

Enhancing Sustainable Rural Development in Sri Lanka: A Study of Community-Centered Approaches and Volunteerism in Ohiya, Karagahayaya, and Moragahapallama

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Abstract

This study investigates community-based volunteer programs in Sri Lanka, with a specific focus on development initiatives that emphasize community participation. The research identifies three primary development approaches: "Community-Oriented Development," "Community-Engaged Development," and "Community-Driven Development." These approaches aim to promote the adoption of sustainable and effective development practices by actively involving volunteers. The study's findings reveal shortcomings in existing approaches, including issues related to sustainability and their alignment with the intended beneficiary areas. This conclusion is based on a rigorous review and comprehensive analysis of the subject. To address these challenges, the research provides valuable examples of community-centered development efforts that are highly recommended. The study benefited significantly from the inclusion of three key case study regions in Sri Lanka: Ohiya, Karagahayaya, and Moragahapalla. The active involvement and collaboration of local residents played a pivotal role in shaping the outcomes and ensuring the relevance and feasibility of the proposed development strategies. In summary, this research centers on development projects in Sri Lanka that prioritize community involvement and participation. The active engagement of local residents is instrumental in shaping the outcomes and validating the practicality of the proposed development strategies.

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Introduction

Rural areas refer to geographic regions that are characterized by a low population density and a predominance of agricultural, natural, or undeveloped land. Rural areas are often associated with a close connection to nature, with landscapes encompassing farmland, forests, mountains, or other natural features. However, rural economies can also involve other sectors such as mining, fishing, and small-scale industries. Compared to urban areas, rural communities generally have fewer amenities and services, including limited access to healthcare, education, transportation, and infrastructure. The population in rural areas tends to be more dispersed, and there is often a

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greater sense of community and interdependence among residents. "Rural development is a multidimensional process that aims to enhance the economic, social, and environmental well-being of rural communities through strategies that foster sustainable growth, bridge the urban-rural divide, and empower local individuals and communities" (World Bank, 2019 The World Development Report 2019). Rural areas can vary widely in terms of their size, resources, and development levels. Some rural areas may experience population decline and economic challenges, while others may benefit from tourism, natural resource extraction, or specific industries. Government policies often aim to support rural development, improve infrastructure, and address the unique needs and challenges of rural communities. Community-centered development approaches are crucial for promoting sustainable development in rural areas. These approaches emphasize the active participation and engagement of local communities, aiming to empower them and address their specific needs and aspirations. Volunteerism plays a vital role in driving these initiatives, acting as a catalyst for change and fostering a sense of ownership within the community. This research focuses on conducting a comparative analysis of three community-centered development approaches, namely "development for community," "development with community," and "development by community," through the case studies of Ohiya laboratory development, Karagahayaya roof development, and Moragahapallama roof development.

The Objective of the Study

Key Research Questions:

- a) How have community-driven development initiatives in Sri Lanka evolved over the years, and what were their initial objectives?
- b) What lessons can be learned from successful community-driven development projects in Sri Lanka, and how can these lessons inform the design and implementation of future initiatives?

The Research Objective is to evaluate the effectiveness of community-centered development approaches in fostering sustainable rural development outcomes. It involves an assessment of three distinct development approaches (development by community, development with community, and development for community) to understand their respective contributions to rural development.

Literature Review

There are several existing methods and approaches to rural development that aim to improve the quality of life, promote economic growth, and address the unique challenges faced by rural communities. Chambers (1979), in his book "Rural Development: Putting the Last First," emphasizes the importance of infrastructure development in empowering rural communities. He argues that providing basic infrastructure, such as roads, water supply systems, and electricity grids, can enhance the livelihoods of rural populations and enable them to participate more effectively in economic activities, which can enhance connectivity, accessibility, and overall development opportunities. (Rural Development: Putting the Last First, Book by Robert Chambers, 1979) (UNDP 2020, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) 2022, World Development Report 2008)

Rural Development - The World Bank recognizes infrastructure development as a critical factor in rural development. Their reports, such as "World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development," Agricultural development: Supporting agricultural activities through various means, including promoting sustainable farming practices, providing access to credit and financial services for farmers, improving irrigation systems, introducing new technologies, and facilitating market linkages for agricultural products. (World Development Report 2008.

International Labour Organization (ILO 2017) The ILO has extensively addressed the topic of employment generation and diversification in rural areas. Their reports, such as the "Rural Employment Report," provide insights into strategies and policies for promoting decent work, entrepreneurship, and rural job creation. Employment generation and diversification: Encouraging the growth of non-agricultural sectors and promoting entrepreneurship in rural areas can help create employment opportunities and reduce dependency on agriculture. This can involve supporting small-scale industries, tourism development, skill training programs, and promoting local enterprises (World Development Report 2013: International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) in his book "Rural Development: Putting the Last First," emphasizes the importance of social empowerment and community participation in rural development. He emphasizes the need to involve and empower local communities in decision-making processes and development initiatives to ensure their active participation and ownership. Social empowerment and community participation: Encouraging community participation, empowering marginalized groups, and strengthening local institutions can contribute to rural development. This includes promoting participatory decision-making processes, facilitating access to resources and services for disadvantaged groups, and fostering social cohesion within rural communities. Also, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) approaches: These participatory methodologies, pioneered by Robert Chambers and other practitioners, emphasize the importance of community participation, local knowledge, and empowerment in rural development. They promote inclusive and bottom-up approaches to planning, decision-making, and development interventions.

Community-centered development approaches - Several scholars and practitioners have explored the concept of community-centered development approaches, highlighting their significance in fostering sustainable development and empowering local communities. These studies underscore the value of community-centered development approaches in promoting inclusive development, community ownership, and sustainable outcomes. Brophy and Shabecoff (2001), in their book *A Guide to Careers in Community Development*, take a comprehensive approach to community development. They define community development as "the economic, physical, and social revitalization of a community, led by the people who live in the community". Community development empowers the community and creates stronger and more networked communities (Buye, 2021). By involving communities in the development process, these approaches have the potential to address local needs, mobilize resources, and create lasting positive change at the grassroots level. The development for community approach emphasizes the role of external actors in providing resources, expertise, and support to facilitate community development initiatives. Development for community approach that relies mostly on experts to assist the community during a planning phase, implementation phase, evaluation phase, or all of these (Gallardo, 2016). In this approach, external entities lead in identifying development priorities and implementing projects. The community is seen as the recipient of development efforts, with external actors playing a key role in providing technical assistance, funding, and infrastructure. This approach aims to empower communities by addressing their development challenges and improving their overall well-being. The development with community approach emphasizes collaboration and partnership between external actors and community members in identifying and addressing development challenges. "The assumption of the cooperative or self-help theme suggests that by working together people can improve their situation" (Gallardo, 2016, Christenson and Robinson, 1980, p. 43). The development by community approach places the community at the forefront of the entire development process, with community members taking the lead in planning, implementation, and decision-making. The goal of community development has always been to empower members of a local area to facilitate self-improvement, not to have the developers maintain and/or improve the community. In this approach, external actors serve as facilitators, providing support and resources based on community-defined

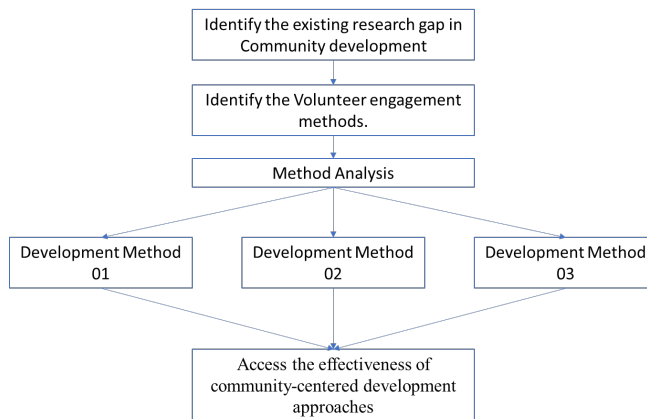
priorities. Development by community aims to empower communities by building their capacity, strengthening local institutions, and fostering sustainable self-reliance.

Volunteerism -Volunteerism in development refers to the act of individuals dedicating their time, skills, and resources voluntarily to support and contribute to development initiatives. It embodies the spirit of selflessness and community engagement, where individuals offer their services without expecting financial compensation. Volunteerism in development plays a vital role in addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges by harnessing the enthusiasm, expertise, and local knowledge of volunteers. These dedicated individuals actively participate in a range of activities, such as community-based projects, capacity building, advocacy, and service delivery, working alongside local communities to empower, strengthen, and create positive change.

Methods

The method consists of several phases aimed at comprehensively developing the study. The study begins by identifying the existing research gap in Community development. The purpose of this phase is to pinpoint the gaps in scholarly work related to development. Following this initial step, a systematic review is conducted to identify the various methods of Volunteer engagement and how these methods can be aligned with the development of scenarios. After completing the systematic review, a comprehensive analysis is undertaken. This analysis involves the development of a case study to test and validate the identified methods. By using the case study, the effectiveness of the methods is assessed in practical scenarios, providing valuable insights into their real-world application and impact. Finally, the study concludes with the assessment of the effectiveness of community-centered development approaches.

Figure 01: Method of the Research



This assessment helps to determine the success and efficiency of the approaches used in promoting community development. Overall, the method is designed to ensure a thorough and well-rounded exploration of the research gap, volunteer engagement methods, and community-centered development approaches, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Case studies Selection

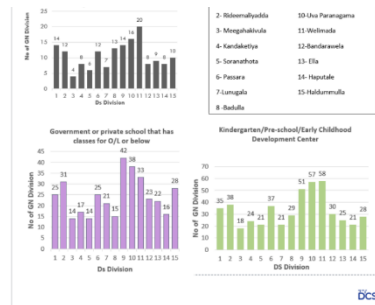
Ohiya

Ohiya is located in Welimada Divisional Secretariate Division in Badulla District under Uva Province of Sri Lanka. A major part of the community is engaged in tea plucking under daily wages. Another major part of the community is farming vegetables and fruits which can only cultivate in the region. The total number of families registered in the election roll in the Badulla District is 270,835. Out of that Welimada Divisional Secretariat reports 29,715 families (11% of Badulla District).

Karagahayaya

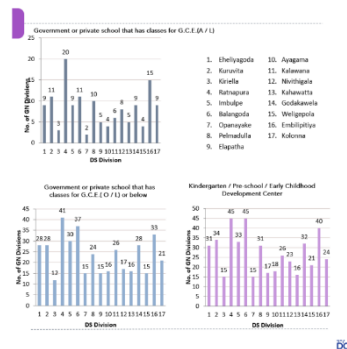
Karagahayaya village is located in Kolonna Divisional Secretariate Division in Rathnapura District under Sabaragamuwa Province of Sri Lanka. The majority of the local community are farmers and workers who are hired on daily wages. A considerable number of people work in tea factories as well. The total number of families registered in the election roll in the Rathnapura District is 331,994. Out of that Kolonna Divisional Secretariat reports 15,631 families (4.7% of Rathnapura District). Ratnapura/Embilipitiya/Karagahayaya a Vidyalaya – Kolonna is the selected school to initiate development process, and this is a secondary school offering classes up to grade 11. About 100 school children study currently at the school.

Figure 03: Number of Grama Niladhari (GN) Divisions where education facilities are available within Grama



Source: Grama Niladhari Divisions Statistics – 2020: Badulla District

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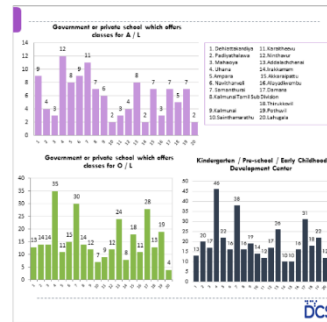


Source: Grama Niladhari Divisions Statistics – 2020: Rathnapura District

Moragahapallama

Moragahapallama village is located in Damana Divisional Secretariate Division in Ampara District under Eastern Province of Sri Lanka. Most of the local communities are farmers who cultivate sugarcane and supply it to the sugar factory in the area. While Others are related to agriculture, few of the local communities are government employees. The total number of families registered in the election roll in the Ampara District is 224,785. Out of that Damana Divisional Secretariat reports 12,165 families (5.4% of Ampara District).

Figure 04: Number of Grama Niladhari (GN) Divisions where education facilities are available within Grama



Source: Grama Niladhari Divisions Statistics – 2020: Ampara District

Results and Discussion

As a result of the research, three main development scenarios have been identified that can be adopted for community-centric development applications. These scenarios are as follows:

- **Development for Community:** In this scenario, the development process will be primarily led by volunteers. The volunteers take the initiative and play a central role in driving and implementing the development projects for the community.
- **Development with Community:** This scenario involves a collaborative approach, where both the community members and volunteers work together as partners to lead the development initiatives. It emphasizes the importance of active involvement and engagement from both parties.
- **Development by Community:** In this scenario, the community takes the lead in driving the development efforts, while volunteers offer their assistance and support. The community members are at the forefront of decision-making and project implementation, with volunteers serving as valuable resources.

Each of these development scenarios has its own merits and potential benefits, and the appropriate choice depends on factors such as the specific needs and characteristics of the community, the level of volunteer participation, and the available resources. The research provides valuable insights into these scenarios, offering guidance for selecting the most suitable approach to foster community-centric development and improve the overall well-being of the community.

Development for Community

"Development for Community" is a top-down strategy where external groups, governments, or institutions design and implement development initiatives or programs without community engagement. In this strategy, outsider experts or anticipated development needs make community-benefitting judgments. Problem identification began with the school's lack of current technology and educational tools. Problem Prioritization followed, emphasizing the need to close the digital gap to improve student learning. The external team and volunteers then developed a thorough strategy to create the community computer lab. Budgeting, resource procurement, and timeline were concerned. To ensure the project met the school's and community's needs,

stakeholder discussion was crucial. After the Stakeholder Discussion, Project Planning began, detailing all computer lab construction details. The team collaborated on the lab's design, technology, and curriculum integration. With a strong plan, volunteers built the computer lab and set up the equipment during Project Implementation. The "Development for Community" part was demonstrated by the volunteers' time and experience, which helped the struggling initiative. Monitoring mechanisms tracked progress and addressed issues during implementation. Regular assessments kept the project on schedule and allowed quick revisions to ensure completion.

Development with Community

The success of the project in Ambilipitiya, involving the construction of a school roof, was driven by the "Development with Community" approach. This strategy prioritized active community participation and collaboration at every stage, leading to a meaningful and sustainable impact. The initial step involved identifying the school's struggles due to insufficient funding, which resulted in leaking roofs and uncomfortable classrooms, hindering students' learning, and posing health hazards. To address the most pressing issue—the roof—a project team collaborated closely with the community to brainstorm potential solutions. Budget constraints, available resources, and community preferences were considered during strategy development. Comprehensive stakeholder discussions with school authorities, teachers, students, parents, local authorities, and community members ensured the project aligned with their specific needs. A detailed project plan with timelines, budgets, and responsibilities was prepared, guiding the implementation process. Community members and volunteers joined hands to build the new roof, with daily monitoring of progress and prompt problem identification. The involvement of community members was pivotal, providing valuable input during planning and essential contributions to execution. The successful completion of the project hinged on the project plan, adhering to timelines and budget constraints, while community participation guaranteed the project met the community's needs. This case study highlights the significance of inclusive approaches, illustrating how collaboration and shared responsibility can lead to impactful development initiatives in local communities.

Development by Community

"Development by Community," the Monaragala District exemplified an empowering approach to address their struggling school's inadequate infrastructure. Faced with the pressing issue of a roof in disrepair, the local community took charge of the situation by mobilizing collective efforts. Recognizing the significance of this project for students' academic performance and overall well-being, they collaborated, pooled resources, and planned meticulously. Local businesspeople facilitated consensus building and shared ownership, ensuring transparency. By engaging local artisans, they ensured quality and efficiency throughout the construction process. Regular meetings allowed prompt resolution of challenges, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility. The community-led approach proved highly successful, completing the project on time, within budget, and meeting the community's needs. The remarkable achievement of the school's roof became a model for other communities facing similar infrastructure challenges, showcasing the power of grassroots initiatives in driving development.

Conclusion

The research focused on identifying the main three community-centric development methods and how they can be practiced with the involvement of volunteers. The study evaluated the existing methods for community development and highlighted existing scholarly gaps. It found that there is a lack of community-driven initiatives and major sustainable projects. The main problem with the existing methods is their lack of sustainability. After the development projects are completed, they tend to become isolated, and the community does not feel the lasting impact of the

development efforts. To address this issue, the study provided essential examples and case studies for recommended community-centered development initiatives. These initiatives include Development for Community: This method involves volunteers taking the lead in driving and implementing development projects for the community. The projects are designed with the community's needs and input in mind, ensuring a more sustainable and impactful approach. Development with Community: This approach emphasizes collaboration between community members and volunteers. Both parties work together as partners to lead and execute development initiatives. This collaborative effort ensures a more inclusive and effective development process. Development by Community: In this method, the community takes the lead in driving the development efforts, with volunteers providing support and assistance as needed. This community-led approach empowers the residents to take ownership of the projects and ensures their long-term sustainability.

By promoting and implementing these community-centered development initiatives, the research aims to address the shortcomings of existing methods and create sustainable and impactful projects. The use of real-life examples and case studies demonstrates how these approaches can be successfully applied in various contexts, fostering genuine and lasting positive change within the communities involved.

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