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INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A PEOPLE'S APPROACH

THE SARVODAYA SHRAMADANA MOVEMENT

IN SRI LANKA

An assessment over the last ten years

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Preface

This study describes the achievements of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement against it's own goals and objectives.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement differs from traditional Community Development Organizations in many respects. It tries to achieve an ideal: The Sarvodaya Social Order. It sets out criteria and methods: the awakening of the individual, group, nation and the world by changing the physical and psychological infra-structure of villagers.

The Movement has been evaluated many times. Evaluators would find that the uniqueness of the Movement provides substantial difficulties in using traditional tools and evaluation techniques. This study describes some of these difficulties and provides a framework for the understanding of the Movement's work.

The study was done with the help of many voluntary, professional and just ordinary people. An earlier draft was thoroughly revised by among others Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, Mr. Karunananda and Dr. N.Ratnapala. I am indebted to them for their comments and critical remarks. I am responsible for the final product presented here.

I hope this study contributes in a small way to a better understanding of the work, methods and objectives of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. The title Integrated Rural Development: A People's Approach is chosen as a contradiction to the type of integration where only physical infra-structure such as roads, canals and electricity wires are integrated. The human being is central in the Movement's approach, consequently this study is about achievements of human beings, the people of Sri Lanka.

Acknowledgements

Few people have the opportunity to study the work they have been involved in for the last seven years of their lives. I can not adequately express my feelings for Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne who put up with me for so many years and gave me the trust and confidence, and human and material resources to materialize so many of his ideas and suggestions in the years that we worked side by side, day and night, 7 days a week, year after year, to make a dream come through. He introduced me to Buddhism, not only as a religion, but as a lifestyle and even as management practice.

I am indebted to NOVIB, especially to Sjef Theunis, the General Secretary, for his integrity in supporting me, even when I, in the interest of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, had to oppose from time to time NOVIB's view regarding the Movement's work.

Next to Ariyaratne Nandasena Ratnapala was my teacher, guru and guide. His explanations, his insight in the Sri Lankan society and his understanding of the Western and Eastern mind helped me to overcome my frustrations, to understand my own roots and how best to utilize my energy in Sri Lanka and in the Sarvodaya Movement in particular.

A special word of thanks goes to Ari's family, to Acchi, Neetha, Sharika, Vinya, Jeevan who cared for me as grandmother, mother, sister and brother. The work in Sri Lanka, and specially this study would never have been done without the loyalty and continuous support of my friends, Christy Jayakody on one side and Sathis de Mel on the other. The number of papers and documents they reviewed for this study must be close to a 5 digit figure, not to speak about the many hours Christy spent behind the small computer that was used to store all the data.

A word of thanks go to George McRobie and Ted Owens who were kind enough to review an earlier draft

I am also indebted to my friends in NOVIB, Peter van Zandvoort, Peter Proost, and the others for whom my continuous stream of requests, always at the last moment, never seemed to be a burden.

Contrary to the Sarvodaya practise, I want to thank some of the Sarvodaya workers personally: Harsha, Sisira, Harshani, Mrs. Jayasekera, Abeynaika, Patma, Kularatne, Indra, Theru, Kishani Tillekaratne, Mrs. Rayasuriya, Mr. Punchihewa, Dassanayka, Weera, Hewa, Jodhi, D.A. Perera and all those who cared to make Sarvodaya work and get this study done as well.

I am indebted to the Gramodaya workers and the staff of the research institute who collected the data.

Thanks go to the people in the USA, who contributed to process the data and the words: Kazam, Naomi Adams and especially Bill Watson who spent many hours of his free time to get this document in the right shape.

Last but not least, I want to thank Lucy who never got tired of reading and correcting one draft after another. Without her help this study would never have been produced.

To the Memory of Harold Dickinson

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Chapter I. Introduction: The Methodological Considerations and Approach

This evaluation study sets out to analyse the achievements of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement against its objectives. An earlier publication of the Sarvodaya Movement¹ explains the value basis of the Sarvodaya Shramadana programme and how it developed over time. In this and the next chapter an analysis is given of how programme and project goals and objectives developed. In succeeding chapters an assessment of the Movement's activities and achievements against these goals and objectives is given.

Development of a Development Philosophy

The Movement did not start out with an instant development theory or programme. In the past twenty-five years its programme developed by trial and error and added to its philosophy and methodology through a conscious and continued dialogue with all the people involved. It is not a programme defined by a small elite in Colombo and implemented rigorously along a once-set programme plan. Ariyaratne's statement in the preamble of the "Five Year Development Plan"² emphasized

this:" This publication is entitled Five Year Development Plan of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement. The title should not make the readers assume that the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement believes also in rigid development plans which look very convincing and beautiful on paper. There have been volumes and volumes of development plans drawn up by governments, United Nations and International Institutions to eradicate world poverty, provide people with basic human needs, reduce unemployment and increase people's incomes. We all know that the objectives set down in these plans fell far short of expectations bringing about increased poverty, more unemployment, frustration and social disturbances. Sarvodaya believes more in the capacity of people to understand problems and discover solutions with their own intelligence. All that Sarvodaya attempts to do is to help them to develop a psychological, social, organizational, physical and appropriate technological environment within the Movement's capabilities and resources. So our Five Year Plan is only an indication of the processes we want to induce within communities that would help the people to find a path to moral, cultural, spiritual, social, political and economic liberation and progress according to their values and aspirations."



The Sarvodaya Movement has been evaluated many times in the past. In spite of the fact that several of them were very enthusiastic and

positive about the Movement's achievements, the Movement expressed dissatisfaction with the results of such evaluations. The reason was, that none of these evaluators and evaluations really took into account all the goals and objectives of the Movement. The expression "goals and objectives" itself causes disagreement due to a different connotation in Eastern and Western science.³

This does not mean that by understanding and taking into account all the Movement's objectives, strategies etc. the frustration that goes with past evaluations of the Movement can be taken away. It is assumed that several of the evaluators did understand, maybe not in rational and academic terms, but with their heart, what the Movement is all about. The frustration is that there are no adequate instruments to evaluate so-called alternative and experimental development programmes. The experience of the Movement in this respect is an excellent example. Academics and researchers, for academic purposes, or for their own interests, at the request of donor organizations or on the request of the Movement, have tried to establish what the Movement is about, analyzed, got frustrated, struggled to find ways to set up an evaluation scheme and consequently fell back on the knowledge and analytical tools they are familiar with. Several understood and expressed that the Movement is an experiment in development, and that time and resources were limited to do a full evaluation, therefore they developed, based on their limited

knowledge of the Movement and in discussion with staff members of the Movement, their own criteria, their own objectives of what the Movement should be about and started their studies based on those assumptions.

The result is that the outcome of the evaluation studies appear to have a higher correlation with the development ideology of the evaluator than with the Movement's actual performance. Kantowsky expects the Movement to get entangled with national politics and fears a lack of sustained leadership.⁴ Debbie Taylor in the New Internationalist⁵ questions the "...Sarvodaya hierarchy and rigid planning...". Denis Goulet, who characterized the Movement as the "largest non-communist people's movement", questions Sarvodaya's chances to survive in view of the by-him-perceived need to influence structural changes in the Government's policy which encourages a consumer society⁶. Sugatha Dasgupta who appears to have a closer understanding of the cultural base of Sarvodaya, does not agree with Goulet. He analyses the same phenomena and makes a different case. In his search for an explanation of the fear and anger of some Sri Lankan politicians and academics he observes⁷: "Ari advocates abdication of mega technology, self reliance, bread labor, cosharing of hunger, decision making and work, all of which would make the vocal elite of the third world look like dispensable parasites. The goal of

Ariyaratne's Movement was the distribution of poverty rather than accumulation of wealth".

Some evaluation studies even go so far that functions are designed and defined by the outside evaluators without taken into consideration the specific situation of the Sarvodaya Movement. In these cases a certain development concept is tested in various countries, but selection is rather superficial. For example a study was made of the role of para-professionals in the Movement, while the Movement does not employ para-professionals as defined by the research team. Not only are there no para-professionals in the Movement, the concept as defined in this study does not have a place in the Movement's philosophy. Nonetheless, an evaluation took place⁸.

The examples mentioned here are to indicate the problem, not to criticize anyone. The problem identified can not be underestimated. Apparently, the conventional development theory and practices, can only measure success and failures by rigidly quantifiable results and outcomes. However, all world development analysts indicate that such development theories and practices have not produced the expected results. To the contrary, we have more hungry people, we have more sick people, we have more poor people, less proven and reliable energy resources, fewer rich than 25 years ago. And, to add to this problem, alternative experimental development models are only judged by results

that are the results of traditional models, models which have a proven failure record.

This evaluation study cannot avoid all the problems which have plagued other evaluations although this study can provide a better description of what the Movement is about. Nonetheless to analyze the results, we have to use the traditional tools and measures which development theorists use. If we do not apply statistical measures or cite quantitative results it will be impossible for an outsider to get a grasp of what Sarvodaya has, and has not, done. But we are aware that such a presentation, even with our close understanding of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, will distort the situation at least somewhat.

The development process Ariyaratne believes in, and has pursued, is a vertical as well as horizontal integrational process which involves:

- (i) the awakening of the individual;
- (ii) the awakening of the village;
- (iii) the awakening of the nation, and
- (iv) the awakening of the world.

