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PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT AND POLICING THE POOR: A STUDY OF NATIONAL POVERTY ALLEVIATION PROGRAMME IN SRI LANKA

Abstract

The World Financial Institutions and Governments in less developed societies have co-opted the participatory development strategy practiced by civil society organizations in the context of economic globalization. Governments in the less developed societies have started to establish beneficiary organizations and network them to implement public policies for poverty alleviation. The present study explores the political consequences of such embracement referring to the national poverty alleviation programme of Sri Lanka. The study has found that the policy remains top down despite its claim to be participatory in nature. It has invented new form of disciplining the poor or policing the poor by the poor, a new tool of political control. The labour of the poor is being exploited for the benefits of the well to do strata of the rural community.

1. Introduction

It has become a fashion among neo-liberal thinkers and financial institutions to account bad governance for the failures of market to

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address the pressing issues of societies like poverty, social unrest and the likes (Murphy, 2005, Williamson, 1997). Economic Reform package of structural adjustment, followed during the liberalization phase of development during 1980s-1990s, has failed to deliver the promised benefits because of lack in corresponding political reforms. In this context, participatory development strategy has gained wide currency among world development institutions as a means of countering bad governance in development activities in the less developed societies (World Bank, 2003: ii). The malaises identified included, patron client politics, nepotism, rogue state and so on (Murphy, 2005). The civil society organizations and their development strategies were thought to be capable of overcoming problems of bad governance in less developed societies and were co-opted by world financial institutions and third world governments alike (Nederveen, 2001:79, World Bank, 2000). World financial institutions and individual donor countries had started to channel development aid through civil society organizations believing that it would lead to good governance and effective and efficient development facilitation for the initiatives of the poor (see: Sooryamurthy and Gangrade, 2006, Williams, 2004). Besides, partnership between government and civil society organizations were made a condition in granting aid under the assistance programmes (Hudock 2003, OECD, 1999). The channelling of aid to civil society organizations has given birth to a process of governments-go-non-governmental by setting up government sponsored Non-governmental Organizations or NGOs (Nederveen, 2001:79). The motivation for this new concern on poverty reduction was the political unrest that emerged out of structural adjustment policies (Lewis and Wallace, 2003). The increasing number of poor had compelled the financial institutions at the global level and the individual nation states in less developed societies to engage in projects that increase the purchasing power of the great majority of the poor. This new policy concern is neither resorting to state-led development strategy nor dethroning economic growth as the engine of development (Sirivardana, 2004, World Bank 2000). This is a reinvention of the state, steering the society to get things public done using competitive market strategy.

Non-governmental Organizations were regarded as a means of meeting the developmental needs of the poor more efficiently,

effectively and cheaply (Montgomery, 1988:79-80). Specially, the participatory development strategy followed by NGOs found high esteem among development institutions. The financial institutions not only recommended this for the less-developing countries in their effort to find solution to the pressing problem of poverty but also made participation by the poor through community organizations or NGOs conditional in granting loan to the indebted countries under the Poverty Reduction Country Papers.

There is sufficient literature on the merits of this strategy. The participatory development creates a genuine public space (Abeyrathne, 1997), leads to take perspectives of the poor by powerful actors in the policy community (Parfitt, 2004), fills the inherent shortcomings of representative democratic process of decision making, avoids the principal agency problem in policy implementation (Riker, James V 1995), avoids the administrative policy making (Bebbington, (1999), is devoid of elite capture effect (Chambers, 1983) and is more cost-effective (Clark, 1991, O'Brien et al, 2000: 28). Different aspects of political impact of partnership between NGOs and government have sufficiently been explored in the present literature (See: Kothari, 1986, Srivastava, 2005, Salamon, 2002, Davidson, 2007, Kamat, 1996). However, governments in the third world countries have embraced the participatory development strategy in their poverty alleviation programmes by way of building beneficiary organizations and networking them into organizations using participatory development strategy despite co-opting Non-governmental Organizations. The participatory development strategy is thought to be involved in raising awareness, organizing against the vested interests of the society, supplementing the state and empowering the poor to take part in the policy making process of the society (Oakley, 1991). This is a political strategy that challenges the state and its apparatus. The major lacuna in the literature is that there are little studies that deal with the political consequences of embracing an empowering development strategy by state. The objective of the present study is to examine the political aspects of participatory development activities with respect to poverty alleviation programme sponsored by the Sri Lankan government under its Samurdhi (Prosperity) Movement.

This article commences with a brief consideration of the context of the emergence of participatory development within World Financial Institutions and nation states in less developed societies. Secondly, it clarifies the methodology of the study. Thirdly, it makes an attempt at explaining the philosophical foundations of the Samurdhi movements and its corresponding activities to alleviate poverty in Sri Lanka. Fourthly, an attempt is made to analyze political form and consequences of participatory development endeavours carried out by Sri Lankan Government with partnership of beneficiary organizations. Finally, it brings out the concluding observations of the exploratory study.

1.1 Methodology of the Study

This study is an exploratory study conducted during the mid 2006-mid 2007 in Niyagama Divisional Secretariat area in Galle district of Southern Province, Sri Lanka. The divisional secretariat area is arbitrarily chosen solely on the basis of convenience of the researcher. The divisional secretariat area has been subdivided into three zones for the administrative purpose of the programme. Mattaka Zone is chosen because it represents diversities in the divisional secretariat area like caste, small scale planters etc. more than others. The selection was based on a discussion with officials of the project at the divisional secretariat. Mattaka, Bambaravana and Poddival Samurdhi Samithi areas were chosen to administer an open ended questionnaire to collect primary information on the real practice of the programme. 150 questionnaires were administered for the study. Besides this main tool of information gathering, the formal and informal discussions with different stakeholders formed part of the information of the study and information has been qualitatively analyzed.

2. Philosophical Foundation and the Major Components

Samurdhi movement is the successor to the previous government poverty alleviation programme known as Jana Saviya (People's Strength) in Sri Lanka (Salih, 2000). In many respects, the present

programme is same and similar to the previous one¹ despite its simultaneous implementation throughout the country and bringing of the youth as social animators.

Philosophically, the movement upheld the capitalist mode of production (Samurdhi Authority, undated.). The movement is based on a firm belief that if the market-led development strategy is to be successful, the economy must be capable of providing purchasing power for the overall majority of the poor people and a minimum level of standard of living for every strata of the society (Mitraratna, undated.). Hence, the movement has adopted two approaches—Empowerment and Safety Net in dealing with the problem of poverty.

The programme has identified two categories of the poor. The first category includes those poor people who could be empowered. In the other category are those who cannot be engaged in meaningful economic activities and hence in need of a permanent safety net (Samurdhi Commissioner General, Undated). However, it is thought that a safety net is necessary even for the poor who can engage in profitable economic activities as a temporary means of attracting them to the programme (Mitraratna, 1998). The temporary safety net will be removed after the poor families become self-reliant entrepreneurs through the micro-credit programme.

Households which receive income below the accepted minimum level or have only one earning member or which have become poor due to inadequacy of resources, training and education, lack of capital and infrastructure have been identified as families that could be effectively integrated to the market economy through a process of social animation (Samurdhi Commissioner General, Undated). The temporary tangible benefits under the programme are meant to be strategic and tactical to attract these families to the programme. The handicapped and the aged who cannot work and women-led families which do not have mature children to labour are considered to be the beneficiaries of the safety net programme. The beneficiaries of the previous Janasaviya Programme also have been integrated into the programme. The criteria for selection have been set for the families whose monthly income is below Rs. 1500.00. The number of

¹ Changing names of programmes and public places after regime change is a fashion in Sri Lanka.

dependents in a family is also a criterion. Table 1.1 shows the pattern of distribution of benefits based on the above criteria.

Table 1.1 Benefit Distribution Pattern

Category of household	Amount of Benefits	Distribution of Coupon
Families earning less than Rs. 500.00 and having more than 5 members	Rs. 1000.00	1. Rs. 400-only to purchase food items 2. Rs. 375- to buy goods or to encash 3. Rs. 25 – insurance 4. Rs. 200 – compulsory savings
Families with only one member	Rs. 100.00	Only for the purchase of food
Families with 2 members	Rs. 200.00	Only for the purchase of food
Others	Rs. 500.00	1. Rs. 200- only to purchase food items 2. Rs. 175- to buy goods or to encash 3. Rs. 25 – insurance 4. Rs. 100 – compulsory savings
Janasaviya Recipient	Rs. 250	Can either buy goods or encash

Source: Salih (2000).

The single member families and two member families are chosen for permanent safety net and it was believed to be the ones who can not work due to age or physical disability

2.1 Major components of the Programme

The programme is composed of three major components: i. Welfare; ii. Savings and Credit; and iii. Rural Development. Welfare benefits have been given to all the beneficiary households irrespective of the nature of poverty of the families. However, in case of poor households who contribute to savings and come under the credit programme, welfare benefit has been suggested as a temporary measure to attract the poor to a participatory poverty alleviation effort carried out through self-help savings and micro-finance as provided by the Banks of the Poor. If a member of a family under the

above category finds a job or record a monthly income over Rs. 2000 continuously for six months, this family is to be removed from welfare programme of nutritional support in kind or encashment benefits. To keep them in the programme, they would be given a savings support of Rs. 100 per month in the Samurdhi Bank. Further, there is an insurance scheme for these families to cope with the unexpected circumstances of marriage, birth of babies and death of family members. In addition, there is a component which aims at social development which is to be carried out in partnership with NGOs.²

The savings and credit is the most important component of the programme. The beneficiaries are to become shareholders of the Samurdhi Banks. The poor people who have been assigned a compulsory savings have to deposit that part in the Samurdhi Bank of the area. In addition to compulsory savings, they have to become shareholders of the bank through purchasing at least a share of Rs.500.00 in order to be eligible for credit facility under the programme. The other relevant provision is that only a poor person can become a shareholder. To qualify for credit programme, poor people have to be organized into small groups of five members and open a group account in the Bank. All the members of the small groups of a definite area are once again organized into village level society called Samurdhi Samithi.

Rural Development project is aimed at development of infrastructure facilities in rural areas which benefit the poor directly. The youths of the village are supposed to be the driving force of these activities. It is expected that the development activities carried out under the programme and other programmes would be implemented with the contribution of labour by the beneficiaries while government would provide technical and financial assistance.

2.2 Implementation Mechanism

According to the legal framework of the project, there is an independent authority with the responsibility of designing a participatory development project to alleviate poverty in Sri Lanka. It is responsible for planning and implementation of the programme

² The researcher had not found any information on implementation of this component in partnership between NGOs in the area under the study.

(Samurdhi Authority Act of 1995 no.30). The project designed an implementation mechanism which envisages a partnership between beneficiary organizations and government bureaucracy. The authority has developed its power, functions and authority *at par* with the district and divisional secretariat levels along the traditional bureaucratic line. To shoulder the special responsibilities under the new programme, a group of youth has been selected as Samurdhi Managers³ and Animators⁴ on the basis of political commitment to the project (Samurdhi Commissioner General, Undated). It is envisaged that they would become agents of change. Their responsibilities have been the identification of beneficiaries, organizing them in small groups and village level Samithis, supporting them for designing income earning activities, rendering extended services, collecting the monthly payments of credit installments, and to work as a social developer and concintizers etc.⁵ Most important part of the implementation mechanism is the network of beneficiary organizations. This network includes small groups, Smurdhi Samithis, Banking Societies and Samurdhi Maha Sangam.

The policy has visualized that small groups would work as education institution which then would act as a guarantee for the poor in dealing with the Samurdhi Bank. The expectation behind the small group is that poor would scrutinize the proposed proposals to start enterprises and guarantee to the banking society as a group. The Samurdhi Samithi is composed of all the members of small groups and is the supervisory body of all the development activities carried under the project. It has to scrutinize the credit applications that come through small groups and recommend for credit grants. It also has to approve the rural development projects proposed under the programme, function as a collective force against the vested interests of the society and submit development proposals for the area to the divisional development committee for consideration and actions.

The next important body of the beneficiary organization network is the banking society. Membership is limited to the poor. They are members in individual capacity and as a group. The banking society

³ Graduates were made Managers.

⁴ General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level or above) were the qualification with political commitment.

⁵ See for detail Salih (2000).

is governed by a board. The board is composed of all the office bearers of the Samurdhi Samithis and the board elects an executive committee to steer the bank. The ex-officio executive of the bank is the manager attached by the authority and is under the control of the divisional secretary. To help him, there are other Samurdhi animators attached to villages in the area of the banking society⁶

The next important body is the Maha Sangamya. It is comprised of all the chairmen of Samurdhi Samithis at village level. This body has supervisory and advisory functions and insuring of banking societies.

Besides these beneficiary organizations, there are advisory bodies at various levels appointed to advise the beneficiary organizations. The Divisional Level Advisory Committee is appointed by the divisional secretary and the district level committee is appointed by the district secretary consulting the authority. The specific feature of these advisory bodies is that they can override and overrule whatever decision taken by the beneficiary organizations. Thus, the advisory committees had become not mere consultation or advisory bodies but also governing bodies.

3. The Movement in Real Practice

This section examines the working of important components of the movement and its impact on the form and practice of political behaviour of the different stakeholders.

3.1 Targeting of Beneficiaries

The present study found that the targeting of the real poor is not achieved under the programme in the divisional secretariat area of Niyagama. The monthly income level of responded families are given in table 1.2

⁶ Divisional secretariat area is divided into zone for the convenience of the beneficiaries.

Table 1.2 Monthly Income Levels of Beneficiary Families

Income in rupees	500-1000	1001-1500	1500-2000	2001-2500	2501-3000	3001-3500	3501-4000	4001-4500	4501-5000	5000 and above	Total
No. of Families	11	15	12	12	12	12	13	18	09	36	150

The analysis of family income level reveals that there are only 17.33 percent of households eligible for benefits under the programme. This raises pertinent questions regarding the feasibility of poverty line adopted and the possibility of benefits being usurped by the relatively affluent segments of the society. Even if the poverty line is up to Rs.3500 per month, there is around 48 percent who do not deserve benefits under the programme. On the other hand, the respondents generally agree that there are 5-6 households who are kept out of the benefits of the programme.

3.2 Poverty or Poverties

The participation of the poor beneficiaries has been regarded a prerequisite to avoid infiltration of vested interests into the projects and programmes designed for the poor. Participation of the poor in the project cycle is also intended to bring out the sufferings of the poor and real problems of poverty in designing meaningful poverty alleviation projects.

To understand the poor's perception of causes of their poverty and to receive their suggestions, two open ended questions were given in the research process. 41.5 percent of the respondents have explained the unemployment and under-employment of members of the family as the major cause behind their poverty. They started to laugh when asked of the opportunity to start self-employment using the micro-credit facilities available under the bank society movement of the programme. Children of the respondent families are more prospective aspirants to get permanent employment that match with the level of their education and skills either in the private or in public sector. Second most important cause of poverty in the study area is the lack of resources. These respondents are basically, small-scale tea cultivators of a small plot of land around $\frac{1}{4}$ acre. Over 50 percent of the beneficiaries have only $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ of acre as land entitlement. They have explained that if they were given enough land they could

live without any assistance from the government. Some are small-scale craftsmen who found that it is extremely difficult to acquire raw materials like woods, metal, gun-powder and so on due to legal barriers to access these resources. It is around 28.5 per cent of the total respondents. Third major important category of the poor is the ones who have become poor because of history of being poor. When asked about the reasons behind their poverty; the explanation given by them is poverty itself. The beneficiaries have explained that they have become poor because they were historically poor and hence, in a disadvantageous position vis-à-vis the affluent segments of the society. The respondents of this type significantly lack a sense of self-respect and self-dignity. Included in this category are the people marginalized by traditional social processes like castes and other discriminations. The final category of significance is the poor who have become poor due to the problems inside the family itself. This includes factors like single income earner, many children, disease of the husband and the likes. Beneficiaries perceive the programme being of little help in resolving their true problem of poverty besides its cushioning effect on their sufferings.

Beneficiaries blame the authority for not allowing them to withdraw the compulsory component of savings under the programme. They question the utility of savings if they were denied to withdraw the savings to meet their wellbeing even after ten years of operation of the programme. And, they are of the opinion that in reality, insurance, lottery, savings are of no help to them and it is a deceptive mechanism on the part of the government. In reality, the expending on subsidy is much lesser than calculated by the official accounts and economists as considerable amount of money is rolled back to the treasury as compulsory savings, insurance and lottery.

It is important to note that the programme, despite its avowed commitment to participatory development, bottom up planning and demand-led development, remain a delivery-led development and top down process of policy to alleviate poverty. The programme has defined poverties of the rural poor as poverty of the people. This implies a failure on the part of policy planners to grasp the problem of the policy issue under the suggested field of intervention.

3.3 Effectiveness of Project Component

Banking society is the major strategy of the programme to alleviate poverty. Its major objectives are to protect the poor from exploitation in the informal sector of credit market and to provide micro-finance to open new income earning activities. For this purpose, the bank had introduced three kinds of loans as follows: i. Self-employment loan; ii. Cultivation loan; and iii. Consumption Loan.

Self-employment loan ranges from Rs.5000-25000 depending on the amount of group deposit and previous records of loan repayment by individual beneficiaries. In case of financial difficulties as faced by the government during 2004, 2005 and 2006, the authority had given the animator a target of empowering at least nine beneficiaries in each village to the animators. The target had led to unplanned and infeasible projects for the poor and granted loan by compelling the members of the small groups and Samurdhi Samithi to approve those projects. The ultimate result had been the failure of the projects and increasing poverty of the poor households. The researchers had observed 7 projects which were utter failures and only two successful projects. The major cause of the failure of the projects was the inability of new enterprises to sustain in an open market. One of such forcefully made entrepreneur who had opened a bakery had complained that he had spent all of his savings and the loan to put up a bakery and his production of breads and other sweets could not compete in the market because there were replacements to his product every day.

The cultivation loan has to be repaid within six months. This criterion is very hard to be found realistic in this divisional secretariat area because the poor in the area get loan not to cultivate paddy or some other short term crops but to grow perennial crops.⁷ They include tea, cinnamon and rubber. These crops take much time to grow. The officials of the bank have found that this loan scheme is in fact ineffective in this area. In the case of consumption loan, beneficiaries can obtain a loan worth of Rs.1000 immediately and repayable within three months in a lower interest rate. However, both the beneficiaries and officials agree that the amount of loan is not

⁷ Personal communication with Mattaka Zonal Samurdhi Bank Officers.

sufficient to meet the immediate financial needs faced by the beneficiaries in the context of galloping inflation. The director board cannot make any change to the prescribed criteria of providing loan and their recommendation to the authority is never heard by the authority. Thus, the programme activities aimed at reducing poverty remain top down despite its avowed commitment to participatory development. Participation by the poor is a strategy of legitimising centrally designed policy process.

The dehumanizing political aspect of the micro-credit loan practice is that the poor has been made to be vigilant over the poor and the poor is policed by the poor. If debtors are unable to pay back the loan and prevent paying the instalments on time, the benefits to the other members of the small group are denied. The animator always reminds the consequences of non-repayments to the members of the group. Thus, the poor has to go after the fellow poor to force him to pay the credit instalment to be eligible once again the cushioning support for their suffering. This is a new form of control and discipline invented under the participatory development. The bank officials were proud to state that loan recovery rate is very high. The utility of this new mechanism for the government is particularly important in the context of demands made on the government by the rural poor to cancel loan and debt taken by the formal institutions of public sector banks.

3.4 Beneficiary Control over the Implementation

The functioning of the small group is limited to keeping record even though it is required to meet at least once in a week. What beneficiaries do is to register their small group and collect some amount of money and deposit it in a group account in the Bank to be eligible for credit under the programme. In case of a member's application for credit facility under the programme, the applicant normally goes a round and gets the approval of the members and sends it to the consideration of the Samithi.

The participation rate of the beneficiaries in the monthly session of Samithi is always over 90 per cent. This high rate of participation is secured through a mechanism of compulsory requirement of participation as non-participation in the monthly session amounts to a fine in cash and to the cancellation of benefits. The beneficiaries

felt that the Samithi and meetings of the small group are of little value for the betterment of their lives. The meetings are time wasting exercises to hear the painting of images of the local politicians and the party in power. The constitution of the Samithi requires that the offices shall rotate among the members and there is no barrier for one to be re-elected to another post next time. What was striking to observe in four of the Samithis, the offices have been rotating among the same group except in 7 cases where new members were accommodated in to the committees of the respective Samithis. The other important aspect of the Samithi office holding is that it is the women who hold office and they also participate in the monthly meetings on behalf of the household. Is this an aspect of women empowerment under the project? Women take part in these activities because husbands are not available to take part in the day time. Further, the voice of women participants are effectively dominated by the few male participants of the meeting.

In assessing the effectiveness of the control over the rural development activities and other proposals, several factors have to be considered. These are:

- a. The political background of the office holder;
- b. How they are elected;
- c. Role of the Animator in the functioning of Samithi and
- d. His ex-officio secretarial capacity to the Samurdhi Youth Force.

The office holders of the Samithi normally emerge out of the politically high-powered strata of the rural society. The animator and the rural political brokers of the ruling party get together and design the mechanism to keep the post going to strong loyalists of the ruling party. Keeping post in the hand of traditional party loyalists has become very important, especially in the context of growing power of the radical political left in the countryside in Sri Lanka. The strategy is pre-planned and supporters are quick enough to suggest the nominees to the posts and it is customary among the rural folk not to suggest alternative names as they are not willing to show hostile attitudes towards fellow villagers publicly. The Animator is always present in the meetings of the Samithi and vigilant over the

dissident of the suggested programme activities. Animator is a sword hanging over the beneficiaries. He has got power to enlist and drop the beneficiaries out of the project labelling them as beneficiaries empowered. The control over the rural development projects in this context has become meaningless as the animator is the ex-officio secretary to the Samurdhi Force. What-ever the project, it has suggested normally get approved and implemented using the labour of the beneficiaries. It is most important to note that the activities under the rural development have yielded significant outputs in terms of cost and benefits.

The issue to be raised is the impact on alleviating poverty, particularly, whether the poor views the projects as having any impact on their lives. The projects carried out include digging wells for drinking water, building of water tank to provide pipe borne water to the villagers using the natural fountains, cleaning of canals of the paddy fields and construction of damps. Beneficiaries explained that 'drinking water' and 'pipe borne water' are not problems of their poverty. They can fetch drinking water from natural fountains. The demand for pipe borne water was never demand of them but of the rich strata of the society. The cleaning of canals and construction of damps benefit only the well to do strata of rural society as the poor does not own paddy land. This is exploitation in the name of developing the poor. The participation by the poor in these activities, stop at tapping the labour contribution by the poor to rural development projects which benefits the rich.

The presence of Animator in the village level Samithi and his position in the Samurdhi Force designed to carry out rural development activities and the power given to this body to enter into minor contract with government have contributed to make animator interested in contract rather than helping the poor. His political power and his official power of deciding to keep or exclude a poor from the programme has effectively work against the basic premise of participatory development i.e. becoming a collective force against vested interests of the society.

3.5 Politically Constructed Poor

The process of inclusion to or exclusion from the project is decided by a complex political process. One of the important aspects

of political culture in Sri Lanka is the high electoral turn out but low level of effectiveness of the political participation. The top politicians normally suggest the courses of policy actions with their perception of public problems (See: Roberts 1985) and elections are meant to legitimize such competing policy actions by competing power elite in Sri Lanka. To help the power elite at the top, there are different layers of power brokers in between the elite and the grass root people.⁸ These brokers mobilize the people to support different policy actions suggested by the power elite. This has made the voter a demand maker at the implementation level of the policy process rather than at the initial stage of the policy formulation (Abeyrathne, 2005).

The Samurdhi proposal put forward by the People's Alliance in 1994 general election had issued certain signals to the voters. They include a package of benefits to both power brokering layer of the society and general voters. Those promised benefits under the programme have made the people to attract the people to the party.

One of the important political cultural aspects in Sri Lanka is that the voters are compelled to openly declare their allegiance to the party in grand ceremonies of public rallies and canvassing from house to house after declaring allegiance. The average voter knows that this is compulsory if they are to take benefits in the spoils system of social reward allocation.

In the present context of declining capacity of the state to engage in patron client politics, the sponsorship of any project to alleviate poverty is the best opportunity for the competing power elite to gain power and sustain power through social reward allocation as there are no funds available to engage massive development projects under the liberalized economy and as well there are no avenues to engage in patron client politics under the privatization drive. The inclusion of beneficiaries who are not worthy according to the criteria of the project and exclusion depends on this process of political construction of beneficiaries. Nearly 58 per cent of the families included at the initial stage continue to be beneficiaries under the project of 2007. Another 14 per cent of families have been added to

⁸ Personal Communication of the Researcher with Divisional Secretary, Galle Four Gravetes.

the programme after United National Party came to power in 2001 while 15 per cent families were dropped. However, they all have been included into the programme when Sri Lanka Freedom Party-led coalition came to power in 2004. The drop outs and re-entrants were given benefits irrespective of political allegiance to the party in power. If the animator refused to include or decided to exclude the beneficiaries on personal grounds, the beneficiaries normally resort to the high powered henchmen of the ruling party and its electorate organizer to remedy the situation and they arrange to request to divisional secretary to intervene to correct the situation. In fact, this does not amount to a request but to an order to intervene into implementing the policy deviating from original courses of actions set by the competent authority. The implementing authorities have no option but to lean to the local politicians in the context of politicized system of higher level appointment to the positions in country's administration.⁹ The animators and Samurdhi Managers themselves are beneficiaries of this political made poverty alleviation movement as they had got appointed without any competition from others. Further, the animators express the view that they had to support the party to which they owe their appointment as there is a danger to their job security if the rival political party comes to power. This situation has led the animator to propagate policy of their paternal party and to protect the interests and images of the local power elite. This has led the animator to become a full time cadre of the party rather than a social animator. His duties, thus, become convening of Samurdhi beneficiaries to political rallies and meetings, distributing of party messages to the beneficiaries etc. Thus, the beneficiary organization network has become an effective mechanism of keeping the poor under the control of politicians.

4 Concluding Observations

The analysis of explanation of the causes of poverty offered by the beneficiaries clearly reveals the complexities inherent in their poverty. The public policy designed by the Samurdhi Authority has been unable to grasp the crux of the policy issue. The approach

⁹ Personal Communication of the researcher with a top level officer in Niyayagam Divisional Secretariat.

adapted to programme and project designing remains top-down despite its avowed commitment to participatory development, or else programmed to be failed.

The beneficiary organization network created under the movement has no effective control over the policy process and the rural development component under the programme has become a means of exploiting the labour of the poor to benefit the elite of the rural community. In the case of compulsory savings component, one important issue to be raised is that whether it is a deceptive policy measure to cheat the poor as they are not allowed to withdraw these savings from their accounts. In this context, whether micro-credit component in poverty alleviation programme is working to relief the burden of demands that the poor makes on governments in third world democracies like Sri Lanka at times of elections is a question that deserves serious consideration. The strategy of guaranteeing by the small group for credit taken by the poor has turn out to be an oppressive tool of disciplining the poor by making the poor to police over the fellow poor. This is a new mechanism invented by government to keep vigilant over deviant behaviour of the citizen. The failure of small scale income generation projects, on the part of the poor, raises the issue of the feasibility of this kind of approach in a macro-economic policy framework that promotes competition or the survival of the fittest. The politically constructed poverty and politically defined beneficiaries allow the traditional politicians to legitimize their oppressive rule in the context of liberalized economy. Ultimately, the findings of this research lead to raise the question of whether a state apparatus dominated by vested interests could lead a project of empowering the dominated to question the dominator and its allies.

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