not this conscious about their economic situations as today. Although, they had felt that the situation was difficult, they had not identified themselves with these special categories. In short, Gunapala never felt that he was poor.

Gunapala was not the only person I came across who had identified himself as poor, but several other villagers believe that they are poor and need external support to survive. Actually, most of the people have joined World Vision with the hope of a better life. In order to eliminate poverty, World Vision encourages every village to form its own group to promote ‘micro-entrepreneurship’. These small groups function as savings groups which help people to save for themselves and gain access to credit with a very affordable interest rate.

At the same time, World Vision organizes different awareness sessions and training programs for the community about bookkeeping and basic techniques of accounting and management. Most of the families belonging to the “poorest of the poor” category receive monetary and material aid such as money to build toilets and to improve sanitation. Moreover, World Vision organizes workshops and training sessions to teach farmers how to improve harvest from their cultivations and encourage the community to engage in home gardening activities.

The key objective of these programs is to liberate people from the adversities of poverty. According to people’s experience during the last five years, villagers have become
more concerned about their economic well-being. Most of them are motivated to attend World Vision meetings, workshops, and awareness programs about ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘micro finance methods’ and ‘saving’. As the villagers learn that they are poor, most of them desire to liberate themselves from poverty.

Prior to the World Vision’s categorization and awareness-raising processes, however, people used to experience poverty through the famous government poverty alleviation program: “Samurdhi” 11. People are acquainted with the poor families that are suitable to receive benefits from the Samurdhi Program. The recipients of the Samurdhi Program were, therefore, deliberated as the poor people in the village before the arrival of World Vision. So, the label poor was not new. However, according to the World Vision categorization, many villagers who were not eligible to receive Samurdhi benefits also came to be labeled poor. In that sense, World Vision has expanded poverty in the village and redefined it.

Construction of Poverty

Above findings are have multiple connections with the intellectual discourse on poverty. Writing the chapter ‘Poverty’ in The Development Dictionary, Majid Rahnema (1992) demonstrates that the ideas of poor and poverty are constructions or inventions of a particular civilization. He argues that the hegemonic perspective of poverty in the contemporary world is highly influenced by the utopian concept of ‘complete man’ who would not lack anything. Rahnema stresses the acceptability in the mainstream development practice of labeling

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11 In 1994, government introduced Samurdhi as the national program to alleviate poverty. The key objective of the program is to find a solution to poverty. Since, the government funds every year to the program to provide safety net assistance to the poor, it carries out various programs to support the people live under the poverty line, for instance, income transfer (food and income subsidy), nutrition package for pregnant and lactating mothers and milk feeding subsidy for children between two and five.
someone poor. He questions: “What is necessary and for whom? And who is qualified to define all that?” (Rahnema 1992: 159).

According to Rahnema (1992), the dominant concept of poverty in the contemporary world has four dimensions: First, it is caused by ‘materialities’ such as deprivation, destitution, hunger, malnutrition, homelessness, and exclusion from educational possibilities, etc. Second, poverty is defined according to the definer’s perception and his context. Rahnema further elaborates: “[People’s] perception of the deprivations from which they suffer is ... often aggravated by the feeling that they lack the ... ability to overcome [these] conditions”. For instance, Since, I grew up in a Buddhist religious atmosphere; I used to believe that people are suffering from deprivations such as poverty because of their bad karma from their previous existences. The third dimension of poverty is ‘how the others view the poor’. In this sense, Rahnema argues that the poor’s perception of his/her predicament is inevitably affected by how others view him/her. As the fourth dimension he brings ‘spimes’ (socio-cultural space-times) which affects various perceptions of poverty. According to him, all these dimensions mutually interact in shaping the construct of poverty. At the same time, all these dimensions are affected by the space-times to which they belong.

Rahnema (1992) further explains that the idea of ‘global poverty’ is heavily integrated with the mainstream development practice which emerged in the late-1940s. This dominant notion is based on the assumption that the poor are ‘underdeveloped’, especially at a national scale. Further elaborating this construction, Escobar (1995) argues that poverty consents to those ‘superior’ positions of knowledge and power (governments, institutions, professionals, and competent authorities) to intervene into the lives of the poor, to assist them, on their
behalf. As discussed in the previous chapter, the development discourse was initiated through the identification of ‘mass poverty’ around the world. As Esteva (1992) argues, the origin of the development discourse was the origin of underdevelopment, which pushed two thirds of the global population to misery.

World Vision’s development process, when considered from a post-development standpoint, indicates that it constructs poverty instead of liberating the community. The development discourse, which adopted by World Vision leads people to think themselves as poor. During its categorization process, World Vision guides the villagers to label members of their community as poor based on their material wellbeing.

By employing PWR method, World Vision believes that it is possible to bring out people’s voice in its development program. While, the program ensures community participation in the categorization process, the PWR method is a top-down application dominated by outsiders, ‘experts’, and their views. Even though, people have an opportunity to represent their ideas on matters of community development, they may modify their speech when under the pressure from their own society or due to the fear of being excluded. Apart from World Vision, the community members also attempt to interpret themselves as poor to receive benefits from the NGO. For instance, once Morayes described how people try to define themselves as poor:

Actually, most of them like to be in the ‘poor of poor’ category. Even they try to put their relatives and friends into the same category; because they know when the program starts, this category will be given the most priority. They assume that they will get most benefits if they are in the poorest layer.

Conversely, the state also actively supports World Vision to continue this construction. It is because World Vision uses information of the government census to identify ‘poor places’.
Eventually, the government statistics about poverty and some poverty alleviation programs like Samurdhi have also granted permission to World Vision to carry out its development programs. Even, the government administrative agent officially invites World Vision to develop the area and empower the community. Although the project belongs to World Vision, and it has the main role, it is impossible to identify World Vision as the only actor in this poverty determination and construction process; the state and the community of the area are also involved.

DREAMS FALL APART

Compared to Nawagattegama, the story of Mahakumbukkadawela is contrasting. World Vision has left after its full term and the people in Mahakumbukkadawela area no longer have external support to ‘uplift’ their lives. During my fieldwork, they were in a transition period in their lives. I wondered how people experience development and empowerment after World Vision had left. Some of the people I came across were very much oppressed and they were very critical about World Vision’s development process. I wondered why they were unable to achieve their goals (set by World Vision) during the last fifteen years. My experience makes me ask: What is the reason behind the community’s (or a member’s) inability to empower itself during the project period? Does the cause lay in the community, World Vision’s development process, or both?
Good Old Memories

In Mahakumbukkadawala, Nimal Wijayaratne, a former Chairman of World Vision’s VDC in Kanadayaya for the first ten years, revealed the beginning of the development project:

One day in 1996 or 1997, when I was going to work, one of my friends showed me a piece of a newspaper. It had an article about a development agency, which had selected some villages in Mahakumbukkadawala Divisional Secretariat area to do some development projects. Since I am a social worker, I would accept anything from anyone for the development of the village. Even it is a piece of junk we still accept it. As my friend and I assumed that our village could get something from those projects, we went to the development agency’s office in Chilaw to ask them to select our village for the development program. It was my first meeting with World Vision. At that time, World Vision had already selected several villages for its projects, but had one vacancy for a village. Actually, my friend and I lived in two different villages. I asked World Vision to select my friend’s village, Dangahawela. As I requested, World Vision agreed to join my village in the next year.

Accepting his request, the next year World Vision arrived in Kandayaya.

It became a very nostalgic moment for Wijayaratne to recall his past with World Vision. As he described, the next ten years was a time of great happiness, success, and achievement for the village, not only for Kandayaya, but also for all twenty-five villages in Mahakumbukkadawela area. They received many benefits from the World-Vision development process. Quite interestingly, they had appreciated gifts from the outside world, especially from a foreign NGO, without ever realizing they have entered into a new world of thinking in which World Vision is the provider and they are the recipients.

Children in poor families got the priority in the development process. World Vision continuously provided stationery for children to use in school. It also developed “social mobilizers” from each village. It selected a few people from each village and encouraged them to participate in workshops and training programs about ‘child development’. Those social
mobilizers were encouraged to associate with the children in their villages and involve them in different programs such as children clubs. By organizing workshops for children, World Vision helped the young generation to overcome their self-confidence deficit (stage fright) and provided them a stage to expose their talents in singing, dancing, and acting. At the same time, World Vision provided the required funds to treat the seriously ill or disabled children in these villages. Once Wijayaratne mentioned:

There was a very seriously ill child in our village. World Vision paid for all the medication. Further it funded for three surgeries to save her life. Since, she had very rare blood group, it was very difficult to find that. At that point, World Vision managed to get required blood from Army and Air Force base hospitals. Now she is an adult. She lives only because of the kindness of some great officials of World Vision.

Similar to Nawagattegama, World Vision had also formed a VDC for each village in Mahakumbukkadawala12. With the collaboration of these VDCs, World Vision conducted many development projects in Mahakumbukkadawala. For example, World Vision involved to construct ‘amunu’ (very small dams) to hold water for agriculture, built houses for poor families, and modified community halls and old buildings in schools. In Kandayaya, World Vision established a water tank and a pipe network as a solution to the lack of drinking water. Apart from physical improvements, World Vision also organized various training programs and workshop for the villages to inculcate positive thinking, good governance principles, and community leadership.

Before it moved out of Mahakumbukkadawala after the specified fifteen-year term, following its modes of operations, World Vision opted to establish a mechanism to continue its

12 Villages with larger populations had more than one committee.
development process into the future. In 2004, it formed an organization, ‘Green Vision’\textsuperscript{13} as a body that supports World Vision’s development process. Then, World Vision began to withdraw in phases, transferring its responsibilities to Green Vision.

At the beginning, Green Vision did not have its own capital; World Vision provided the initial capital for investment purposes. With World Vision’s funds Green Vision started cashew nut\textsuperscript{14} and wood apple processing factories. As these plants were native to Mahakumbukkadawala area, villagers sold their products to Green Vision. World Vision also arranged one of the national grocery store chains to buy the Green Vision products. It also invested in an animal husbandry project. Under this project, members of the VDCs were given various animals such as goats, chickens, and cows; in return, the people had to take care of them for two years and return a specific number of animals, including the off springs, to Green Vision. For example, Green Vision gave five young goats to a family and the family had to return seven young goats to Green Vision in two years. Under normal conditions, five healthy young goats could easily produce more than twenty off springs in two years. In this way, animal husbandry project became popular among the community.

Educations fund was another important Green Vision project. Through that fund, Green Vision provided scholarships to children in poor families so that they can continue their education. Other Green Vision programs include those to make attitudinal changes in the population.

\textsuperscript{13} In regard to the governance structure of the company, Green Vision is managed by a Managing Director and a board of directors. Since, there are twenty-five village development committees in Mahakumbukkadawala area, three members from each committee are appointed as the members of the main council of the company. Nine out of seventy five members of the main council are elected as the board of directors of the company. The director board appoints one of them as the Managing Director. Apart from the main governance body, there is a manager, an accountant, and various project officers working at Green Vision.

\textsuperscript{14} Ratmalgaswewa Cashew Company; this factory was registered as a company under Green Vision.
community; youth development program is one such example. Being the backbone of all these projects, World Vision attempted to empower the community. Most people believe that it was the golden age of their villages. They all dreamt of a better future, a future without poverty and all the misfortunes of their current life.

**The Expired Prosperity**

In fact, World Vision projects gave people hope, a new life, and a new beginning. This new hope inspired the community and encouraged them to work hard to achieve their dreams. If someone would visit Mahakumbukkadawala in the mid-2000s, S/he would be fascinated with the progress made by the villagers, their courage, and unity. The community would have confidently said that they could achieve their dreams of development or eradicate poverty in the next ten years. They were hardly afraid of the withdrawal of World Vision’s assistance.

Unfortunately, the reality that I observed in Mahakumbukkadawala is extremely different from these people’s point of view. When I asked villagers to talk about the World Vision’s development program, during my fieldwork, most of them were hesitant: One said, “oh, it was many years ago. What is point of talking about history?” Many others repeated this sentiment. According to another person; “it’s gone, it will never come back”. According to Wijayaratne, Since World Vision moved out of Mahakumbukkadawala in 2009, his village has been like a ‘tire without air’. Wijayaratne exposed some of the root causes of the collapse of the village community: “During the last few years people became very selfish. Eventually, we lost our unity and the community was splintered into different groups.”
In that sense, even though, these villagers were trained to be leaders and they had participated in several workshops about the ‘importance of teamwork’. What they have developed through this process was not development, but individuality and selfishness. In addition to the community itself, some World Vision officials and employees were also responsible for the breakup of the community. As Wijayaratne described some new officials’ behavior changed the whole structure of the project:

The officials who came here at the beginning were very honest. They had a real intention to develop our villages, empower the community. They worked very hard to develop us. Sometimes they gave their priority to us than to their own personal lives. With time, some officials were replaced. Actually, the new ones ruined everything. Eventually, World Vision turned into a bureaucracy, creating a great gap between them and us. Every time when I remember those first officials, I bless them and I hate all the new ones.

Some officials who joined the project in the last five years had created their own favorites, both individuals and groups, within the community. Some of those actions had enhanced the gap between World Vision and the community, particularly in the last few years. On the one hand, the people have gradually lost confidence in the World Vision’s development process; on the other hand, the issues had destroyed the social harmony in the village.

Dayawathi is one of the founding social mobilizers of World Vision in Miyaellawa village. She mentioned;

Many years after the departure of World Vision, people are still fighting and complain against each other. Now most of them have forgotten about World Vision, but they continue their old resentments. They continue to suspect each other.

Right at the beginning of the project, people were informed that World Vision would not stay with them forever. Through establishing VDCs and, later, a similar supporting body: Green Vision, World Vision expected to continue its own development process. Simultaneously, it
assumed that the community would be able to manage their organizations without World Vision. Actually, the key objective of the World Vision development program was building self-confidence of the community so that it will overcome the poverty and achieve their aspirations. Instead of establishing a short-term development program, World Vision approached the community with a long, fifteen-year program and expected the process and the momentum to continue further. Although, they were organized to face their challenges, people lost their confidence immediately after the withdrawal of World Vision. Evon Jayantha a founding member and an employee of Green Vision explained the situation:

After World Vision left us, it was very hard to find members to continue the VDCs. They [the villagers] assumed that they cannot achieve anything without the assistance of World Vision. The community participation dropped down to zero in many village development committees.

According to him, only few Village Development Committees are still functioning and it in the following villages: Dangahawela, Garayakgama, Kivula Number 1, Andigama, Baranankattuwa, and Western Galkuliya. In Dangahawela, Dayawathi is able to continue their Village Development Council with a few members. She makes a great effort to find new members and encourages villagers to become the members of the committee. Her committee has begun to issue small loans to its members. Through this kind of strategies, she hopes to incorporated people for the development of the village. Here the key seems to be her leadership.

However, the destiny of the “people’s company”: Green Vision is miserable. Jayantha had many grievances about the present status of the company:
Actually, we had no reserve capital to continue the investments. When World Vision was in action, it pumped money into Green Vision. When it left this area in 2009, Green Vision eventually went bankrupt. The greatest issue was the unawareness of the director board. Of course, they worked hard in their village councils, but those experiences were never enough to manage such a company.

Green Vision was established though a bottom-up process. The representatives of the village made all the decisions. It had a strong connection with the community in the grassroots level. In this sense, Green Vision is a mascot of bottom-up development. In reality, Green Vision was unable to protect any of these ‘unique characteristics’. As mentioned above, there was a position of a manager apart from the board of directors. Since, most of the directors did not have enough experience to manage a company; the position of manager was established as an independent position to support those directors to make decisions. The manager became stronger and more powerful than the board of directors and eased into the position of Managing Director of Green Vision. In Jayantha’s words:

Managing Director and the board of directors became puppets ‘in manager’s hand’. In practice, the manager’s role changed from being an assistant to the committee to its controller. At the end of the day, manager controlled everybody and there was nobody to control the manager.

Apart from these, most of the members of the director board wanted to earn credit for the achievements of Green Vision. They increasingly focused their attention on building their personal images, instead of working as a team. When Green Vision moved away from its original objective of empowerment of the community, World Vision refused to support the former. According to Jayantha, there was ‘a tug of war’ between the Green Vision management and World Vision. In result, Green Vision lost its reputation among the community. Immediately after, World Vision left Mahakumbukkadawala area, Green Vision became a powerless organization.
Then people refused to return their animals. Green Vision lost over Rs. 6 million from the animal husbandry project. During that time, we had some issue with the cashew factory and we lost our main client. Worse came to worst and we found many corruptions committed by the manager and the Managing Director. Finally, we managed to fire the manger and reappoint the board of directors, but we did not have any reserve capital to continue our investments. As the best solution, we sold our properties to recover the loss.

Eventually, Green Vision has become completely hopeless. It still has Rs. 3 million in its education fund; it uses the interest of that money to continue the scholars program.

In sum, the beginning of the World Vision development program in Mahakumbuckkadawala was highly successful. It gave hope to the community and about its development. Although World Vision had envisioned to continue the development process after its departure, this vision could not continue in the absence of World Vision. Hence, in the absence of World Vision, all its assumptions about development became fallacious. Through the withdrawal of World Vision, the entire dream of development has become distorted. This is well summed up in an idea about development that Wijayaratne shared with me before I left his house:

Sir, when the government or any other organizations give aid, people become addicted to that. This country will never develop with aid. If you want to develop this country, it should stop all foreign aid. Then people will start by themselves.
**Conclusion**

During the whole process, World Vision has given its priority to two main groups in the society; the poor and the children. If we consider common territories between the above groups, both are extremely fragile to discrimination by the mainstream society. Most of the time they are voiceless beings in the development discourse. In mainstream development practices, they are given very limited and controlled room to represent themselves.

Since the late 1940s, World Vision and several other development agencies have given their priority to address issues related to the poor and children around the world. Identifying this aspect is the uniqueness of the development approach of World Vision. It is important to recognize the NGOs reading about the poor and the children in Nawagattegama and Mahakumbukkadawala. During this study, I understood that World Vision encountered the people and children in the project areas as victims of poverty, not survivors. All the material, monetary, and technical assistance come to improve the quality of lives of those victims who needed external help. World Vision’s development process reflects the worrying assumption of the passivity of the people, which deprives of any attention to their agency. During its process, World Vision gave hope to people, but it was blind to the fact that they are agents of development.

Unless it accounts the agency of the people, a development process can never empower the community. Therefore, the failure of the World Vision project is understandable, but people did not recognize it. That kind of development process can never make a real change in the society, but a temporary excitation of the people. Therefore, World Vision can never expect the community to continue its development process.
Instead of empowering them, World Vision process has transformed the community into “development beings”. Those beings are well knowledgeable about development and their weakness to achieve that. They lack the self-esteem to overcome their deprivations. When the development agency left them, these development beings become destitute in an ambiguity of the memories of their pre-existing life (before the arrival of development agency) and the knowledge they were given by the development agency. It causes these beings a great anxiety of their prevailing lives. People in Mahakumbukkadawala have already become development beings and the people in Nawagattegama are treading towards the same.
CHAPTER 4

THE AGENTS OF DEVELOPMENT

As demonstrated above, with the arrival of World Vision, the people in Nawagatagama became captivated by the idea of development. With its departure, the people in Mahakumbukkadawala area were traumatized. Nawagatagama area still enjoys the fruits of this new process and excited about it. The adjacent Sankadayagama village, not touched by the NGO, has its own story. This chapter focuses on Sankadayagama.

During my fieldwork, which focused on Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagatagama, I lived with an ordinary family in Sankadayagama. I traveled to Nawagatagama and Mahakumbukkadawala areas daily, three and eighteen miles. Unlike Nawagatagama and Mahakumbukkadawala, which are Divisional Secretariat areas with several villages in them, Sankadayagama is a village of thirty-five families comprised of one hundred people.\(^\text{15}\)

During a discussion held in a village in Nawagatagama area, a resident expressed a curious observation of Sankadayagama: “people [in Sankadayagama] have a good life. One day we also want to be like them”. I had never realized this before: Sankadayagama has become a model of development; even some of its neighbors wish to develop their villages like Sankadayagama. As the people in Sankadayagama do not entertain any external support from any development agency, I wondered what turned this village into a model for others to follow. Hence, I expanded the study to include Sankadayagama.

This chapter investigates how people in Sankadayagama had come to determine their own destiny, finding the confidence to create their own path of development. It focuses on how

\(^{15}\) Sankadayagama is located in Labugama Grama Niladhari Division in Anamaduwa Divisional Secretariat area.
people became agents of development, instead of being recipients of mainstream development aid and practices as those in Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattega.

Instead of being frustrated or waiting for the external support to achieve their aspirations, and unlike Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagattega, Sankadayagama created its own destiny. It had organized itself to resist the pressure that came from the lack of social opportunities, which was a bit more overt. They formed their own community organizations to fight against the deprivation of “development.” Sankadayagama has a strong community organization, which has operated since the early 1980s. According to the villagers, the key strength behind the accomplishments of the community is the “Sankadayagama Maranadhara Samithiya” (Death Benevolent Society)\textsuperscript{16}. Maranadhara samithiya is an ordinary organization that can be found in most villages and neighborhoods (even institutions) in Sri Lanka. The key question is: how did this particular society become such a progressive force in the village? Also, how has “death” become such an important factor that organizes the community’s journey instead of “life”? Focusing on these questions, the chapter investigates the development process in Sankadayagama. The purpose is to develop some benchmarks to evaluate the development process in the villages helped by the NGO and arrive at some conclusions.

\textsuperscript{16} Maranadhara Samithiya (death benevolent society) is a very common community organization in almost everywhere in the country. It is an association formed by a group of people such as villagers in a particular village, neighbors of a particular neighborhood, or employees of a particular institution to assist its members at the event of a funeral. Usually, it finds funds by collecting a monthly or annual membership fee. At a funeral of a member or an affiliate of a member’s family, the death benevolent society helps the particular family to proceed the funeral home and contribute for the funeral expenses.
Achieving Life Through Death

Jothipala (Jothi *mama* or Jothi uncle), the owner of the house where I resided during this study, is a founding member of Sankadayagama Maranadhara Samithiya. He explained to me the story behind the formation of the ‘society’.

One of our relatives in this village died in the early 1980s. Since, his family was so poor, it was very hard for them to afford a coffin. Therefore, we collected money from the villagers and helped the family handle the funeral. After that, we realized the need of a *maranadhara samithiya* to confront similar circumstances in the future. A few days after the funeral, we get together in a house in the village and that was the first day of our Maranadhara Samithiya.

On that day, the villagers formed Sankadayagama Maranadjara Samithiya to deal with their immediate issue, i.e., to assist villagers at the event of death and funeral services. During the first meeting, they appointed a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and committee members of the organization. Everyone agreed to meet on the last Saturday of every month to discuss the progress of the society. Furthermore, they decided to collect a monthly membership fee of Rs. 3 (approximately $0.02). At the beginning, at the event of death, a member was given Rs. 350 (approximately $3) for funeral expenses. After three decades, it has seventy-three members in the society and the membership fee has been increased up to Rs. 30 (approximately $0.25). Now, the members receive Rs. 12,000 (approximately $100) per funeral. Besides the membership fee, at a funeral, the society collects an additional Rs. 100 (approximately $.90) and food items such as 2 coconuts and 2 pounds of rice from each family.
The society uses the additional money and food to offer meals and snacks\textsuperscript{17} to the affected family and the visitors who come to pay respects, until the cremation or burial.

Although, Sankadayagama Maranadhara Samithiya was formed to address the issues related with the death, villagers expanded the role of the society as strength to shape their lives. Gradually, the Maranadhara Samithiya became a strong community organization that leads the villagers to overcome the obstacles to development. To further elaborate about the expansion of the society, one evening, Jothipala took me to one of his neighbors, Wijayaratne, the principal of the nearest high school of the village and the present Chairperson of the Maranadhara Samithiya. During our discussion, he explained some incidents that sparked changes, expanding the core of the Samithiya.

In the early 1980, there were three families in this village who were relatively more affluent than the other villagers. They had some properties such as land and paddy fields that they inherited. At the beginning of the rainy season, they began to cultivate their paddy fields. They got water from the village reservoir. However, the other farmers in the village were not financially strong enough to start their cultivation immediately after the first rain of the season. Therefore, they had to wait a certain time to begin cultivation. However, when others started to cultivate, they did not have enough water in the village reservoir, since those three families had already taken much for their paddy fields. Eventually, this water issue became a main topic to discuss in the monthly meetings of the death benevolent society. Since, most of them suffered from the water issue, they expected a direct involvement of the death benevolent society to solve the problem.

\textsuperscript{17} Sri Lanka has several funeral traditions and customs based on the religions. Usually Muslims bury their corpses within 24 hours after the death. However, most of the Buddhists and Catholics embalm the bodies and keep them for a couple days to pay respects. Even there are some funeral parlors in the urban areas; most of the people still like to keep bodies in their houses until buried or cremated. In rural areas, people believe that keeping the body at a funeral parlor is an insult to the dead person. During the whole period, the corpse is at home someone has to be awake 24hrs; people pass the time by playing cards or ‘carom’, chatting, or loudly reading some religious books. During the whole time, the \textit{maranadhara samithi} or neighbors provide the meals, drinks, and snacks (mostly biscuits) to the family and the visitors.
Eventually, the death benevolent society became a platform of the villagers to negotiate the other issues related with their life instead of limiting to matters of death. At the beginning, the Maranadhara Samithiya did not have a particular place to convene. Most of the times, people used to meet every month at the one of those above-mentioned three houses, especially as they have enough room for all the members. However, when the water issue came to the discussion, people noticed that their meeting location could be a constraint to make a balanced decision. Before taking up the water issue, they had to find a permanent location to hold the meetings. Jothipala explained his experience,

We realized the need of an independent location to hold our meetings. Therefore, members decided to build a ‘community hall’ on a land by the village reservoir. Since, we all went to work during the day, we met every evening and continued the construction. Finally, we manage to build the present community hall.”

The community hall was constructed through the collective effort of all members. After, the completion of the community hall, the society was able to come up with a better solution to the water issue of the village reservoir. The Samithiya thus appointed a committee among the villagers to address the unequal distribution of water from the reservoir. Since, then the particular water management committee decides on the suitable times to release water for paddy fields. At the same time, those three well-off families in the village also accept the committee’s decisions. Ultimately, the Maranadhara Samithiya solved the water issue of the community. The villagers do not complain about misuse or overuse of water from the village reservoir anymore.
The People’s Resistance

Once the well-known American writer and philosopher Elbert Hubbard (1856 – 1915) said: “The man who has no problems is out of the game”. In other words, life is a game of problems and struggles; therefore, it is impossible to imagine a life without problems. However, people in Sankadayagama never left the game, continued the life with a new pressures from the mainstream society. Immediately after the water issue, the mainstream political practice in the country posed a new problem to the community. Due to their politics, Sankadayagama people were highly ignored by the officials and the politicians of the then government. In that sense, Sankadayagama was prevented from receiving any benefits from the ongoing government development programs such as infrastructure developments. Since, most of its neighboring communities appreciate the fruits of development such as electricity and pipe-borne drinking water in their villages, people in Sankadayagama had to achieve everything on their own. According to Wijayaratne:

As we are great devotees of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP)\textsuperscript{18} for years, Sankadayagama has been labeled as a SLFP supporters’ village. Therefore, when the United Nationals Party (UNP) controlled the country between 1977 and 1994, our village was highly disregarded. During that time, Sankadayagama did not receive any advantage from the government’s development programs. Even, some people in the village lost some of their property. For instance, some of us lost our lands because of the Iginimitiya project\textsuperscript{19}. Due to our political interest, we did not receive an appropriate compensation for the acquired lands. It was a

\textsuperscript{18} The Sri Lankan political arena has two dominant political parties: UNP and SLFP. Although, there are several other groups with different political interests, it is difficult to achieve electoral success without being a part of the above two parties. Since the independence, only these two parties have managed to rule the country (sometimes with the help of other parties).

\textsuperscript{19} Iginimitiya was a small village tank in the North West Province of the country. In the early 1990s, the government initiated to develop Iginimitiya tank as a large reservoir with financial and technical aid from the well-known British company, H.R. Wallingford to meet the water demand of the crop cultivation in the area.
very tough period. For instance, none of the local politicians or government officials were interested in repairing the road that links our village with the main road or provide electricity to the village. Therefore, the road had huge potholes and people had to light up paraffin lamps at night. Being ignored by mainstream political activities for over a decade was a great stress for the community.

When they were continuously rejected in the mainstream political practice, people realized that they could never sustain as individuals, but as a community. People’s interest to collaborate with the Maranadhara Samithiya grew stronger. The Samithiya eventually became the key director of the society, especially in the lack of state intervention in development. For instance, instead of waiting for the external support, the Samithiya encouraged villagers to organized ‘shramadana’ (self-help, group) campaigns to improve their roads. However, in 1994 the SLFP won a landslide victory on both general and presidential elections to establish its government. This government shift changed the destiny of the Sankadayagama people. Since then, Sankadayagama village was given priority in most government development programs. During this time, the Maranadhara Samithiya became the moderator between national and local level politicians and the villagers to bring in the benefits to the village. Sankadayagama village received the electricity in the mid-1990s. As many other villages in the area, Sankadayagama also suffered from inadequate of drinking water during droughts. In the late-1990s, with the involvement of the government and an NGO (which is named below) a small-

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20 They all highly acknowledge the late Minister D.M. Dassanayake as one of the supportive politicians of Sankadayagama village.
scale water pumping plant\textsuperscript{21} was located in Sankadayagama to provide better drinking water for the households.

In the democratic political setting, every citizen has a right to being a devotee of particular political party and believe in a particular politics. In this sense, the political interest of the people is not a given phenomenon, but a choice of the people. However, these people were disregarded by the mainstream society not only due to their political interest, but also due to their caste. During my study, villagers did not mention about the name of their caste. However, based on my observations and personal experiences, I assume these villagers belong to \textit{Radaa} caste\textsuperscript{22}. Explaining his experience as members of a lower level caste Wijayaratne portrayed,

Most of the members in my generation were mistreated by the society, because of 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 the guests to a school ceremony. Believe me, in front of the guests one teacher stopped me and took the welcome garland away from me. I was so embarrassed. I know most of my contemporaries in this village also have the similar kind of experiences.

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. They did not want the younger generation to grow up with the same bad experiences. People discussed

\textsuperscript{21} This plant provides drinking water not only to Sankadayagama, but also to a few other neighboring villages. There is a separate committee, which is appointed from the community (most of them are members of the Maranadhara Samithiya), to take care of the water plant and it charges an affordable monthly fee from each household according to its water consumption.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Radaas} were the traditional washer men who engaged in laundry activities during the last kingdom of the country, the Kingdom of Kandy. According to the caste hierarchy, \textit{Radaa} community was considered one of the lower level castes in the society. Even after two centuries after the demise of the last kingdom, the caste system still remains a part of the social stratification in Sri Lanka.
this issue several times at the meetings of the Maranadhara Samithiya. It recognized ‘higher education’ as the best solution to overcome all the humiliations that came from the mainstream society. During their monthly meetings, they chanted about the importance of education like a *mantra*. The Samithiya encouraged the parents to give a better education to their children. At the same time, children were encouraged to get exposed to higher education and think of it as the only way to earn dignified lives.

At the same time, the Maranadhara Samithiya promotes codes of ethics to its members with the object of ensuring a disciplinary and exemplary community for the younger generation in the village. It does not allow anybody to make or sell illicit liquor in the village. There is no prohibition to consume liquor, but nobody is allowed to make noise or disturb others. Moreover, after 7 pm the villagers are not allowed to play their televisions, radios, and DVD or cassette players with high volumes even at their houses. According to the Samithiya, loud noise would disturb the children in the village making it difficult to concentrate on their studies. Since, nobody wants to lose the membership of the Maranadhara Samithiya and get boycotted in the village; everybody accepts and obeys these codes.

During this study, I was exposed to some living evidence to prove the success of their effort: Most importantly, the children are successfully exposed to higher education. A family in Sankadayagama, for instance, sends the daughter to the medical college. Although Jothipala has not gone beyond grade three and cannot read or write he could manage to send his only son to college. As it is highly competitive to get in to a university in Sri Lanka, the younger generation of Sankadayagama having university education, especially under above conditions, is a great achievement of its people.
The Challenging Future

Resisting the pressure that came from the mainstream society and from within the community, people of Sankadayagama have shaped their lives, following their own aspirations. In relation to most of their neighbors, Sankadayagama people have made several grand achievements. Most significantly, the initiators of the community have achieved their targets and they could protect the young generation from the pressures and discrimination that they experienced as youth. When compare to most other villages in the area, most families in Sankadayagama own houses and they are in better condition. Moreover, every family in the village owns a vehicle at least a motor cycle. Although the elders appreciate and proud of the achievements of the youth, they have a complaint about them, especially the generation born after the mid-1980s. According to Wijayaratne,

They (the youth) are very reluctant to take responsibility and assume leadership of the community. Since they do not like to hold any positions (offices) in the Maranadhara Samithiya, all the key positions are still rotating among the members of our generation. Most of them (the youth) like to live in urban areas and seldom come here to visit us; they do so as tourists who visit the zoo to watch animals.

The youth in Sankadayagama would desire to stay outside the village. Most of them are hesitant to share the responsibilities of their community organization. When compared to the elders, most of the youth are educated and well exposed to the outside world. Since, they have less exposure to the pressures that their seniors experienced; most of the youth do not have a sense of resistance. As they have a reputation in the mainstream society due to their academic qualifications, youth do not feel that they are being neglected by the mainstream society. Since most of them prefer to consume an urban life style, they are less concerned about agricultural
activities in the village. Ultimately, most of the youth in the village do not have a real intention to maintain the Maranadhara Samithiya. According to most of them, the responsibility of the Maranadhara Samithiya belongs to their parents’ generation; they created it and it is “their baby.”

Conclusion

In view of concluding this discussion, I wish to make a comparison between the Maranadhara Samithiya in Sankadayagama and the Village Development Committees in Mahakumbukkadawela and Nawagattegama areas. The purpose is to investigate the differences between two types of community organizations; one is emerged from within the community and the other is granted to the community.

Maranadhara Samithi is quite common in Sri Lanka; there are several such societies in almost every village in Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagatthegama areas. Those death benevolent societies only function when someone is dead in the village. In those villages, World Vision’s VDC is the key community organization that directly focuses on social and economic matters of the people. That is the only platform in the community to discuss issues pertaining to the village at large and its future (or development). However, VDC is not produced from within the community. World Vision created it for the community. At the same time, World Vision believes that VDC can represent the real voice of the people in the development process.

As Devy (2008) argues, the true development neither imports from another society nor imitates another model, but comes from within the community. From Devy’s perspective, the Maranadhara Samithiya in Sankadayagama is the effective community organization, developed
from within, for the purpose of development. When compared with the VDC, people in Sankadayagama have continued to maintain their organization for a long time.

Even when World Vision introduced the concept of community organization to the people of Mahakumbukkadawala, the Maranadhara Samithiya was strongly functioning in Sankadayagama. Even after the VDCs collapsed in Mahakumbukkadawala, i.e., after World Vision left the area, the Maranadhara samithiya kept functioning in Sankadayagama. Although, it was initiated to deal with deaths, Sankadayagama people changed its role according to their requirements. They were able to change its objectives and lead the organization to achieve their aspirations of life.

Most significantly, this indicates that the people of Sankadayagama trust in their own strength than any other external organization. Although, they got several benefits from the government, they did not become a dependent on government aid. Although the people Mahakumbukkadawala connected with the VDC with great passion towards development, they did not trust in themselves, but in the helping hand of World Vision. In result, people gave up their contribution to the VDC after the NGO left them. Without World Vision, people did not have much value for their VDCs. Although, the VDCs are still functioning in Nawagattegama, there is no guarantee that the people would continue them in the absence of aid from World Vision.

Based on these observations, it indicates that empowerment or the development could never be handed over to a community or an individual. It should emerge as their own cause, through their own decisions.
CHAPTER 05

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, I have no intention to propose a universally relevant development model. This study has given me the understanding that development is place/community specific and should come from within. As Devy (2004) highlights, development is unique to the time, space, and the community. Therefore, way a community, village, city, or a nation achieves its development can never be a model of development for another community to follow. Nevertheless, the driving forces behind certain development approaches, and select aspects of the process, can inspire and help others find their own paths in development.

According to Sen (1999), development is one’s ability to live as long as s/he wants the way s/he wants. The social opportunities such as health and education are the essence of development; adequate social opportunities enable people to shape their own destiny. These opportunities enable the community to be real agent of development instead of being the passive recipients of external development programs. Sen (1999) demonstrates that the lack of social opportunities builds huge anxieties in a society, separating people from their aspirations. The inadequacy of social opportunities makes people frustrate and waste their abilities to achieve development, creating a vacuum in the society.

This vacuum creates the need for external support for development, possible even its own existence. Further, it tolerates the entry of external actors such as development agencies and NGOs into the community in the name of development. On the other side, these development agencies sympathetically identify the community as the ‘target’ or ‘beneficiaries’
of their development projects. Moreover, they organize the community and form community organizations to empower their target groups.

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, in every village in Nawagattegama and Mahakumbukkadawala areas World Vision formed VDCs to ensure community participation in the development process. Most of the time, the VDCs made up of all the villagers within each village, decided what kind of improvements are/were essential for their particular village. In this, the VDC became the atom of World Vision’s development process.

In Sankadayagama, however, the Maranadhara Samithiya propelled development. I have identified an essential difference between the formation of VDCs in World Vision project areas and the Maranadhara Samithiya in Sankadayagama. The difference is based on the perceptions of development of the initiators of these community organizations.

Although, the World Vision approach was grounded and it interacted well with the public, the entire approach is based upon an ‘outside-in’ perception about the community. In this, World Vision was blind to what the people in Nawagattegama and Mahakumbukkadawala have/had already achieved through their existing community organizations and leaders. Instead of understanding the local culture, its strengths and weaknesses, and bolstering up these strengths to support the people and their communities to reach development through their own path(s), World Vision redirected and disciplined people’s ambitions under its direction and goals. In this, World Vision reduced people’s strength, courage, and abilities into a particular structure: the VDC. However, World Vision’s ignorance of local culture became a barrier for the community in Mahakumbukkadawala to find its own path of development, based on its own strengths and weaknesses. Instead the World Vision approach made the community a passive
recipient of development aid, thereby creating a dependency on the NGO. Although people in Nawagattegama are ambitious about their future, if the experience in Mahakumbukkadawala is a pattern, then Nawagattegama may suffer a similar experience when World Vision withdraws from the area.

At the same time, World Vision anticipated that they could handover empowerment to the community in Mahakumbukkadawala through the VDCs. As this study demonstrates, no institution, person, or organization could deliver, or provide development or empowerment to any individual or community. In that sense, although outsiders may be able to help, both development and empowerment are only possible through the self-transformation of the community. Furthermore, the causes of development are always unique to the individual, community, or nation.

People in Sankadayagama had utilized their existing social organization, the Maranadhara Samithiya as means of development. Most crucially, they had the drive and used the best local institution. Although there are many Samithiyas in both Mahakumbukkadawala and Nawagaththegama areas, none of them were able become the means of development for those communities. The Samithiya was, in fact, a tool, not the driver. It is clear that the leadership of a couple of people in the village (especially those like Jothi, Wijayaratne, and some of their compatriots) have transformed the Samithiya as the main means of development. They were heavily discriminated from the mainstream society due to their strong political support for the opposition and caste (considered low). However, they utilized even humiliation as a key strength to shape their lives. Therefore, the essence of success in Sankadayagama is not simply in the structure of their community organization, but the will and faith of the key
actors who lead the community and their leadership, creating a drive for vision and commitment to the community. It is hard to export this; it needs to grow from within.
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