



**BRIDGING THE GREAT DIVIDE BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY (A STUDY ON TWO INITIATIVES OF ENHANCING THE STATE – SOCIETY SYNERGY IN SRI LANKA)**



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**ABSTRACT**

**Article History**

Received: 19 January 2017

Revised: 3 March 2017

Accepted: 30 March 2017

Published: 24 April 2017

**Keywords**

Civil society

State

“Vicious circle”

“Virtuous circle”

Participatory irrigation

management

Samurdhi

Sri Lanka.

A ‘great divide’ exists between the society and the state, due the mistrust and lack of confidence from citizens towards state authorities or public administration. The hostility between state and society creates a “vicious circle” which brings great harm for both state and civil society. The importance of bridging the gap between state and society has being emphasized by many scholars, for achieving economic development and enjoying the maximum benefit of democracy. Positive-sum interaction between state and society should be developed for turning the above mentioned “vicious circle” into a “virtuous circle”. This paper critically examines two main attempts in Sri Lanka which aimed to bridge the above mentioned gap.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study is one of very few studies which have investigated State – Society Synergy in the Asian contexts. Thus the paper contributes the first logical analysis of the attempts for bridging the ‘great divide’ between state and society in Sri Lanka.

**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

GOSL	Government of Sri Lanka
CBO	Community Based Organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
INMAS	Integrated Management of Major Irrigation Schemes
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
O&M	Operations & Maintenance
PIM	Participatory Irrigation Management
SDO	Samurdhi Development Officer

UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Civil society represents the ‘formal and informal groups of citizens that act collectively, in public, to express their interests and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable’(Diamond, 1994 in Brinkerhoff (1998)). Many scholars have analysed the different forms of interaction between state and society. Some analysts point out the fact that, there is a huge gap between the state and the civil society. This ‘great divide’ should be bridged for achieving prosperity. There are several attempts in Sri Lanka which have aimed to bridge the gap between state and civil society. This paper critically examines two main attempts among them, the Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) and the ‘Samurdhi’ program. The first part of the paper discusses the theoretical analysis of the state-civil society synergy. Then it analysis the role of the above mentioned attempts for creating a state society -synergy in Sri Lanka.

## 2. THE ‘GREAT DIVIDE’ BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY

In many countries, large proportions of the people try to keep a distance to the state. In other words, they try as much as possible to avoid any contact or business with the state machinery due to various reasons. According to Evans, a ‘great divide’ exists between the society and the state as there is usually a lack of confidence and trust from ordinary people operating as individuals or groups towards state authorities or public administration (Evans, 1996). Some scholars identify the hostility between the state and the society as a “vicious circle”. If people see the state as a problem, they feel less loyalty or commitment to it, they will try to distance themselves from the authorities. As an example, they try to avoid paying tax, or they try to break governmental rules and regulations. ‘This again will weaken the state as it will have even less to offer to the people, which again will lead to an even lesser loyalty to the state’(Øyhus, 2010).

### 2.1. State - Society Synergy

In the original sense of the term ‘synergy’, denoted the causal chain of “one thing leading to another” (Argonza, 2008). Synergy is defined by Evans as a win-win relationship, which can be achieved by ‘Complementarity’ and ‘Embeddedness’ (Evans, 1996). Complementarity means mutually supportive relations which suggest a clear division of labor, based on the contrasting properties of public and private institutions. Embeddedness means, connections between citizens and public officials across the public private divide (Mendonca, 2004). By criticizing the zero-sum relationship, Evans emphasizes the importance of positive-sum interaction between the state and the civil society. For him, interactions between state segments and social segments have the effect of creating more power for both sides. Further, he emphasis, the positive engagement between the state and the civil society as a crucial factor for economic development and this is also important for ‘bring the state back in’(Evans, 1996).

Robert Putnam, brings the idea of, “strong society, strong state” (Kim, 2007). According to him, the synergistic relationship between the civil society and the state has both a demand side and a supply side. On the demand side, a strong civil society will expect better government, demand more effective public service, and act collectively to achieve the shared goals of citizens. On the supply side, the performance of the polity is facilitated by the social infrastructure of civil society, the democratic values of citizens, and their social ability to collaborate for shared interests. Further he identifies ‘social capital’ as an important element of the state –society synergy (Putnam, 1993 in Kim (2007)). Ostrom and Walker (2003) argues that the division of society in segments such as government, civil society and market is useful as an analytical tool, but it is an artificial separation. According to her,

'the great divide between the government and the civil society is a conceptual trap arising from overly rigid disciplinary walls surrounding the study of human institutions' (Ostrom and Walker, 2003). She emphasizes the fact that, synergy cannot be achieved if public officials and citizens continue to see a great divide between them. In one hand, no market can survive without extensive public goods provided by government agencies. On the other hand, no government can be efficient and equitable without considerable input from citizens (Ostrom and Walker, 2003).

It is important to turn above "vicious circle" to a "virtuous circle" which involves joining hands between the civil society and people and government authorities on all levels for ensuring the state – society synergy (Øyhus, 2010). This virtuous cycle can be created through the 'mutual collaboration and gains in which civil society nurtures good government and good government in turn fosters civic engagement' (Harriss, 2001).

### 3. PARTICIPATORY IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT (PIM) IN SRI LANKA

A cornerstone of the ancient irrigation management system of Sri Lanka, was the active involvement of farmers in the management of irrigation systems. This ancient system epitomized in the "tank village", where economical use of land and water was defined according to ethical values of the traditional Sinhalese community (Yalman 1967 in Raby (1998)). However, this management system was changed during the European colonization. Until the 1970s, the Irrigation Department was directly responsible for all aspects of the management in many irrigation systems. In the late 1970s, the government was planning to change their irrigation management policy after realizing that many of Sri Lanka's major irrigation schemes were deteriorating badly and needed extensive repairs costing more than was available from regular government funds (Brewer, 1994). Sri Lanka has experimented with variations of the Asian model of PIM since 1977 (Raby, 1998). Modern participatory management methodologies to irrigation were introduced in the mid-1980s. The Integrated Management of Major Irrigation Schemes (INMAS) program in 1984, was the first attempt to implement participatory management in a number of irrigation schemes, following the pilot projects in Gal Oya, Minipe and Kimbulwana Oya (Molen, 2001). Since then, with the collaboration of the government, department of Agrarian Services and farmers organizations, a number of PIM attempts have been made island wide.

Currently there are 500,000 hectares of land that have been provided with irrigation facilities. About 150,000 hectares of this land are found in some 12,000 "minor" systems, each serving less than 80 hectares of land. All of these minor systems are managed directly by the farmers whose lands are irrigated by these minor systems (Brewer, 1994). The government is responsible for rehabilitation of these systems, and this is done through the Irrigation Department. The operation and management of the system is by farmers through an Agrarian Services Committee of fifteen farmer representatives and five public officers, with oversight by the Department of Agrarian Services (joint management committees) (Raby, 1998). Operation and maintenance responsibilities are being transferred to the farmer organizations through formal agreements with the relevant government agencies (Brewer, 1994).

With the assistance of some INGO's the government has now reintroduced some ancient irrigation management methods such as 'Pangu' method.<sup>1</sup>

#### 3.1. PIM System and State – Society Synergy

As being discussed in the theoretical section state – society synergy means, bridging the gap between government and the civil society. Some analysts point out that, the closeness between the farmers and the officers has well

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<sup>1</sup> 'The *pangu* method is based on the traditional system for sharing the work for cleaning and maintenance of the irrigation infrastructure. It involves digging and/or desilting the reservoir, raising or strengthening the bund, clearing the bund of bushes and weeds, and cleaning out the canals and small repairs of the canals in case those are damaged. According to this method, every paddy land owner (of land in the command area of a particular tank) is responsible for cleaning and repairing one section of the bund or canals, allocated to him or her'. UNESCO (2011).

improved due to the participatory management system (Somasiri, 2008; Perera, 2009). According to Somasiri (2008) there has been an improvement in the equity of water distribution, more transparent water allocation and better acceptance of the management strategies by the farmers. UNESCO (2011) points out the fact that reintroducing of 'Pangu' system has brought many positive results, because this system creates more feeling of 'ownership' and responsibility for maintenance. Moreover, the farmers are accountable for the condition of their share.

Due to participatory management system some irrigation systems such as Kirindi Oya in Hambantota and Rajangana Scheme in Kurunegala, achieved better cropping intensities with higher water use efficiencies (Perera, 2009). According to some analysts, water irrigation management in Gal Oya is one of the best participatory irrigation management systems in South Asia. Because it represents a unique collaboration of farmer organizations, a donor agency (USAID), government as well as university institutions (Uphoff and Wijayarathna, 2000; Suharko, 2001). Suharko further points out that this was successful because this collaboration has been able to distribute water very carefully and effectively.<sup>2</sup>

This system nevertheless cannot be described as a complete success in terms of state –society synergy. For ensuring such a synergy 'hostility between the state and civil society' should be minimized (Øyhus, 2010). However, when implementing the PIM approach, the government had several conflicts with the farmers. As an example, in 1984 government introduced fee collection to pay for the operation and maintenance of the irrigation project. Even though this was a promising initiative for the sustainability it did not last more than 4 years. In 1984 the government was able to collect 49.2 per cent O&M fee. But in 1987 it had decreased to 4.9 per cent (figure 01). Because, this was seen by farmers as an attempt to privatized the irrigation system and it became a contentious political issue (Somasiri, 2008).

Year	Percent Collected
1984	49.24
1985	17.54
1986	11.54
1987	4.98

Figure-01. Trends in O&M Fee Collection

(Source: Raby (1998))

Further, some opposition parties, oppose participatory management by pointing out the fact that, 'it is unfair to farmers'. According to them, profits from irrigated agriculture is so low that farmers cannot afford the cost of operation and maintenance of irrigation systems (Brewer, 1994). Some critics also argue that 'many irrigation systems are so dilapidated that to turn them over to farmers is to ask the farmers to make up for the government's past deficiencies in maintenance' (Brewer, 1994). There are criticism against this system even from the government side. As an example, some Irrigation Department officials have declared that channels taken over by farmers are

<sup>2</sup> 'The system of organizational roles and rules created by farmers with assistance from the outside agents was able to distribute a very limited volume of water so sparingly yet effectively that a better than normal crop was obtained with only a portion of the water supply considered necessary.' Suharko (2001).

deteriorating at a very fast rate, particularly following rehabilitation. Further, some government officials claim that the farmer organizations are falling apart and not carrying out their responsibilities (Brewer, 2011). However, some studies revealed the fact that, there is no evidence that handing the project over to farmer has affected the rate of deterioration of channels, but that there are clear problems with understandings of responsibilities handed over (Brewer et al 1996 in Brewer (2011)). These evidences suggest that hostility between government and civil society has still not being minimized.

According to Evans (1996) state – society relationship should be a ‘win-win relationship’. As we have observed, for ensuring a win – win stage, in one hand civil society should be empowered, on the other hand poor communities should be able to escape from the ‘dependency mentality’. However, ‘Dependency of farmers on state help’ has been identified as one of major weaknesses of this system (Brewer, 1994; Somasiri, 2008). Many of the famers’ organizations are still receiving subsidies directly from the Irrigation Department. Further, for achieving the successes of the participatory irrigation systems, it is necessary for farmers to be organized themselves and demand more participation. In fact, farmers have done so in some places.<sup>3</sup> However, such impulsive organization has been rare in Sri Lanka. The reason behind that is the government’s domination in decision making. Neither individual farmers nor groups of farmers have being given real power to affect decisions about irrigation systems. Even though, management committees guarantees that farmers have some say in system decision-making, it does not remove the ultimate power of the government (Brewer, 1994).

#### 4. ‘SAMURDHI’ PROGRAM

‘Samurdhi’ means – prosperity. This national program introduced by the government in 1994 and where the aim was to minimize the poverty and contribute towards a stable national development by identifying the potential in families through people’s participation-based development (Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development, 2009). This program is premised on participatory development principles. The program encourages beneficiaries to engage in developmental activities of their own choice from planning to monitoring of the program implementation. The structure of the Samurdhi program is a combination of state and civil society because it has both formal & informal structures. The formal Structure consists of ministry, departments, authority, district secretaries, divisional secretaries, Kalapa (areas), Grama Vasama(villages). The informal level consists of various bodies from; family level, village level, area level, district level and national level (Nawaratne, 2010).

The main components of the Samurdhi Program can be divided into three major areas; the welfare component, the group-savings and credit component, and the integrated rural development approach. Under the welfare component, a welfare grant is being provided (Rs. 1,500 per family/per month) for the selected poor families. There is also an insurance scheme for all beneficiaries. Further, there are many social development programs under this component, focusing on the aged destitute, alcoholics, drug addicts, handicapped and other disadvantaged persons. The second component consists of efforts to encourage savings and provide financial markets that serve the poor. The third component consists of a series of efforts aimed at community development, through investments in economic and social infrastructure, agriculture, nutrition and small enterprises (see figure 02).

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<sup>3</sup> As an example Tamiravaruni System in Tamil Nadu, farmers have created 132 organizations on their own to pressure the government to issue water in certain ways Brewer (1994).

- 1. The welfare component**
  - 1.1. The welfare grant
  - 1.2. Insurance scheme
  - 1.3. Social Development Programmes focusing on the aged destitute, alcoholics, drug addicts, handicapped and other disadvantaged persons. To be implemented with the assistance of certain NGOs.
- 2. The group-savings and credit component**
  - 2.1. Group savings and intra-group credit
  - 2.2. Credit schemes implemented by the state banks
  - 2.3. The accelerated loan scheme
  - 2.4. The *Samurdhi* bank project.
- 3. The integrated rural development approach**
  - 3.1. Rural infrastructure development carried out by the local communities
  - 3.2. Other projects such as environmental protection, youth training, nutrition projects etc.

Figure-02. Main Components of Samurdhi Program

(Source: Salih (2000))

Today, nearly 2,000,000 families are covered by the Samurdhi program. It owns a giant national network of CBOs as well as public administration network. At present, nearly 26,000 full-timers are engaged as “Change Agents” of the movement. 24,000 Samurdhi Development Officer (SDOs) and 2,000 graduate managers (Nawaratne, 2010).

#### 4.1. The Samurdhi Program and the State – Society Synergy

As being mentioned in the theoretical section, there should be ‘positive engagement’ between the state and the civil society for achieving the state – society synergy. When analyzing the ‘Samurdhi’ program, we can identify some of areas which aim to promote the ‘positive engagement’ between state and society. As we observed, the third component, the ‘integrated rural development approach’ basically aims to enhance the state – civil society synergy, because, this scheme promotes the development of the stock of rural infrastructure by the beneficiaries themselves with the assistance of the government. Project identification, design and implementation are all supposed to be carried out by the beneficiaries with some technical assistance, if required (Salih, 2000). Further, this program is premised on participatory development principles. As an example, all aspects of decision-making in the village level centre ‘Samurdhi Balakaya’ which is a collaborative body of government, non-government agencies and villagers.<sup>4</sup>

According to some analysts ‘Samurdhi’ program has been able to bridge the state – society gap to some extent (Nawaratne, 2010; Department of External Resources (ERD) Sri Lanka, 2011). Some researches show that, in many Samurdhi projects, there is a strong involvement of community leaders, workers and targeted families in decision-making, particularly in project identification, targeting and monitoring. Further, they emphasize that those initiatives taken by communities are matched with government schemes through provision of technical, managerial and financial resources by various government sectors (ERD, 2011). According to Nawaratne (2010) this program

<sup>4</sup> “The ‘Samurdhi Balakaya’, also called the ‘Samurdhi Task Force’, is the grassroots level organization formed to implement the Samurdhi Program. It is comprised of all youths in the village aged 18 to 35 years, and has an elected Executive Committee of seven persons, two animators, and seven other members representing government and non-government agencies engaged in youth, sports, and rural activities in the village. An advisory council whose members are appointed from non-youth residents provides advice and assistance to the Task Force.” FAO (2011).

done a lot to empower the poor and graduate them out of the 'poverty trap'. Samurdhi group-savings and intra-group credit schemes also has been a useful tools to assist in vulnerabilities (Salih, 2000)

However, there are number of weaknesses in the Samurdhi program, which can harmfully affect the state – society synergy. Corruption is one of the limiting factors of synergy between the society and the government (Evans, 1996; Øyhus, 2010). Corruption and political polarization in the Samurdhi program, has been one of major factors for weakling the state-society synergy. World Bank (2002) indicated that around 40% of the poorest in who were eligible to receive the 'Samurdhi' benefit , have been excluded from the program while considerably better off house hold receive benefit due to political affiliation. Not only in the selection process but also, political influences are ingrained in the many stages of the program. As an example, development officers employed are political appointees. Some researches has revealed the fact that development officers are often identified with the political regime sometimes causing a problem in the implementation of the program, especially in areas where support for the government is weak (Salih, 2000). World Bank (2004) identifies, 'accountability' as a crucial factor for the state – society synergy. 'Samurdhi' has being highly criticized for lack of accountability. There is no proper external or internal accountable system in the program. Some analysts point out that , Samurdhi officers are accountable to two authorities, one of whom is a local politician. Thus the people who carry out the program are not free of political influence, and no external checks and balances are present to prevent them from acting on the demands of politicians.( Gunitalaka et al. 1997 in Glinskaya (2000)).

According to Evans, to construct state-society energy, there is need for an effective administrative apparatus (Evans, 1996). Weak public administration institutions can harm the synergetic relationship between the state and the civil society. Many researchers point out the fact that the high administrative costs due to the cumbersome administrative structure of the Samardhi, is huge burden for its effectiveness (Glinskaya, 2000; Salih, 2000). As an example salaries and wages alone cost roughly 10 per cent of total expenditure. According to some critiques, one of main weaknesses of the Samurdhi program is the uncompromising conflict between political motives and development motives. Above all the burdensome administrative structure of the program fuels the politics-development conflict (Salih, 2000). Further, in many projects, the Samurdhi's mandate overlaps with other government bodies such as the Department of Social Services, the Department of Agriculture and various local government agencies. Furthermore, many of the Samurdhi capital and enterprise development projects are planned and executed in an ad-hoc manner (ERD, 2011). Because of this, there is a tendency of technically inferior investments and limited community involvement in maintaining assets.

As same as we observed in the PIM approach, the 'dependency mentality' of beneficiaries is another weakness of the Samurdhi program too. Researchers show that, in some regions, Samurdhi grants has discouraged the poor from seeking employment (ERD, 2011)

## 5. CONCLUSION

The paper shows that the above two cases are good initiatives for bridging the 'great divide' between state and civil society in Sri Lanka. Both approaches have been able to accomplish some elements of 'Complementarity' and 'Embeddedness'. The closeness between the farmers and government officers has improved to some extent due to the PIM approach. Under the component of 'integrated rural development approach' Samurdhi program also has been able promote the 'positive engagement' between state and society. However these approaches cannot be described as a complete success in terms of state –society synergy. The paper reveals that, still there are some hostilities between government and civil society. Corruptions, lack of transparency, lack of accountability and political polarization have been, limiting factors of synergy between the society and the government. Even though these approaches aimed to promote 'grassroots decision-making', ultimate power of the government in system decision-making has still not being removed. 'Dependency mentality' of beneficiaries on state help' is also another

major weakness in both cases. Therefore, still long way to go for well achieving the state – society synergy with a win-win relationship.

**Funding:** This study received no specific financial support.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Contributors/Acknowledgement:** Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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