

# Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Community Development Process – With Special Reference to the Empowerment of Livelihood Activities in Rural Areas in Sri Lanka

Panampitiya W.M.G.N

Assistant Lecturer

Department of Sociology, University of Kelaniya, Dalugama, Sri Lanka

Email: [gnpanampitiya@gmail.com](mailto:gnpanampitiya@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** Main intention of this article is to analyze the operational patterns of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the process of livelihood empowerment in community development and to study about the effects of programmes which have been implemented by NGOs for the uplifting sustainability of standards of living of the people. This is an empirical study which was conducted in a rural area in Sri Lanka based on survey method and functional method. Data have been collected based on questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and observations. Mainly using empirical data, the author have further analyzed the main operational fields of NGOs, their techniques and programmes related to enhance the stability of livelihood activities and income generating process. Based on findings, it has suggested some recommendations regarding government and NGOs' interventions to achieve true sense of community development objectives in a sustainable manner.

**Keywords:** Non-Governmental Organizations, Community Development, Livelihood, Empowerment, Stability.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Community development is a significant development strategy which has been discussed in the development discourse to address small social groups in the society. Community development is a social process of where community members come together to take collective action, planning and making decisions to generate solutions to common problems. To understand the implication of community development requires a clear understanding of what is meant by community. "The term community can be used in both the concrete and the abstract. In the concrete sense, according to Donald R. Fessler, sociologist defines community as any area in which people with a common culture share common interests" [1]. According to that, main features of a community are sharing common culture and interest and people who living in a same geographical area. Thus, community can refer to a social group having common interests. Enforcement is not a factor for the formation of a community and it is based on common identity. Ethnic, religious, geographic, cultural, economic and political identity and many features may be caused to form a community. community development is a basic and significant development strategy to enhance capabilities and potentials of community members into the well-being of their living. community development focus on the process of teaching people how to work together to solve common problems. It strengthens the capacity of people as active citizens through their community groups, organizations and networks. It plays a crucial role in supporting active democratic life by promoting the autonomous voice of disadvantaged and vulnerable communities. "Community development is based on confident, critical consciousness and collectivity which is initiated through collective attempt to understand the reality for a positive change" [2]. According to that, Community development involves changing the relationships between ordinary people and people in positions of power, so that everyone can take part in the issues that affect their lives. "Community development is a social process of where community members come together to take collective action, planning and making decisions to generate solutions to common problems" [3]. community development relies on interaction between people and joint action, rather than

individual activity. Good community development is action that helps people to recognize and develop their ability and potential and organize themselves to respond to problems and needs which they share. It supports the establishment of strong communities that control and use assets to promote social justice and help improve the quality of community life. But, it is not a sole effort of the community and government intervention is significant to provide and improve structural resources and infrastructure facilities in the process of community development. Government often get provision for that through foreign aids and foreign loans. In this matter, it is essential to have alternative institutional interventions in the development process and NGOs are one of significant alternative intervention in the modern scenario of development path.

In the Dictionary of Non – Governmental Organizations – NGOs has defined, “A non-governmental organization (NGO) is any non-profit, voluntary citizens' group which is organized on a local, national or international level. Task-oriented and driven by people with a common interest, NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian functions, bring citizen concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies and encourage political participation through provision of information. Some are organized around specific issues, such as human rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help monitor and implement international agreements. Their relationship with offices and agencies of the United Nations system differs depending on their goals, their venue and the mandate of a particular institution. NGOs have efficient administrative structure and specialized skills and strategies to closely work with the community. Because of NGOs strategies on stimulating potential powers, skills, talents and capacities and specialized techniques, they have become more crucial factor in the community development process. NGOs have formulated which based on environmental preservation, human rights improvement, community welfare and development. But as a whole, ultimate goal of NGOs are uplift of the living standard of the people for the economic, social, political and educational sustainability.

Livelihood activities of individuals directly affect the level of income and economic stability of a household. Therefore, it is significant to have supportive mechanisms in the community to empower the capacities and abilities of people in particularly in rural areas. One of significant working area of NGOs in community development is to empower livelihood of individuals or households. Hence, role and Patterns of projects of NGOs in the process of livelihood empowerment in community development has been analysed in this study. There, it has mainly focus to identify practical contribution of NGOs related to empowerment of livelihood in the community development process and effects of community development programmes which launch by NGOs for the uplifting sustainability of standards of living of the people with special reference to the rural areas in Sri Lanka.

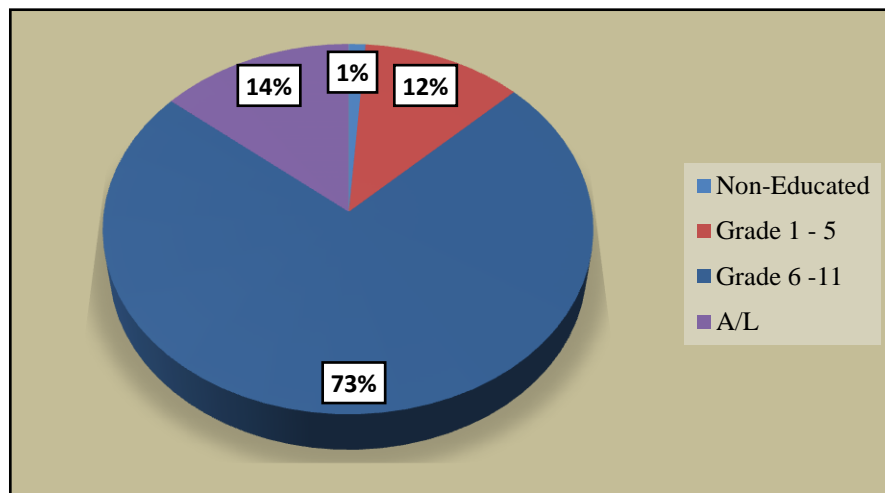
## II. METHODOLOGY

Research is a systematic endeavour in order to generate intellectual knowledge and practical answer to social problems with the application of scientific method. All sciences are bound to follow scientific method. Therefore, research methodology is a crucial factor in the research process. “Research methodology is a systematic way to solve a problem. It is a science of studying how research is to be carried out. Essentially, the procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are called research methodology. It is also defined as the study of methods by which knowledge is gained. Its aim is to give the work plan of research [4]. Research methodology refers to the structure of procedures and transformational rules which used social scientist shift information up and down this ladder of abstraction in order to produce knowledge. Survey method and functional methods were used to investigate operational patterns and effects of community development programmes of NGOs. The empirical study was conducted in two Grama Niladari Divisions of Nawagaththegama Divisional Secretariat Division in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from 50 households based on purposive sampling. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and observation were used as primary data collection techniques. Both open ended and closed ended questions were included in the questionnaire.

## III. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Educational Background of the sample

Educational level or educational attainment is one of important factors which strongly influences the livelihood and living condition of households. In one hand, education is a main factor of facilitating social mobility. On the other hand, it interprets their probability of falling vulnerabilities and poverty in some extent. When studying a status of a community, education is a significant factor directly affected to the quality and well-being of a community. Hence, level of education of sampled respondents were studied and it can be illustrated as follows.



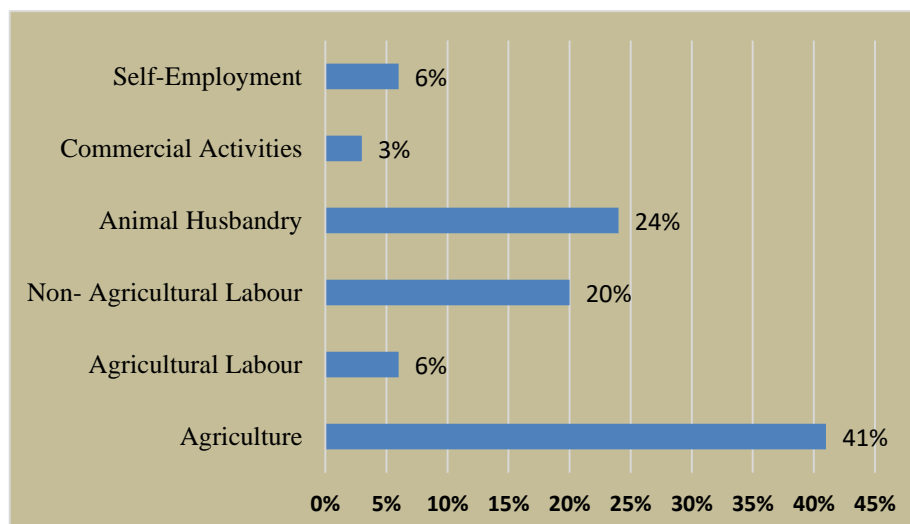
Source: Filed Data

**Figure 1: Adult Education Level**

According to above data, it is evident that vast majority of responded adults (73%) have attended school from grade 6 to Ordinary Level (O/L). A considerable proportion of women (12%) have completed only primary education (from grade 1 – 5). A few proportion (14%) have passed A/L while 1% of women reporting no schooling. None of them in the sample reported that have received higher education (Graduates/Post Graduates or other Vocational Trainings). It has indicated that although free education is provided in Sri Lanka, education mobility is very limited among sampled FHHs. Considering all information, inadequate awareness about value of education, lack of motivation and not taking education as a necessary social requirement, becoming as assistants for cultivation with their parent due to economic difficulties have mainly affected to low level of education in particularly adult people in rural societies.

### B. Employment Status of the Sample

Employment or livelihood activities are main factors which influence to decide living condition or status of an individual in the society. On the other hand, employment status or livelihood strategies of individuals directly affect the level of income and economic stability of a household. Therefore, researcher has investigated employment status and livelihood activities of respondents and data can be illustrated as follows.



Source: Filed Data

**Figure 2: Distribution of Respondents by Livelihood Activities**

Remarkably, a higher proportion of respondents (41%) have engaged in agriculture. Some of them have engaged in both paddy cultivation and crop cultivation and some are doing only crop cultivation. Crop cultivation refers to dry farming in particular *chena* cultivation. Grains such as Sesame, Mung beans, Cowpea, Maize, Finger Millet (*Kurakkan*) are mainly cultivated in this type of cultivations as these types of crops are more suitable for dry zone area such as

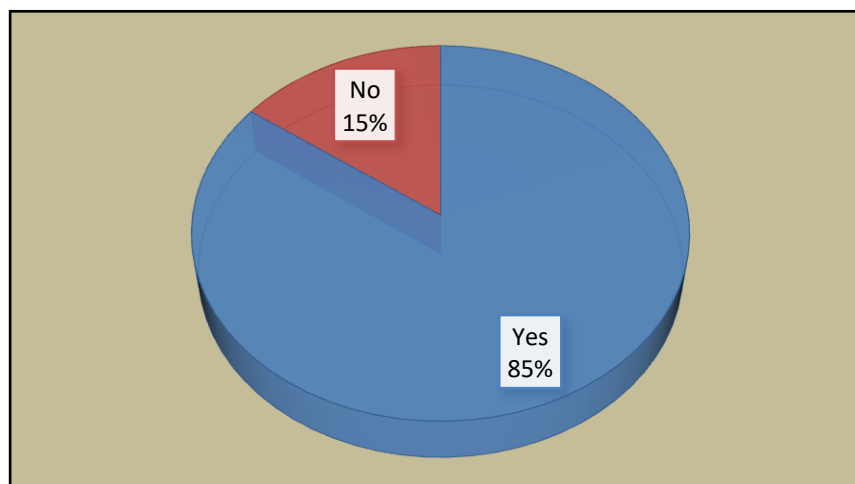
Nawagathagama. A considerable proportion of people (24%) have engaged in animal husbandry. A sizable proportion of respondents (20%) work as manual labours in non-agriculture sector such as carpenter, Mason etc. A few proportions of respondents (6%) have engaged in self-employment such as sewing dresses, making cloth handbags, Making cloth door-mats etc.

### ***C. Programmes of NGOs in the Research Area Related to Empowerment of Livelihood Activities***

According to Chambers and Conway a livelihood is a combination of capacities and means of earning a living of households such as income, assets and foods. When livelihood concept defines in rural areas, it is totally related with means of gaining of living. Livelihood is mainly related to capabilities such as skills, abilities and aptitudes, assets and resources and ability to claim and access towards them for a sustainable living [5]. According to that, livelihood is a broader concept including monetary and non-monetary returns from activities, assets and potential capabilities. Thus, livelihood activities are related to things people do for maintaining their livings. In other words, livelihood activities are helpful in providing food or supplementing the earning opportunities for households. "Activities for living include cultivation, herding, hunting, gathering, wage labour, trading and hawking, fetching and carrying, begging, theft, selling firewood and craftwork" [6]. According to the figure 2, it can be identified that, most of respondent people in the sample area have engaged in different kinds of livelihood activities such as crop and paddy cultivation, animal husbandry, self-employment, commercial activities etc. Improving income generating opportunities is a significant factor to sustain economic stability of a community. Programmes related to enhance knowledge about new technologies, effective techniques and giving awareness and providing access to new income generating opportunities can be identified in the research area and can be analysed as followings.

#### ***C.1. Trainings Related to Agriculture***

Crop and paddy cultivations could be identified as the most spread livelihood activity in the research area. Agricultural extension services had been significant in achieving intended purposes in farming and for enhancing the sustainability of livelihood. It was significant to provide awareness and guidance on new technological agricultural methods and trainings for peasant societies basically depended on agriculture in order to uplift the living standards of people. Agricultural provisions such as fertilizers, guidance, trainings, awareness, improved seeds, new technological methods had been included to the agriculture extension services. Considering studied area, NGOs in the Nawagathagama division had mainly focused on providing knowledge and practical skills related to agriculture.



Source: Field Data

**Figure 3: Overall Community Participation for Trainings Related to Agriculture**

Land preparation trainings, seed preservation trainings, harvesting technological training programmes, field crops training programmes, compost fertilizer trainings, horticulture/Home gardening trainings and soil preservation trainings were highlighted in the agriculture field. When considering deeply, it could be identified that community could be able to gain knowledge, instructions and practical exposure on importance of utilizing new technological techniques on seed preservation, land preparation and importance of using compost and natural fertilizers to increase the quality of harvest and to reduce and control pests. Guidance, trainings and raising awareness programmes could have been crucial for

improvement of sustainability in an agricultural society. And also, the most significant observation was to identify that community members have internalized these most practises into their agricultural activities.

### ***C.2. Distribution of Agricultural Equipment, Seeds and Plants***

Considering development perspectives, enhancing stability and sustainability of the economy is a major factor to increase and strength the basic foundation of a community. Distribution of subsidies related to agriculture was an identified programme which were initiated by NGOs in the study area. Garden Rake, Hoe, Water pipes, equipment related to seed preservation as agricultural equipment, seed paddy, vegetable seeds and Plants such as jacks, coconut, Orange, Mango had been distributed by programmes of NGOs to community members.

### ***C.3. Composing Agriculture Wells***

Natural capital is resource stocks especially common environmental resources which are very useful for livelihood activities. Water is an essential natural capital in rural paddy and crop cultivation. Farming activities in this area are based on both rain-fed cultivation and major and minor irrigation systems. But, because of lack of rainfall, one of major issue related to agriculture in the study area was lack of water for agriculture. In this content NGOs had initiated to compose agriculture wells (*"Pathaha"*) to store water for cultivation.

### ***C.4. Training Programmes for Animal Husbandry and Distribution of Animals and Equipment***

In addition to agriculture, NGOs in the study area had conducted significant programmes related to generate income sources in primary and secondary occupation. There, NGOs had distributed of poultry, Domestic pigs, Dairy cattle and Goats and provided trainings on beekeeping and other trainings for breeding, Nutrition, Prevention of diseases to promote animal husbandry among community members. In addition to that they had provided nets and other equipment reading livestock. As a result of these initiatives, community members had received awareness, knowledge and practical experiences on maintaining livestock and additionally, it had influenced to generate secondary income generating sources for them. Parallely, positive influences regarding nutrition of the community in particularly children had been increased by productions such as eggs and dairy.

### ***C.5. Self-Employment Training Programmes***

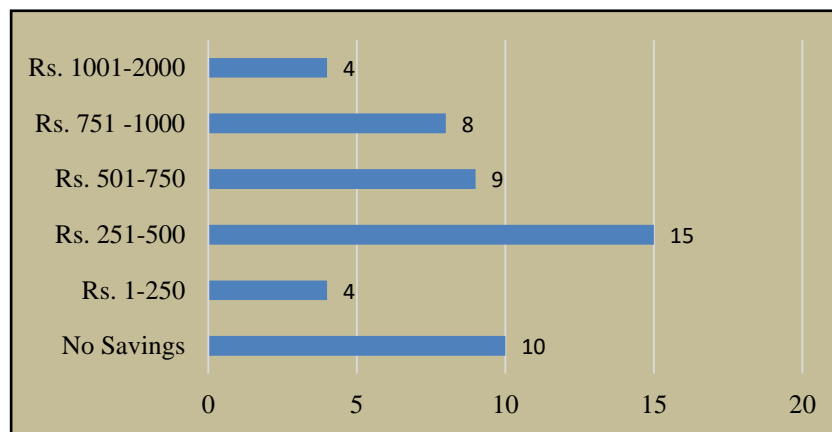
Self-employment is a great method which can use as primary occupation in order to increase the household income. Alternatively, it is a significant option to protect economic stability in challenges against agriculture and other occupations due to various factors and situations. NGOs in the studied area had provided self-employment trainings on making food such as curd, milk-toffee and making handbags and cloth doormats. Some people had tended to start self-employment such as making handbags and making curd. But, it could be identified that due to lack of motivation and inspiration, most of them had not gained proper confidence in any new income generating sources like self-employment. Therefore further, it was observed that intervention of NGOs regarding improving access to the market, public transportation and infrastructure and low rate loan systems, updating reasonable rate of commodity price for products, increase motivational factors and empowerment are important to increase the tendency of diversified livelihood activities such as self-employment.

### ***C.6. Awareness Programmes on Management of Expenditure in the Household***

NGOs in the study area had conducted awareness programmes on how to priorities the needs and wants, reducing unnecessary expenditures and maintain monthly list of goods. It could be observed that some people had internalized and maintained these practises for everyday lives in the household income. But, more intervention to empower and stimulate attitudes regarding management of household income need to increase good practises of spending money in particularly people who live in rural areas.

### ***C.7. Programmes related to Savings***

Savings are important factor to enhance stability of the household economy and to improve confident for confronting shocks. On the other hand, it is significant to enhancing practices related to increasement of tendency for savings among rural people in the community development process. NGOs in the research area had implemented programme namely *"saving society"* to increase the tendency of savings. Accordingly, community members of the sample had inclined to collect agreed specific amount of money monthly and to deposit in an account related to *"saving society"*.



Source: Filed Data

**Figure 4: Amount of the Monthly Savings of the Sample**

According to above data, it was evident that majority of people in the sample (40) had tended to save at least some amount of money monthly. They had also initiated to give low-rate loans for members of the “saving society” for emergency needs and there is a practise to distribute the profit of the “saving society” among its members annually. These initiatives had added the strength to their economic stability. On the other hand, the risk of taking loan can be worse if they obtain loans from informal sources. But, as a result of this low-rate loan system for members of the “savings society”, it had reduced the negative consequences of taking loans from informal sources such as interests.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Overall, programmes related to paddy and crop cultivations, animal husbandry, employment, management of household expenditure and savings and also community effects of them was analysed critically through this study. NGO programmes in the studied rural area to enhance the capacity and skills related to income generating opportunities had positively influenced to uplift economic stability of their household. Based on the findings, it has suggested that programmes related to empower human potentials and skills to sustain livelihood of people are significant to introduce rather than focusing social welfare and effective integrated approach between state and NGO sector is important in order to absorb full potentials of community members into development discourse through empowering capacities, skills, and strengths. Finally, this study signifies the importance of introducing integrated intervention between government and NGOs with an approach to Participatory and Negotiated Territorial Development which offers concrete answers to the challenges of improving trust among community members in the research area, strengthening social cohesion and promoting a systemic territorial development.

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