

Local Government and Community Development Performance and Participation in Sri Lanka's System of Decentralization

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I. Introduction

In a number of third world countries which have emerged from colonialism, highly centralized political and administrative systems were a direct legacy from the past. In the years following independence, development policies were adopted by these countries for the purpose of distributing more equitably the benefits of economic growth and improving living standards of all levels within society. It was imperative for the success of those policies to elicit popular participation and popular support in development planning and administration. A large number of developing nations therefore attempted different forms of decentralization in the 1970s and 1980s to overcome the drawbacks of centralized planning and implementation,

While the concept of decentralization embraces a wide spectrum—from administrative deconcentration to devolution of functions to democratically elected local bodies, as well as delegation to para-statal institutions and non-governmental voluntary organisations—the scope of this study is limited to the operation of the system of local government in Sri Lanka in the form of District Development Councils, supplemented by Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas at two lower levels within each district. This system as it operates in Sri Lanka, is however inextricably tied up with the agencies of administrative deconcentration in different areas as well as the central political system at the head of which is the Executive Presidency.

As in other ex-colonial countries, Sri Lanka's colonial heritage also included a highly centralized system of provincial/district administration. Although the years following independence (1948) witnessed a number of constitutional and political changes (including the institution of a republic, and the grafting of an executive presidency on to the parliamentary/cabinet form of government) administrative arrangements remained largely unchanged.

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MAP 1
Administrative Districts in Sri Lanka

The district (under the Government Agent, an official of the Ministry of Home Affairs) came to be accepted as the unit of administration, subdivided into territorial units at two lower levels, under officials of the same ministry. (Presently Sri Lanka consists of 25 districts. See Map I.) Vertically structured field agencies of government departments, answerable to their head-offices in the capital city of Colombo had also developed and continued to function after independence. Elected local authorities, consisting of Municipal Councils, Urban Councils, Town Councils and Village Councils performing a limited range of functions, operated under the control of the Department of Local Government.

Structurally therefore, in each district, there was the organisational system of the Government Agent, centrally controlled sub-offices of government departments parallel to one another and to the Government Agent's 'district administration', with local authorities on the fringe of this system. Weak coordination was a marked feature, since the G.A. (who was expected to coordinate all governmental activities in the district) found his position ambiguous in relation to vertically structured departmental units.

1. Politicisation

The process of politicisation which gained momentum especially after 1956 was reflected in the districts (each of which generally contained a member of MP's constituencies) in the form of an enhancement of the MP's role. This received formal recognition in 1973, with the system of District Political Authority (DPA)⁽¹⁾ when a member of the central parliament was appointed as political head of the district. He could also decide financial allocations from the Decentralized Budget⁽²⁾ for capital works of a local nature within the district.

In 1978 the government of the United National Party⁽³⁾ replaced the system of DPA with District Ministers appointed by the President from among Members of Parliament, the main objective of the District Ministry being:

- 1) Formulation, approval and implementation of capital works of a local nature within the district;
- 2) Generation of increased production and employment in the rural sector by enlisting the participation of the people in the planning and implementation of development projects at the local level;
- 3) Securing the participation of the members of parliament for the completion of the projects in their respective electorates expeditiously and to effect economies by enthusing the people to involve themselves in programmes of development.⁽⁴⁾

2. Reform of Local Government

The system of District Ministers was accompanied by a number of other reforms in 1980/81:

- 1) While Municipal and Urban Councils continued to function in the urban

(1) The system of District Political Authority (DPA) introduced during the government of Mrs. Sirimavo Bandaranaike (1970-77) had the following objectives:

- a. To provide political leadership for the "Food Production War" which received the highest priority in the face of the economic crisis at the time.
- b. To provide a form of decentralization whereby the people would be associated in planning and implementation through the DPA who would be able to mobilise the people behind the government's effort.

(2) All items of capital expenditure which were of a purely local character (which hitherto were allocated under the annual budget to Ministries/Departments) were now collected together, as the "Decentralized Budget". These funds, allocated to the different districts, were to be utilized for local-level development projects decided by the District Political Authority.

(3) The United National Party, under the leadership of J.R. Jayawardene, came into office with a large majority at the elections of 1977.

(4) Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs 4th January 1979.

areas, Town Councils and Village Councils (which had functioned in small towns and rural areas respectively), were abolished.

2) Development Councils were constituted under the Development Councils Act No. 35 of 1980, for each district, consisting of:

- (a) the MPs within the district and
- (b) a specified number of members elected (on the basis of the list system of proportional representation) by the voters of the district. The Chairman of the Development Council (DC) was to be the person heading the list of the party (or independent group) which obtained the highest number of seats. Generally the MP s were to be in a majority within the DC and the chairman of its executive committees was the District Minister.

3) Pradeshiya Mandalas (P.M.) and Gramodaya Mandalas (G.M.) were instituted at two lower levels within the district-viz at the level of the A.G.A.-Division and the Grama Sevaka Division respectively.

The Gramodaya Mandalas are not elected bodies but consist of the chairmen of 36 specified types of voluntary organisations which may function in the area.⁽⁵⁾ The chairmen of the Gramodaya Mandalas automatically become members of the PM at the higher level.(See Chart I.)

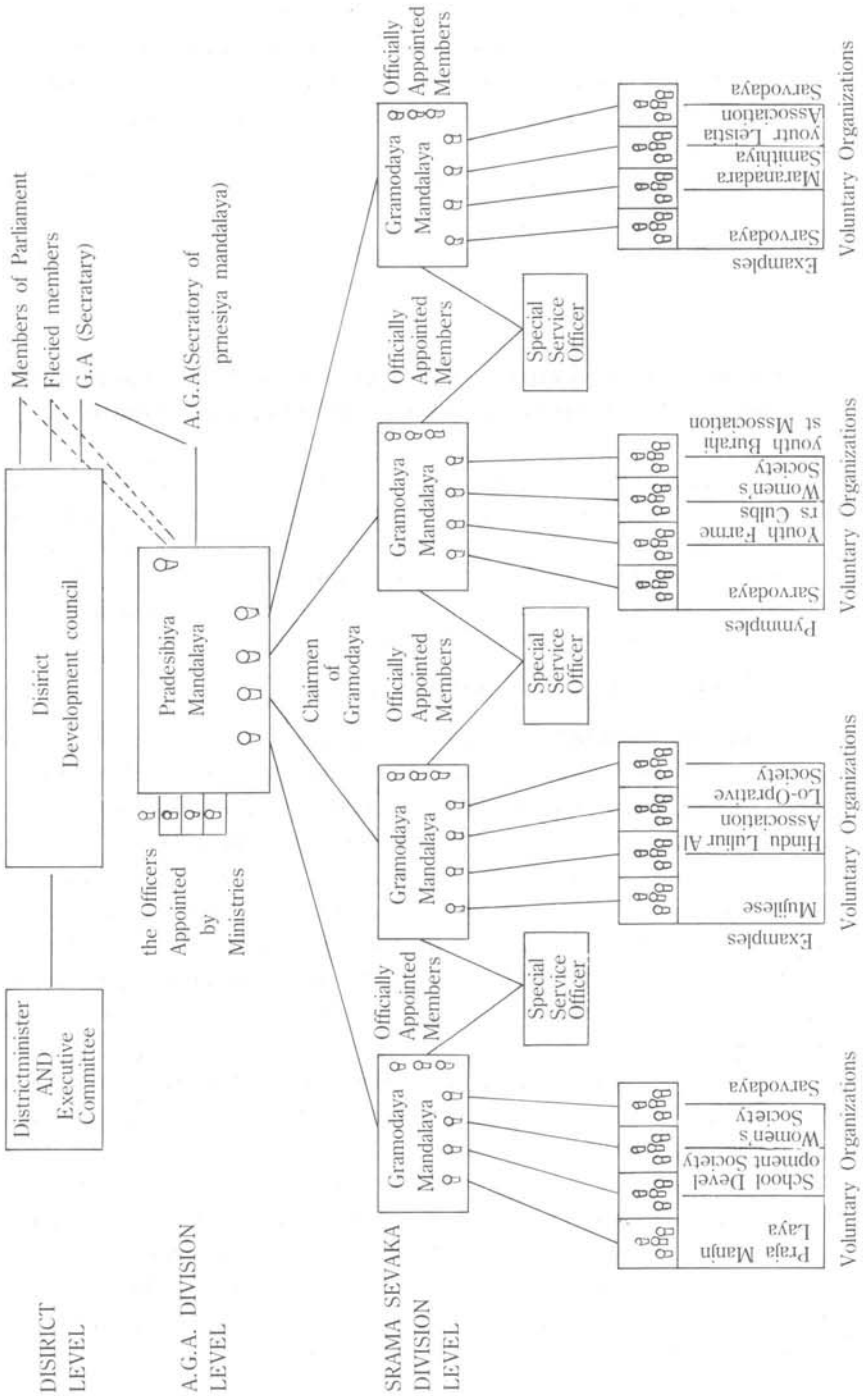
The system of DCs/PMs/GMs was a response to the need for infusing an element of democracy through popular participation at different levels, into Sri Lanka's highly centralized bureaucratic structure. It was expected to be the mechanism through which people could become partners with the government in the processes of planning, decision making and implementation, within the broad parameters of the national plan.

In Vol. I(Leitan, 1987) attention has been drawn to emerging patterns within Sri Lanka's local political system in relation to effectiveness in the delivery of services, participation of localities and the degree of decentralization in practical terms, which the system has effected. The chapters which follow substantiate these themes on the basis of research conducted primarily (though not exclusively) in two of Sri Lanka's districts. While certain constraints (mainly financial) limited the scope and intensity of research, data has been collected on the basis of:

- 1) The study of files and circulars pertaining to the system both in the ministries/departments in Colombo, as well as in the district offices.
- 2) Interviews (open-ended) with officials in Colombo and the districts, including Government Agents, Assistant Government Agents, Assistant Commissioners of Local Government, Deputy Directors/Planning, Rural De-

(5) These are listed on p. 27.

Chart 1. The Development Councils System-Structural Organization



velopment officers, Special services officers etc;

- 3) Interviews with District Ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Development Councils, Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas.
- 4) Extended field visits to the selected districts for an appraisal of development activities.
- 5) Attendance at meetings of Development Councils Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas.
- 6) An intensive study of selected Gramodaya Mandalas at the level of the grass-roots.

II. Social Service Delivery-Performance of Local Government under The System of District Development Councils

"The importance of Local Government lies in the fact that it is the means by which people can provide services for themselves, can take an active and constructive part in the business of government; and can decide for themselves, within the limits of what national policies and local resources allow, what kind of services they want and what kind of environment they prefer." (Report of the Royal Commission on Local Government in England, 1966-69 Vol I.).

1. Functions of Local Authorities

An underlying assumption behind the adoption of a system of decentralization is that services and facilities of a local nature which affect people more directly, can be planned and implemented by local authorities. One of the dimensions of a successful system of local government therefore is the extent to which the provision of services and facilities to people in education, health, sanitation, water supply etc. can be facilitated as a result of direct contact and closeness to the users of the services. In this process, local councils can not only utilise resources which may be available in different localities, thereby reducing the unit cost of services, but can also act as a catalyst for development from the grass-roots.

"Development functions" in the Sri Lankan context, mean primarily functions pertaining to agriculture and related functions which affect the rural economy and its infrastructure. But significantly, these services as well as some others like social services and housing, which are generally recognised as local authority functions, remained outside the purview of local government. The agencies for these functions were almost exclusively, vertically-structured government departments, extending very often from their head-offices in Colombo down to the village level, as well as a large number of public corporations.

Against such a background therefore, it is significant that an attempt has

been made, with the institution of the system of Development Councils, to broaden the scope of local authorities, and enable them to be involved in planning and implementation.

Local authorities in Sri Lanka, it should be noted, do not have general competence legally, to operate within their localities. Their powers and functions are limited to those which are specified in their relevant ordinances.

2. Municipal Councils and Urban Councils

Thus the Municipal and Urban Councils which operate in the urban and semi urban areas, have clearly defined functions under the terms of the Municipal Councils Ordinance and the Urban Councils Ordinance respectively. These relate broadly to maintenance and lighting of streets and thoroughfares, public health and sanitation and the provision of public utility services (subject to the extent of their finances). They are also expected to "generally promote the health, welfare, convenience, and the development of sanitation and amenities of the municipality."⁽⁶⁾

3. Development Councils

It is significant that with the reforms of 1980/81 while a local authority was established for the first time at the level of the district, significant changes were also introduced in relation to the scope of activity of local government.

Attention has already been drawn to the limited role assigned to local authorities before 1980. With the establishment of DCs, the former Town and Village Councils were abolished and their functions devolved on the DCs as successors to the TCs and VCs.⁽⁷⁾ However in addition to these functions, the DCs are now vested with functions relating to 15 subjects specified in the 1st Schedule to the Development Councils Act. These include agriculture, agrarian services, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, health services, fisheries, rural development, primary and secondary education, small and medium scale industry etc.

(6) Municipal Councils Ordinance (Chapter 252) Section 46.(f)

(7) Development Councils Act No. 35 of 1980:

First Schedule

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| I. Agrarian Services. | IX. Food. |
| II. Agriculture. | X. Health Services. |
| III. Animal Husbandry. | XI. Housing. |
| IV. Cooperative Development. | XII. Irrigation Works (not of an inter district character). |
| V. Cultural Affairs. | XIII. Land use and Land settlement. |
| VI. Education. | XIV. Rural Development. |
| VII. Employment. | XV. Small and medium scale industries. |
| VIII. Fisheries. | |

These "development functions" are to be incorporated in a District Development Plan which is to be formulated by the Executive Committee of the Development Council and after the approval of the Development Council is obtained, it is to be implemented by the Executive Committee. The new system is thus intended to be an exercise in decentralisation to localities for the promotion of area based district level planning and implementation within national policies.

In the formulation of the plan the Executive Committee of the D.C. is first required to consider the draft development proposals prepared by the different functional ministers in charge of the fifteen subjects specified in the first schedule. It could also formulate other proposals, but again in consultation with the appropriate minister. These proposals (or some of them) are then to be incorporated in the Development Plan which is to be submitted to the Development Council for its approval (Section 35 (a)). It is also to be noted that the DC (under Sect. 17(l)(e)) is able to formulate other development schemes regarding matters not included in the 15 specified subjects, if the approval of the appropriate minister (and the Minister of Local Government) could be obtained.

4. Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas

Under the Development Councils (Amendment) Act No. 45 of 1981, the Gramodaya Mandalas were cast in the role mainly of bodies which could submit recommendations to the Pradeshiya Mandalas at the higher level, which would then consider their recommendations and submit them to the District Development Councils.

Their functions have been broadened under the Gramodaya Mandala Fund Act No. 28 of 1982, so that the G.M.S are now empowered to undertake functions at the local level and are cast in the role of development agencies at the level of the grass-roots.

5. Functioning of the System

The system of Development Councils/Pradeshiya Mandalas/Gramodaya Mandalas was designed, presumably, to make it possible for an integrated, district-based plan to be formulated and implemented on the basis of proposals which would originate at the grass-roots.

However the results of research indicate that in practice, a number of constraints continue to make the system largely ineffective. These constraints will be illustrated under the following broad headings:

- 1) District Development Plan
- 2) Structural weaknesses arising from inadequate linkages and different areas

of operation

3) Financial constraints

6. The District Development Plan

The objective of a "District Development Plan would be the preparation and implementation of a concerted, integrated plan of development for the district, on the basis of the interaction of the three levels within the system, so that decentralized functioning would become a reality. In its operation however, the District Development Plan has failed to achieve these purposes. What is evident is that it consists of a joint presentation of isolated projects, which are grouped under 4 broad categories or components:

- | | | | |
|--------------|-----|---|--|
| 1) Programme | I | : | Development Council Functions |
| 2) Programme | II | : | Line Ministries |
| 3) Programme | III | : | The Decentralized Budget |
| 4) Programme | IV | : | Special allocation for functions of Development Councils |

Looking at each of the above items, Programme I consists of the revenue received by the DC from rates and taxes, rents, licence fees, fees in respect of services, fines and warrant costs, grants from the Department of Local Government as well as any funds it may receive under the Decentralized Budget. It is possible for the DC to utilize this revenue for the performance of its functions under the DC Act.

Programme II consists of proposals for projects drawn up by departmental sub-offices within the district. By way of illustration, a section of Programme II of the District Development Plan, Kalutara is reproduced below:

Projects such as those illustrated above are approved and financed by each departmental head office in consultation with its staff stationed in the district (and the Member of Parliament in each constituency) and are implemented independently of other work which may be proceeding within the district. What needs to be emphasized therefore is that *although the projects under Programme II of the District Development Plan (Line Ministries) are presented for inclusion in the District Plan, there is no connection between this and programmes I, III and IV of the Plan.* They are individual projects of different functional ministries financed by their own funds.

Thus, while ostensibly Development Councils are vested with a number of new functions relating to development, it is the appropriate minister who is given the initiative in preparing draft proposals for the district, which are to be 'considered' by the Development Council. Others which the Development Council considers of special importance could obviously be included in the

District Development Plan, Kalutara 1987

Programme II Line Ministries, District of Kalutara
(New Works)⁽⁸⁾

Ministry	Parliamentary Constituency	Project	Total Estimate (Rs. cts)	Allocation for 1987
Education	Panadura	1. Construction of toilets for Bandaranaike School	11,000.00	11,000.00
		2. Repair of Girls School, Panadura	35,000.00	35,000.500
	Bandaragama	1. Repair of School building Imbulhena	18,300.00	
	Agalawatta	1. Constuction of building for Meegahathenna Central School	625,400.00	
Fisheries	Kalutara	1. Construction of toilets for fishermen	10,000.00	
		2. Provision of drinking water	20,000.00	
Local government, Housing and construction	Kalutara	Loans for Housing		5,99,385.00
	Beruwala	" "		612,940.00
	Agalawatta	" "		872,990.00

district plan only if they receive the blessings of the appropriate ministries. The initiative in transferring subjects to the Development Councils also rests with the line ministries.

While national interests must pre-dominate and district planning has to fall into place within the national plan, the weightage seems to be heavily in favour (as before) of individual ministries and against the emergence of the voice of localities. It is difficult to envisage (in the context and background of Sri Lankan traditions,) that line ministries would given up very easily their jealous-

(8) "New Works" are those which have been commenced in 1987, while 'continuation works' refer to those started in previous years, but for which financial allocations have been necessary in 1987 also.

ly-guarded functions or contribute willingly towards the dissolution of their empires. Each Development Council is faced with the necessity of negotiating with a number of powerful ministries, and their members (even though reinforced by the presence of MPs who are members of the Council) are not in a very favourable position. It is also doubtful whether the District Ministers (who are comparatively junior politicians) as chairmen of the executive committees of Development Councils, possess the necessary political muscle to contend with senior ministers and long-established practices of departments.

The practice which has come to be accepted therefore is that the line ministries proceed as before, to draw up draft proposals for each district; and Development Councils docilely accept these as part of their District plan, and incorporate them as Programme II of their plan. Moreover, these proposals are implemented separately by each department and the Development Council has no control over them.

Under Programme III are shown allocations within the district, for projects under the Decentralized Budget (DB). It was in 1974 that the Decentralized Budget was established a few months after the appointment of District Political Authorities to each of the districts. Hitherto all central financial allocations were made to Ministries/Departments and a central allocation by the relevant department was necessary for even the smallest village level project. As from 1974, funds normally allocated in this manner by individual departments for village level projects throughout the country were detached from Ministry/Department votes and constituted as a central fund under the nomenclature of the 'Decentralized Budget' to be allocated by the Ministry of Planning district wise for projects to be decided by the DPA of each district. Although DPAs have been replaced by District Ministers, the Decentralized Budget continues to operate.

It could be inferred that the continuation of the DB was for the purpose of district based development, within the system of DCs. However, a study of its functioning at present reveals that the funds received by each district under the DB are allocated on the basis of each MP's constituency in the district, and it is the MP (and not the Development Council) who makes decisions regarding the utilization of these funds. In 1987 for instance, a sum of Rs. 2.5 million was received by each MP. Tables I and II illustrate the allocation for continuing projects and new projects in 1987 in the district of Kalutara.

Programme III of the District Development Plan is also therefore not within the purview of the DC. Part of these funds may be allocated by MPs for work which the DC wishes to implement. It is system also contributes to pull away from district based planning towards individual electoral constituencies.

What is classified as Programme IV is a special allocation to each district

Table 1. District of Kalutara
Summary of Continuing Projects under Programme III: Decentralized Budget. Allocations to Parliamentary Constituencies

Departments	Panadura	Bandaragama	Horana	Bulat-sinhala	Matugama	Kalutara	Beruwalla I	Beruwalla II	Agalawatta	Joint Work	Total
Education	520933.00	385540.00	428316.25	332511.72	41555.00	19117.00	171776.00	19815.00	280547.00		2200110.97
Local Govt.			57466.50			162946.19					220412.69
Roads									155000.00		155000.00
Irrigation		11585.05				16953.00			445591.60		474129.60
Agrarian Services	15009.79				1119.00						16128.79
Buildings		214923.00							9105.00		224028.00
Rural Development			22123.00						7192.00		29315.00
Cultural Affairs								4169.00			4169.00
Women's Activities	42186.38	21577.46	33088.17		5000.00	15104.91			28607.00		145563.92
Development Council	9869.15	45300.00	74593.97		289220.50	96322.10	84175.00	49236.84	395074.69		1043792.25
Land Acquisition		240000.00	10.00		10.00	2149.29	70000.00		5200.00		317369.29
										37573.00	
Administration						50643.00	14900.00				65543.00
Electricity					14655.00						14655.00
Youth Services											
Total	587998.32	918925.51	615597.89	332511.72	336904.50	337890.49	340851.00	73220.84	1326317.29	37573.00	4947790.51

Table 2. District of Kalutara
Summary of New Projects under Programme III: Decentralized Budget. Allocations to Parliamentary Constituencies

Department	Panadura	Bandaragama	Horanan	Bulatsinhala	Matugama	Kalutara	Beruwala I	Beruwala II	Agalawattia	Total
Education	800000/=	265000/=	980000/=	400000/=		58000/=	937000/=		490000/=	3930000/=
Electricity		953043/=	210000/=	615000/=	1043000/=	880125/=		24776/=		3725944/=
Local Govt.	75000/=					213875/=	190000/=	1360000/=		1838875/=
Highways				750000/=		225000/=				975000/=
Irrigation							215000/=			215000/=
Buildings		25000/=								25000/=
Land commissioners			60000/=							60000/=
Cultural	40000/=	32500/=	233000/=	10000/=	50000/=	60000/=	35000/=	25000/=	25000/=	507500/=
Women's Affairs						60000/=	40000/=	50000/=		150000/=
D.D.C.			125000/=		680000/=		50000/=	360000/=		1215000/=
Lions Club							110000/=			110000/=
Agriculture	10000/=									10000/=
Sports	25000/=		20000/=			25000/=		50000/=		120000/=
Railways	490000/=									490000/=
Land Acquisition		18500/=				100000/=				118500/=
Administration			15000/=							15000/=
Census & Stab.	31265/=	39630/=	40000/=		20000/=		20000/=	26065/=	40000/=	216960/=
Sp. Dev.								25000/=		25000/=
Youth Affairs	45000/=	25000/=					75000/=		300000/=	445000/=
	1516265/=	1353673/=	1680000/=	1775000/=	1793000/=	1622000/=	1672000/=	1920841/=	855000/=	14192779/=

from the year 1984 for functions of DCs. A noteworthy feature of this allocation too is that it is not made as a block grant to the DC, but is made on the basis of electoral constituencies, the total received by each district depending on the number of MPs. The result inevitably, (in the context of the strength of the MP in Sri Lankan politics,) is that the deciding voice is that of the MP.

What needs to be emphasised is that although funds may be received under this programme for projects identified by the GM, individual MPs as member of the DC, and not the DC itself decides priorities and allocations.

A detailed analysis of the functions of the DCs/PMs/GMs in relation to the formulation of the District Development Plan thus brings out the discrepancy between theory and practice and the fact that the authority of the DC extends only to Programme I. The 4 programmes really represent a collection of projects, decided separately, accounted for separately, and which cannot therefore be said to comprise a plan for the integrated development of the district. (Chart 2 p. 15 Summarises the 4 Sectors which comprise the District Development Plan.)

7. Structural Weaknesses

One of the structural weaknesses within the system which prevents coordinated functioning on a district basis is that while the chairmen of G.Ms are members of the PM at the next level, there is no *direct linkage between the PM and the Development Council* at the level of the District. Resulting from this deficiency, proposals which may come up from the grass-roots to the PM, if they are accepted, cannot be referred up officially to the D.C.. It is through devious channels that these proposals have to be sent up (if at all) to the D.C.. The following examples which relate to selected Gramodaya Mandalas in the A.G.A. Division of Nattandiya, within the district of Puttalam seem to illustrate the feeling among most G.M. i.e. that their proposals can result in action only if the support of the M.P. can be obtained:

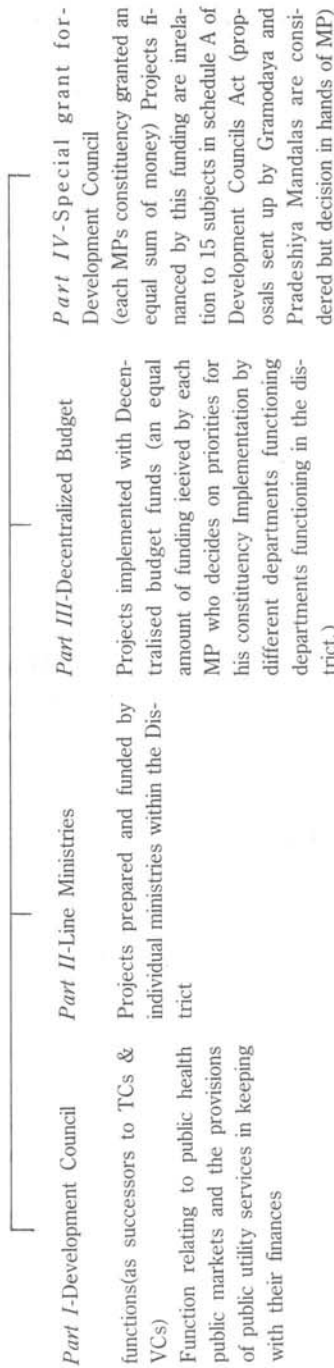
- 1) The G.M. of Pahala Mahawewa brought up the need for increased electricity voltage in the area, since the voltage drops from the required 230 watts to 80 watts after 7 p.m.. Although this matter was sent up to the P.M., a letter was also sent to the Member of Parliament of the area by the chairman of the G.M. in the following terms:

"Sir, we very respectfully request you to take action on our behalf and remove the inconveniences we face due to low voltage...."⁽⁹⁾

(9) Letter from Tilonson Mendis, Chairman of Gramodaya Mandala of Pahala-Mahawewa to Hon. Harold Herat, Member of Parliament for Nattandiya and Minister, Coconut Industries dated 29.3. 1984.

Chart 2
District Development Plan

1



Note:

- (1) Part I consists of "traditional" functions of local government, now performed by Development Councils.
- (2) Part II is *outside* the scope of the Development Council.
- (3) Part III is *outside* the scope of Development Council, except those projects which MPs may decide to assign to the Department of Local Government.
- (4) Part IV is presently outside the scope of the Development Council to a large degree But possibilities for greater effectiveness if it is given as part of Development Councils Funds.

- 2) The chairman of the G.M. of Pilakutumulla addressed an appeal to the Member of Parliament for Nattandiya to take necessary action to recommence the bus service (which had been discontinued by the Sri Lanka Transport Board) in respect of the villages of Nattandiya, Pilakutumulla, Thalgasagara, Muttibendiwela, Medagoda, Yatakalana and Wathugahamulla.⁽¹⁰⁾
- 3) A letter was written by the chairman, G.M. of Thalwila to the M.P. for Nattandiya, drawing his attention to the need for tarring the Thalwila-Marawila road, whereas funds had been allocated only for its repair as a gravel road.⁽¹¹⁾

The absence of adequate linkages within the system also affects the role which the G.M. are expected to play. Under the D.C.(Amendment) Act No. 32.1982, the Gramodaya Mandalas are called upon to

".....execute any work delegated to such Gramodaya Mandalas by a Development Council, the Executive Committee of a Development Council or a District Secretary under this Act."⁽¹²⁾

An analysis of the functioning of G.M.s however reveals that there is no conception of working on the basis of an integrated district plan under which functions are delegated to them by the D.C.. While most G.M.s seem to be defunct or lethargic, there are some G.M.s who do play an active role in village level development, especially under active and enthusiastic leadership. However, most of the functions which such G.M.s perform are in the nature of individual projects. They are by no means undertaken as part of the district plan, and to a large extent are on the basis of voluntary donations of labour and

	District Administration	Decentralized Structure
District Level AGA Division	G.A. Assistant Government Agent	Development Council Pradeshiya Mandala
Grama Sevaka Division	Grama Sevaka Niladhari	Gramodaya Mandala

(10) Chairman, Gramodaya Mandala, Pilakutumulla to Hon. Harold Herat, M.P. for Nattandiya and Minister of Coconut Industries 31.3.84.

(11) Dated 25.8.83.

(12) Development Councils (Amendment) Act No. 32 of 1982, Sect. 3 c.

materials.

An added complexity which contributes to the weakness of the structural pattern is the *lack of uniform functional areas* within the district. As indicated earlier, within each district the "standard" areas adopted by the District Administration of the G.A. are the *District*, the *Assistant Government Agent's Division* and the *Grama Sevaka Division*. With the introduction of the present decentralised system of D.C.s/P.M.s/G.M.s the same areas were adhered to: Nevertheless, in performing its functions, the D.C. follows, not the above boundaries, but the geographical areas of the former (now abolished) local authorities i.e. the areas of the Village Councils and Town Councils. The secretariats of these former councils have been retained under instructions from the Department of Local Government,⁽¹³⁾ as 'sub offices' of the DC. Functions which fall within Programme I of the District Development Plan are thus performed not through the P.M./G.M which follow the boundaries of the district administration, but through these sub-offices.

The district of Puttalam, for instance, contains 10 A.G.A. Divisions for each of which a PM has been constituted; these A.G.A Divisions are subdivided into 184 Grama Sevaka divisions, for each of which a G.M.s has been constituted. Nevertheless, the DC functions through its 19 'sub offices' i.e. the offices of the former 24 Village Councils and 5 Town Councils. In the district of Kalutara, while, 10 P.M.s function in each of the 10 A.G.A. divisions and 244 G.M.s have been established in the Grama Sevaka divisions the DC functions through the 'sub-offices' which correspond to the areas of the former Town and Village Councils: 18 VC areas and 7 TC areas.

Besides the illogicality of abolishing a system and yet retaining its administrative boundaries, the viability of the present system is also affected. Since these areas do not coincide with the boundaries of the P.M.s and G.M.s the tendency is to by-pass or ignore the P.M.s and G.M.s.

Attention has already been drawn to the presence of departmental field organisations within the district. While some follow the areas of the district administration some departments (eg Health Services Excise) adopt their own organisational regions which do not correspond with the standard pattern.

Of the greatest significance however are the electoral areas of the Members of Parliament. As has been illustrated, financial allocations to a large extent are based on the M.P.s constituencies; these however are not coterminous with the A.G.A Divisions which are the operational areas of the district administration. In the district of Puttalam, while there are 10 A.G.A. Divisions, there are

(13) Circular No. 1981/15/No.1A/Dev./Acct. of Commissioner of Local Government 3rd July 1981.

Table 3. Territorial Areas: A.G.A. Divisions and MPs' Constituencies-District of Puttalam

A.G.A. Division	MP's Constituencies
1. Rajavanni Palatha	Anamaduwa
2. Kumara Vanni Palata	Anamaduwa
3. Kalpitiya	Puttalam
4. Pitigal Korale (South)	Nattandiya
5. Pitigal Korale (North)	Chilaw
6. Puttalam-pattu and Kadawath	Puttalam
7. Wennappuwa	Wennappuwa
8. Arachikattuwa	Chilaw Anamaduwa
9. Wanathavilluwa	Puttalam Anamaduwa
10. Kirimetiya	Anamaduwa

Note: (a) Sectors of the MPs Constituency of Anamaduwa falls within the boundaries of 5 A. G. A. Divisions.

(b) The Development Council functions, we through the above areas, but through 29 'sub-offices'.

only 5 M.P.s constituencies, and the constituency of Anamaduwa falls within the geographical area of 5 A.G.A. divisions (see Table 3). In the district of Kalutara, there are 10 A.G.A. divisions and 8 M.P.s constituencies. In this district the MPs constituencies of Bandaragama, Bulatsinghala and Matugama each fall within the areas of 3 A.G.A. divisions, while the constituency of Agalawatta falls within 2 A.G.A. divisions.(see Table 4). These anomalies pertaining to area, in the district of Kalutara, are illustrated in Maps 2 and 3 pp. 20, 21.

8. Financial Constraints

One of the key factors on an effective system of decentralization being finance, it is this factor which hampers the effectiveness of Sri Lanka's system of D.C.s to a very large extent.

As already pointed out, the functions of Development Councils include:

- 1) The functions of the former Village and Town Councils as successors to these councils
- 2) Development functions enumerated in Schedule A of the Development Councils Act.

However, while the scope of their functions have been enlarged, the re-

Table 4. Territorial Areas: A.G.A. Divisions and MPs' Constituencies-District of Kalutara.

A.G.A. Division	MP's Constituencies
1. Kalutara Totamune	Kalutara Panadura Matugama
2. Panadura Totamune	Panadura Bandaragama
3. Pasdun Korale (East)	Agalawatte Bulathsinhala
4. Gangabada-Pattu	Bulathsinhala
5. Pasdun Korale (West)	Matugama
6. Raigam-Korale (East)	Horana Bulathsinhala Bandaragama
7. Kalutara Totamune (south)	Beruwala
8. Raigam Korale (West)	Bandaragama
9. Pasdun Korale (South)	Agalawatte
10. Dodangoda	Matugama

Note: (a) 4 A.G.A. Division i.e. 1,2,3 and 6 fall within the boundaries of more than one M.P.s constituency.

(b) The Development Council functions, not through the above areas, but through 25 'sub-offices'. (18 V.C. areas and 7 T.C. areas)

venue of the D.C.s remains the same as before, viz:

- 1) *The Development Councils Fund* to which is credited the revenue derived from the following
 - Rates and taxes
 - Rents
 - Licence Fees
 - Fees in respect of services
 - Fines and warrant costs
- 2) Financial allocations received by the DC from the Decentralized Budget.
- 3) Capital Grants
 - (Received from the Department of Local Government)
- 4) Special Grants for specified purposes (which are also allocated by the



MAP 2

District of Kalutara showing A.G.A. Divisions and Electoral boundaries

Department of Local Government)

As already illustrated the above sources of revenues are utilised by the DC only as Programme I of the District Development Plan, which Programmes II III & IV are funded through the Decentralized Budget, by individual Ministries/ Departments, and by means of a special grant.

The revenue received by Town and Village Councils was woefully inadequate for the performance of their functions by those bodies. (Leitan, 1979:89-93, 113-121). These functions, as well as functions relating to development now legally belong to D.C.s which they are expected to fulfil with no additional sources of revenue. It is only too obvious therefore, that financial inadequacy is one of the major factors impeding the effective functioning of D.C.s.

Lack of assured and regular sources of income is again one of the major problems facing the Gramodaya Mandalas. These bodies have no taxing powers, and do not have any regular revenue sources, although they have received functions regarding the village economy.

A Gramodaya Mandala Fund was commenced under the Gramodaya Mandala Fund Act No. 28, 1982 to enable G.M. to apply for grants for specified development projects funded partially by donated labour. Within the districts



MAP 3

District of Kalutard showing A.G.A Divisions and Sub offices of Development Council

which have been studied under the present research project, only 2 Gramodaya Mandalas have succeeded in obtaining money from this fund in the district of Kalutara:

- 1) A sum of Rs.40,000 by the GM of Phala Neboda, for the provision of toilet facilities to 100 families
- 2) Rs. 16,000 by the G.M. of Bulatsinghala for the purchase of milk cows by 10 families.

The general feeling seems to be that very little purpose is served by waiting for funds from the G.M. fund (which may never be received); therefore it is better for any G.M. which wants to develop the village, to raise the necessary funds from donations, or organise self-help activities.

A survey of then Gramodaya Mandala in the A.G.A division of Kalutara-Totamune, within the district of Kalutara illustrates the nature of the functions which they undertake:

Morontuduwa

- 1) Repair of 2 village roads
- 2) Distribution of "*Kola Kenda*" (porridge with herbs) for school children under the nutrition programme of the Ministry of Planning.

Kalapugama

- 1) Repair of 2 village roads.
- 2) Construction of new road in area which was not served by a roadway
- 3) Clearing and repair of playground.
- 4) Energising of Development Council to establish a library.
- 5) Supply of sports-equipment to sports society of the village.)
- 6) Clearing of cemetery.
- 7) Distribution of "*Kola Kenda*" under nutrition programme of Ministry of Planning.

Katukurunda

- 1) Obtaining of housing loans from National Housing Development Authority (NHDA)
- 2) Obtaining of footpath to railway station.
- 3) Organisation of religious (Buddhist) ceremony.

Kuda-Heenatiyangala

- 1) Obtaining of loans for housing from NHDA
- 2) Organisation of (Muslim) religious festival.
- 3) Distribution of milk foods to needy children (under Nutrition week of Ministry of Planning)

Kalutara South

- 1) Obtaining approval for pedestrian crossing across road bordering Gnana-daya School.
- 2) Distribution of plants (fruit trees as well as cloves, cardamons, coffee, pepper etc) for home gardens.
- 3) Obtaining housing loans from NHDA.

Nagoda South

- 1) Repair of village roads.
- 2) Obtaining housing loans from NHDA
- 3) Obtaining of electricity for the area from the Decentralized Budget through local MP.

- 4) "*Kola Kenda*" for school children.
- 5) Organisation of (Buddhist) religious ceremonies
- 6) Obtaining of implements for brick-making for use of persons engaged in this industry.
- 7) Organising adult education classes (through Ministry of Health)
- 8) Encouragement of Sports Society.
- 9) Provision of Scholarships for 3 needy children.
- 10) Distribution of plants for home gardens.

Potupitiya

- 1) Cleaning of 2 public wells.
- 2) Constriction of drinking water well.
- 3) Repair of 4 village roads in the area.
- 4) Repair and re-painting of desks and chairs of Potupitiya School.
- 5) "*Kola Kenda*" under nutrition programme of Ministry of Planning.
- 6) Obtaining housing loans from NHDA.
- 7) Obtaining aid for flood victims from Dept. of Social Services.

Pohaddaramulla

- 1) Construction of parapet wall for school.
- 2) Repair of road to temple.
- 3) Obtaining of housing loans from NHDA.

Mestiya

- 1) Clearing of irrigation channel.
- 2) Organisation of seminar on nutrition (under auspices of Ministry of Planning).
- 3) Repair of Sunethrarama Vihara road (from funds obtained from Decentralized Budget through M.P.)
- 4) Widening of Mestiya-thotupola road by obtaining voluntary contributions of land from owners.
- 5) Nutrition programme under Ministry of Planning
- 6) Obtaining housing loans through NHDA.
- 7) Distribution of plants for home gardens.
- 8) Repair and extension of Welivita Road.
- 9) Organising of (Catholic) religious ceremonies.

Diyagama

- 1) Repair of road and construction of culvert.
- 2) Repair of culvert.

3) Cleaning of rice paddy fields and eradication of salvinia (a water weed.)

The functioning of some of the above G.M.-Mestiya, Nagoda S., Kalapugama for instance indicate that these organisations can play a useful role at village level, if adequate sources of finance are made available to them. At present most of the above functions are performed on the basis of '*Shramadana*' or donation of labour, or by obtaining voluntary contributions. Two G.M.s above have been able to 'approach' the MP of the area and obtain funds from the Decentralized Budget. Other functions eg. 'obtaining of housing loans' merely indicates the certification of applicants to the NHDA (that they who do not possess houses) for approval of loans amounting to Rs. 7500/-. By and large therefore, a few of the G.M.s (especially those whose chairmen possess qualities of leadership and initiation) do try to improve their villages. But in the absence of any revenue source, they have no alternative but to depend on self help and donated labour.

A recognition of the need for adequate funding led the Minister of Local Government to permit GM to undertake work contracts for various Government Departments. A criticism against this method however, is that it leaves room for corruption.

All this tend to illustrate the fact that functions may be transferred legally to decentralized units-but the effectiveness of their performance will be conditioned by a number of other factors. In Sri Lanka, the identifiable factors are the tendency of Departments to implement their policies in each district through their sub offices as before, tight central political control manifested especially through the role of the MP and his controlling influence, structural factors which hinder effectiveness, and last but not least, financial inadequacies.

III. Participation

The objectives of decentralization, include reduction of congestion in the channels of administration and communication, reduction of red tape and promotion of greater efficiency, more effective management of national economic development, mobilising popular support for national development policies, etc.

While many of the above objectives (besides a number of others) are often cited in favour of the adoption of policies of decentralization, as rightly pointed out by Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema decentralization ultimately is also

"...an ideological principle, associated with objectives of self-reliance, democratic decision-making, popular participation in Government and accountability of public officials to citizens."(Rondinelli, 1983:12).

As such, it becomes an objective in itself, for the purpose of associating the people in the work of government. Genuine decentralization would therefore involve structures and processes for peoples' participation at the grass-root.

1. Structural Framework

In Sri Lanka, District Development Councils at the level of the district, as indicated earlier, consist not only of member elected by the voters of each district, but also of the Members of Parliament whose constituencies lie within the district. Not only are the MPs members of the Development Councils (D.C.) but under the terms of the Development Councils Act No. 35 of 1980, they generally form the majority in the Council.⁽¹⁴⁾ (For instance, the District Development Council of Kalutara consists of 8 members elected by the voters of the district, and 9 members of the central parliament.) The role of the elected members of the DC is thus adversely affected; more over, in the context of Sri Lankan politics where the MPs enjoy much power and prestige, it is their voices which are heard and which carry weight. When some of the MPs are Ministers or Deputy Ministers, the elected members of the Council, needless to say are still further dwarfed by them.

In the district of Puttalam, the DC consists of 4 elected members and 5 MPs. Of the latter group, the MP for Puttalam is Minister of Finance, the MP for Wennappuwa is Minister of Fisheries, and the MP for Nattandiya is Minister of Coconut Industries.

Participation in local politics thus presents a distorted picture, where the central politician dominates at local level, and popular participation is interpreted more in terms of participation through representatives elected to the national rather than the local level. This results inevitably in the submergence of local leadership (which is essential for representing felt needs of localities) and the concentration of decision making in the heads of central politicians, both at central and local levels.

2. Local Representation and Electoral Processes

It has already been pointed out that while Municipal and Urban Councils

(14) Under the Development Councils Act No. 35 of 1980, Section 2(1)(c) the President is empowered to:

"specify the member of elected members... so however that the member so specified shall be less than the member of members of Parliament elected for this administrative district..."

It is only in those districts when the member of M.P.s is less than three that the elected members may exceed the number of M.P.s since the total membership of the Development Council (M.P.s as well as elected members) has to be a minimum of five.

operate in the Urban areas, outside these areas the Development Councils (at the level of the district) have replaced the former Town Councils and Village Councils. Consequently, a drastic reduction of local representation has resulted. For, taking an overall view of population in relation to local authority areas, as is indicated in Table 5 below, 86.64% of the total population lived in the areas circumscribed by the former Town and Village Councils:

Table 5. Percentages of Population in Local Areas

Local Authority Area	% of Population	
Municipal Councils	9.62	
Urban Councils	3.74	
Town Councils	6.64	86.64
Village Councils	79.97	

these Councils (which were elected bodies) had a total membership of 7831 directly elected members, whereas the Development Councils which have replaced them, consist of only a very small number of members who are elected by each locality. Thus 86.64% of the total population which now come within the areas of the DCs are represented at local level as is illustrated in Table 4 by only 156 members of Development Councils (D.C.s), the elected members of which range between 2 and 16. Thus the District Development Council Kalutara consists of 8 elected members (while the TCs and VCs within the district had consisted of 348 members); the district of Puttalam has only 4 elected members of the DC have replaced 402 Town and Village councillors.

Widespread criticism followed the abolition of TCs and VCs on the grounds that the new system had cut into grass-roots level representation. It was in an attempt to fill the vacuum created by the abolition of Town and Village Councils that the government decided to supplement the DCs by Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas at two lower levels within the district.⁽¹⁵⁾ They were designed for the purpose of greater participation of each locality in the process of planning and implementation, generation of enthusiasm among its residents and harnessing of local resources in the development efforts.

It has to be emphasised, however, that the Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas are *not elected bodies*. At the lowest level embracing a group of villages, a Gramodaya Mandala is constituted, its membership consisting of the Chairmen of voluntary societies (of a non-political nature) which may be functioning in the area. 36 types of societies have been listed as eligible for

(15) Development Councils (Amendment) Act No. 45 of 1981.

Table 6. Elected members of Town Councils, Village Councils and Development Councils

District	No. of TCs	No. of VCs	Total members in TCs & VCs	No. of members elected in DCs
Colombo	6	8	165	16
Gampaha	9	29	521	12
Kalutara	6	18	348	8
Kandy	2	45	674	13
Matale	3	21	333	3
N'Eliya	1	19	305	5
Galle	7	37	465	9
Matara	2	23	352	6
Hambantota	4	10	211	3
Jaffna	9	45	603	10
Mannar	1	15	166	4
Vavuniya	—	9	108	4
Mulativu	1	10	88	4
Batticaloa	2	18	173	3
Amparai	2	21	188	4
Trincomalee	3	23	200	2
Kurunegala	3	49	612	13
Puttalam	5	19	289	4
Anuradhapura	1	32	523	6
Polonnaruwa	2	8	147	2
Badulla	4	32	376	8
Monaragala	1	14	158	2
Ratnapura	3	24	424	7
Kegalle	6	19	402	8
Total	83	548	7831	156

Source: Gazette Extraordinary 133/7 of 1981.3.4; Local Government Dept.(Statistics Division).

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Young Farmers' Clubs | 19. Sarvodaya Societies |
| 2. Branch Committees of Multi-purpose Cooperative Societies | 20. Credit Societies |
| 3. Dayaka Sabhas | 21. Mahila Samitis |
| 4. Buddhist Associations | 22. Sports Clubs |
| 5. Christian Associations | 23. Kulangana Samities |
| 6. Hindu Associations | 24. Sahanadara Societies |
| 7. Muslim Associations | 25. Sucharitodaya Societies |
| 8. Cultural Societies | 26. Social Welfare Societies |
| 9. Arts Societies | 27. Mutual Benefit Societies |
| 10. Schools Development Societies | 28. Death Donation Societies |
| | 29. Rate Payers' Associations |

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 11. Fisheries Societies | 30. Sharamadana Societies |
| 12. Consumer Societies | 31. Societies for the Prevention of crime |
| 13. Hospitals Societies | 32. Bus Travellers' Associations |
| 14. Red Cross Societies | 33. Lions Clubs |
| 15. Rural Development Societies | 34. Rotary Clubs |
| 16. Handicraft Societies | 35. Jaycees Organisations |
| 17. Carpentry Societies | 36. Apex Clubs |
| 18. Community Centres | |

recognition⁽¹⁶⁾ if they have functioned for at least one year:

The GMs so constituted, send their chairmen (elected by the members at the inaugural meeting) to the Pradeshiya Mandala at the intermediate level.

Since these are not elected bodies, there is no guarantee that localities will find adequate representation within them. For although in theory every person in the village can participate in these village level organisations, in fact, on a rough estimate, 95% of village organisations are inactive or defunct, although minutes of meetings are produced for the purpose of membership of the G.M.⁽¹⁷⁾

Nor can the possibility be ruled out that these associations (some of which spring up overnight) may be composed of the political or social elite while the majority find no representation.

Moreover, as illustrated earlier, the lack of a direct link between the PMs at intermediate level and the DC at district level as well as the power wielded by central politicians prevent genuine grass-roots participation in the development process.

3. Relationship between Members and Constituents

Another feature which needs to be highlighted is that elected members to the DC (as well as the MCs and UCs) are elected on the basis of the list system of proportional representation,⁽¹⁸⁾ under which political parties/independent groups are required to put forward lists of candidates for the entire

(16) Gazette Extraordinary No. 157/7 of 10 September 1987. Other under Section 17A(2)(a) of Development Councils Act No. 35 of 1980.

(17) This was revealed at personal interviews, by officials of the District Administration.

(18) Proportional Representation was first prescribed for elections to Municipal Councils and Urban Councils under the Local Authorities (Elections). Special Provisions Act No. 24 of 1977; It is used in respect of DC elections under the Development Councils (Elections) Act No. 20 of 1981. Under the constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, (1978) it is also prescribed for elections to the Central Parliament.

district/MC/UC. Voters cast their vote for an entire list, the priorities on which are determined by the parties or independent groups. While this system may work towards greater proportionality, the sense of voter-participation and contact between voter and candidate is reduced to a minimum. Local elections took place before 1979 on the basis of "wards" i.e. each local authority area was demarcated into a number of areas which were termed "wards" within each of which the voters elected the 'ward member' on the 'first past-the-post' principle. This was a system which had been in operation for a long period of time and was therefore understood by the people. The rural voter, especially, maintained a close relationship with this 'ward member' to whom he went regarding the need for repairing a village road or a culvert, or for a drinking water wells. Furthermore, although national politics operates even at local level in Sri Lanka, qualities of personal leadership, integrity and record of social service had even greater influence in ward elections than political affiliation.

Under the system of proportional representation (PR) however, relationships within a party become more important considerations in obtaining placement on a party list. It is also possible for voters in a particular locality to find that they are unfamiliar with any of the candidates on the party list. Personal contact and close interaction between voter and councillor, is thus very often lost under PR, which could contribute towards lack of interest in local elections. This could have been one of the reasons for the low voter turnout at the elections to Development Councils (4 June 1981). As compared to 86.7% at the general election (1977), only 54.95% voted at the DC elections.⁽¹⁹⁾

4. 'Back to the district'

Another point of criticism is in relation to the 'sub-offices' (to which attention has already been drawn) through which the Development Councils function in each district. These sub-offices are manned by officials responsible not to the DC, but to officials of the Department of Local Government or to the Government Agent at District Level. Since they are generally junior officials, a villager who may go to a sub-office is very often informed that instructions have to be obtained from the district level. From the villager's point of view therefore, matters on which he could go to the 'ward member' of his village council are now dealt with by bureaucrats who get orders from the district level. To him, consequently, the new system represents not decentralized functioning, but

(19) Another reason for the low voter turnout may also have been the boycott of elections to Development Councils, by one of the major opposition parties, the Sri Lanka Freedom Party.

'back to the district' even on matters of day to day administration.

Thus although the present system was designed to "enable and ensure the participation of the people in the process of government by decentralising the administrative set up to the village level and making people partners in the planning, organisation and implementation of policy."⁽²⁰⁾ it is questionable as to whether these objectives have been attained.

IV. Conclusion: Possibilities for Greater Decentralization

In the foregoing chapters, the twin objectives of an effective system of decentralization. viz:

- (1) Effectiveness in performance and service delivery; and
- (2) Participation in the development process

have been examined in relation to Sri Lanka's system of Development Councils/Pradeshiya Mandalas/Gramodaya Mandalas. An attempt has been made to focus on certain constraints within the system which have been identified during the course of this research study.

One of the objectives of the Government which assumed office in 1979 was decentralization of the administrative system "...by revitalising local government as well as by means of a system of District Development Councils headed by a district Minister of State..."⁽²¹⁾ Accordingly, the system of District Development Councils, with the District Minister in the role of chairman of its Executive Committee was established in 1980, supplemented by Pradeshiya Mandalas and Gramodaya Mandalas in 1981.

In one sense this system was a break with the past, since wide ranging development functions were transferred to the new decentralized units, whereas local government hitherto had been completely by-passed in the process of development.

However, what has been brought out clearly by the present research study is that transfer of functions to localities by legal enactment, in the absence of certain conditions necessary for effective decentralization, will remain a useless exercise. If Sri Lanka's decentralized model is to become a reality, the following factors need to be given due consideration:

1. Centralising Tendencies

One of the outstanding features of Sri Lanka's system, is the role played by

(20) A Programme of Action to create a just and free Society. (United National Party, 1977)

(21) United National Party, Ibid.

central politicians within its system of local government. i.e the role of MPs of each district as members (with voting rights) within the Development Council (DC) and that of the District Minister as chairman of the Executive Committee. Although it contains elected members, the council's majority consist of MPs of the central legislature; and while the DC approves the annual development plan, it is the Executive Committee of the Council, headed by the District Minister, which is entrusted with its formulation and implementation.

This system indicates, therefore, a departure from the traditional model of local self government on the British pattern, and could be described in large degree as a fusion of central and local government and an extension of the central government into the periphery. It has also been criticised as a means by which the government in power retains its hold on localities, even those represented by opposition MPs.

Also significant are the powers of central control, particularly the power of the President of the Republic to dissolve the executive Committee of the DC when differences arise between the District Minister and the executive committee, and to remove from office members of the executive committee if there is proof of mismanagement and incompetence. The Minister in charge of local government is also empowered to remove from office any or all of the members of the DC under certain circumstances. It is the District Minister who exercises the functions of the Council until fresh elections are held.

Decided emphasis is to be seen, therefore, on the factor of central control which could dampen local enthusiasm, prevent the emergence of local leadership, and minimise its role as change agents of local development, and muffle the expression of local opinion. It also works against district level planning since funds are disbursed not according to the needs of district planning, but for the purpose of cursing individual constituencies and distribution of political patronage by individual MPs.

What seems to be called for is a reversal of this trend, so that genuine decentralisation and local participation could emerge.

2. Problems of linkage and need for an operational level closer to the people

Although the need for district-based planning is not to be minimised, the study has also brought out the need for an operational level closer to the people. Admittedly, the PMs and GMs operate at two lower levels within each district; but these bodies, as illustrated, are not operational agencies, and it is the 'sub-offices' of the DC which are utilised for performing the functions of the DC. Contact of the public regarding services and facilities is thus with officials in the 'sub-offices' leading to identification of the system with

bureaucratic administration directed from the district, and the idea that, once again, administration is back at district level as under the British Raj.

What is called for is an incorporation of the different levels adequately into the system, and the forging of adequate linkages between the DC, the PMs and GMs, which would not only bring the system closer to the people, but would also facilitate genuine grass-roots participation in planning and implementation. The need for linkage with the Municipal Councils and Urban Councils in urban areas should also not be overlooked for purposes of coordination.

Nor can the need for an elective base to the system be overlooked, either at the level of the GMs or at the level of the PMs. This is specially important in view of the fact that close contact between voter and council member no longer prevails at district level.

3. Financial Constraints

The key factor for effectiveness of local units in community development is finance. At district level, if the 'District Development Plan' is to be effective, the District Development Council has to have adequate financial resources to implement a planned, coordinated programme of action. As has been brought out by the research study, the DC has control over a very small section of the total budget. For the 'Decentralized Budget' remains the preserve of individual MPs; the MPs have successfully established their authority in disbursing the 'special grant' meant for development functions of the DC; and the rest of the budget consists of projects of individual departments, over which the DC has no say at all.

The illogicality of this needs no elaboration. If local government is to play a significant role in development, the financial resources of the DC should be commensurate with the functions it is expected to perform and development funds for each district including the Decentralized Budget should be under its control.

Some GMs, as has been illustrated, do display enthusiasms and initiative under proper leadership. These bodies again obviously cannot continue to function without adequate and assured sources of income.

Although the principle of self-help and voluntary donation of labour is to be commended very highly in relation to community development, it is not possible to depend on constant fund-raising and donated labour within economically backward communities. While self-help could also be utilised, the GMs, if they are to be viable units at the base of the system capable of performing a specified range of functions, should be equipped with the necessary sources of revenue.

4. The Bureaucratic Factor

One of the major obstacles to the development of local government in Sri Lanka has been central bureaucratic dominance in localities. Vertical departmental structures, answerable to their head offices in the capital city continue to operate and are still in large degree, the agencies for development. In addition to field units of government departments, recent times have also witnessed a proliferation of public corporations (some of which operate through their branch offices in different areas) which are given specific functions in relation to development. To mention a few, functions such as housing are handled by the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), Water Supply by the National Water Resources and Drainage Board and the supply of electricity by the Ceylon Electricity Board, while the Urban Development Authority is entrusted with the promotion of "integrated planning and implementation of economic, social and physical development of certain areas..."⁽²²⁾ An erosion of local government functions in relation to community development is thus evident.

Sri Lanka's system of decentralization and local government is once again in a state of flux, for an issue of the greatest significance today, and which will have a major impact on its system of local government, is the ethnic problem. This has escalated, culminating in organised terrorism and the demand for a separate state by the largest minority group, the Tamils. Sri Lanka's total population at the last census (1981) was 14,846,750. Table 7 below indicates the percentage of the different ethnic groups to the total population:

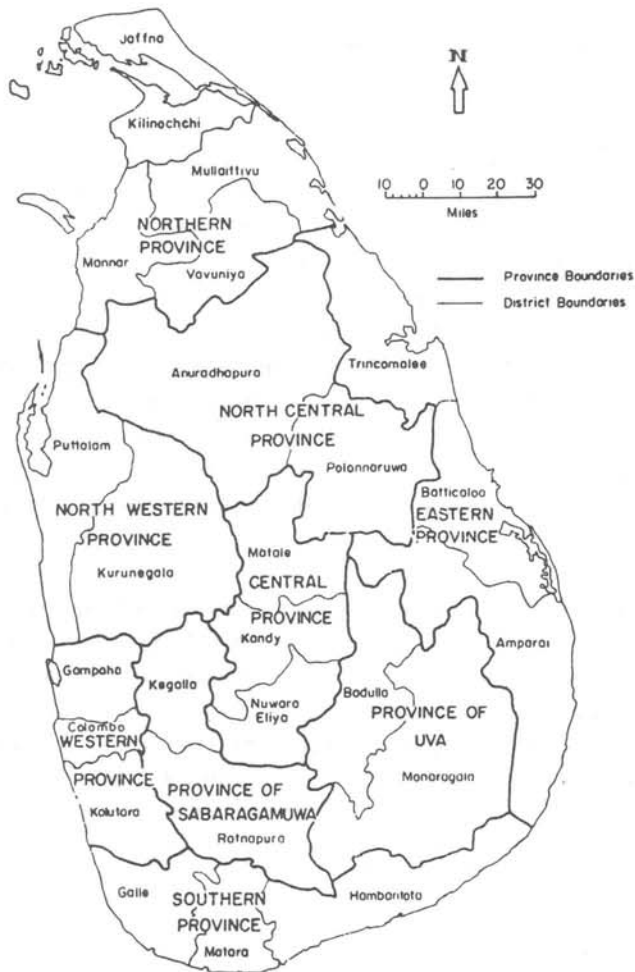
Table 7. Ethnic Percentages in Sri Lanka⁽²³⁾

Sinhalese	74.0%
Tamils ⁽²⁴⁾	18.2%
(Sri Lankan Tamils)	12.7%
(Indian Tamils)	5.5%
Moors (Muslims)	7.0%
Others	0.4%

(22) Urban Development Authority Law No. 41 of 1978.

(23) Source: Census of Population and Housing, 1981.

(24) The Tamils in Sri Lanka are categorised as the "Sri Lankan Tamils" and the "Indian Tamils". the Sri Lankan Tamils are the largest minority group and are mainly concentrated in the northern and eastern provinces. They have a long history behind them, whereas the Indian Tamils (concentrated in the central hill country) were brought in by the British Colonial Government in the 19th century, as an immigrant labour force to work on the coffee/tea plantations. The demand for a separate state has come mainly from the Sri Lankan Tamils.



MAP 4
Sri Lanka-provincial and District Boundaries

The governments' compromise solution to separatism is a proposal for a considerable measure of devolution to the provinces which are at a level higher than the district. Each province consists of a number of districts. (See Map 4.) Legislation has already been passed for the establishment of Provincial Councils (with a merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces initially) within the unitary state of Sri Lanka.⁽²⁵⁾

(25) these provisions have been introduced under the Provincial Councils Act No. 42 of 1987 and the 13th Amendment to the constitution (1978).

Important functions which are to be transferred to the provinces include internal law and order, education and educational services, agriculture and agrarian services, social services, land use, land settlement, rural development, provincial irrigation, health services, food supply and distribution, environmental protection etc.⁽²⁶⁾ their revenue is to include, besides provincial taxation, a system of tax sharing with the centre, on the basis of the recommendations of a Finance Commission.

Under the proposed system of Provincial Councils, it is envisaged that Development councils would cease to function, the Pradeshia Mandalas at the level of the A.G.A. Division would be replaced by *elected Pradeshia Sabha*⁽²⁷⁾ and the Gramodaya Mandalas constituted as at present would continue. Presumably, it is the Pradeshia Sabha which is to be the operative level, with wide ranging functions pertaining to subjects such as public health, maternity and child care services, housing, village works etc., with Provincial Councils also being empowered to confer additional functions on them.

It is to be hoped that with the implementation of the new system there would be reversal of certain trends to which attention has been drawn in this paper, and that effective decentralization would result.

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(26) these functions are broadly similar to those under Lists II and III of the Seventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

(27) Presently, 68 Pradeshia Sabhas have already been established under the Pradeshia Sabha Act No. 15 of 1987.