Stakeholder perceptions on community governance efforts: A case of a project implemented in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Community participation in governance has now become an integral principle in development thinking. In practice also, efforts are being made to apply this principle in various aspects of governance. However, the sustainability of community participation in governance is highly determined by the stakeholder perceptions concerning the change made by that effort. This study investigates the stakeholder perceptions on the governance structures and procedures introduced in one selected area in Sri Lanka. The project implemented in Hambantota and Monaraga districts with the aim of establishing community level structures below the local government level and links them with the overall system of governance through the project in order to fill the gap of an absence of a governance structure for the people to participate at grassroot level. The project introduced two additional governance structures, Village Organizing Committee (VOC) and Rural Coordinating Committee (RCC), in order to work with the existing system of governance. This study aimed to comprehend the way people perceive the newly introduced governance structures and the things related to them.

The study found that all stakeholder categories were in a highly positive perception regarding the new governance structures. The government officials were the most satisfied regarding the importance of the new change. Women and poorest of the poor are were highly satisfied among the marginalized groups. The three main activities, improving governance and participation, promotion of sustainable development and resource mobilization and infrastructure development were identified as the key drivers of satisfaction. However, the respondents were relatively less satisfied on the provision of adequate information on marketing and promotion of linkages.

Keywords: Community participation, Community governance, Stakeholder participation, governance structures.

1. Introduction

Governance as a theory generates many concepts throughout the social science domain. Stoker (1998) [8] mentions that the Anglo-American political theory uses the term governance to refer the formal institutions of the state and the monopoly of legitimate power. Such a governance may remain with no participation of the community in the main processes of governance. However, the development thinkers worldwide at present in a consensus that community participation in governance as an integral part of development (Mallik, 2013: Hunt & Smith, 2005: Barker, 1991) [7, 6]. The participation of community in the governance will fulfill the requirements necessary for an inclusive development. All communities, despite their economic status or ethnic, regions, political, cultural or language differences, should participate in decision making and implementation processes related to their development. Such a broader concept can be known as the community-based inclusive development (Heinicke, 2003).

Helling et al (2005) [5] presents a local development framework for the policy makers and program managers in developing countries in order to help and promote participatory decentralized development. This means that the existing local development framework is not of the kind of community participatory and does not address the development issues of these countries. Even though some governments attempt to initiate community based development, it fails due to lack of knowledge and skills of the personnel which is needed for such an approach. Lorenzo et al (2015) [2] mentions that such an approach requires a workforce equipped with skills to work intersectorally and in a cross-disciplinary manner to provide services in remote and rural areas.

According to the existing system of governance in Sri Lanka, there is no way for the village communities to participate in governance and the development process. Even if the main governance bodies exist at the upper level, namely Pradeshiya Sabha at local level, Provincial Councils at intermediate level with a link to the national level, there is a gap that prevents the community from participating in governance due to the absence of a link to the upper level governance structures. The literature shows this problem exists in most of the developing countries. Dukeshire and Jennifer (2002) [1] show that the absence of rural representation and some community groups in the decision-making process is one of the most common barriers to policy development. Thurlow Sri Lanka experiences the results of a very recent attempt to address this problem. A leading INGO, CARE International Sri Lanka, introduced new governance structures with the aim of ensuring participation of people at grassroot level, with the support of the Government (Heenkenda et al, 2013) [3]. It has attempted to get the village community participated in governance introducing new strategies and procedures. The project involved in organising all the stakeholders of local governance including the local

communities and government officials. However, the sustainability of the newly introduced community participation models largely depends on how positive is the stakeholder perceptions in that regard. This paper is a stakeholder perception study that investigates the goodness of newly introduced governance structures and strategies and procedures.

2. The Research Problem

It has been already identified that the people's participation in governance, mainly in decision making and implementation of development activities at village or grassroot level is very low and unsatisfactory. This is one of the main factors that prevent the socio-economic development in the villages. The link between Provincial Council and the Local Government (Pradeshiya Saba) remains very week while the participation of the local communities to village development activities is nearly absent. Identifying this problem, one of the leading INGOs in operation, CARE International Sri Lanka, with the help of the Government, introduced two additional governance units (structures) to the prevailing system with the purpose of ensuring community participation in governance. This experiment was undergone in 170 villages of the Hambantota and Monaragala districts of Sri Lanka. By now, these new structures alone with new strategies and procedures which were designed with the purpose of increasing community participation in governance have been operating for nearly six years. However, the success of the newly introduced governance structures and their sustainability are critically dependant on the attitudes of the people towards the new change. Therefore, this study attempts to solve the problem that how far the experimented governance structures are successful and sustainable when analyzing the perceptions of the different stakeholders of the community.

3. Aim and Specific Objectives

The aim of the paper was to analyze the successes and failures of the newly introduced governance structures in Hambantota and Monaragala districts of Sri Lanka. The aim was to achieve through the attainment of the following specific objectives:

1. To assess the satisfaction of people over the new governance structures and strategies and procedures.
2. To assess the women, youth and poorest of the poor on the basis of pre and current satisfaction in their individual livelihoods and their level of involvement in the community structures.
3. To assess the pre and current satisfaction levels of their common community needs such as infrastructure.

4. Methodology

The methodology of the study can be divided into three main sections as given bellow:
1) Sampling
2) Data Collection and Procedures
3) Data Analysis

4.1. Sampling and data collection

A multi-stage sampling method related to cluster sampling was used for the survey. First, three Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs), 1.Hambantota, 2.Suriyawewa and 3.Tissamaharamaya, out of the four DSDs of the project area were selected on judgmental basis. Due to the time constraints,

Madulla DSD situated in the Monaragala district was not selected as a sampling area. Having selected the DSDs, final sampling units were randomly selected in a way that different categories of stakeholders are included in the sample. The final sampling units were the individuals either from households or government offices. When it is at household level either head of household or any adult who was involved in the activities related to the LEaD Project were selected. In the case of selection of government officers, the directly responsible officers were selected as sampling units. The final sample consisted of 183 individuals from all three DSD representing different stakeholder categories. The different stakeholder categories considered in the study were as follows:

Table 1: Stakeholder categories

	Detailed names of stakeholder category	Abbreviation
1	Community Based Organization	CBO
2	Junior Government Officials	JGO
3	Other Households	OHH
4	Poorest of the Poor	POP
5	Rural Coordinating Committee	RCC
6	Senior Government Officers	SGO
7	Village Organizing Committee	VOU
8	Women	WON
9	Youth	YOU

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire to be filled by specially trained investigators. Questions were originally formulated in Sinhala language in order to avoid unnecessary steps of translation and back translation.

4.2. Methods of Data Analysis

Questions were formulated so as to obtain structured answers on the perception of individuals using a likert scale type multi-dimensional scaling method. The questionnaire consisted of two sets of questions; one, common to all stakeholder and others that were aimed at specific stakeholders.

The analysis consisted of the following procedures:
1. Construction of a composite index: This was constructed incorporating 48 simple indicators.
2. Test the homogeneity of variance of the composite indices of the stakeholders
3. Key driver analysis for perceptions: This analysis identifies the crucial or strategic activities or sections of the project that attracted public perception.

The construction of the composite index for stakeholder perceptions consisted of the following steps:

Step-1: Selection of single indicators of stakeholder satisfaction so as to consider different dimensions of perceptions.

Step-2: Identification of stakeholder satisfaction under each of the dimensions: The stakeholder views on each of the above dimension were obtained using the psychometric likert scaling method. The satisfaction for the given statements was scaled into five levels as given below:

1. Very Low, 2. Low, 3. Average, 4. High, 5. Very High

The five levels were included in the questionnaire so as to make the identification of the relevant response easy to the investigator.

Step-3: Obtaining user satisfaction weights for each of the indicators: It is normal that respondents do not give the same preference level for each of the five indicators. As such weight for each indicator should be obtained using an unbiased method. In order to do so, Multiple Correspondent Analysis (MCA) was used for obtaining the weights. Coordinates of the first component that comes under the MCA were used as weights relevant to each indicator.

Step-4: Obtaining the index value for each respondent: The weights were finally multiplied by the scale or the level of respondent satisfaction that he had expressed. The values so obtained were divided by the maximum value of the entire series and multiplied by 100 in order to express it as a percentage that varies between -100 and + 100. The final values so obtained at the end of this step indicate the respondent satisfaction. The positive values indicate a positive satisfaction while the negative values indicate dissatisfaction.

5. Results
5.1. Results of the Composite Index of Perceptions
The composite index incorporates a large number of simple indicators into a single indicator summarizing the

characteristics of all simple indicators. The composite index constructed to measure perceptions of the respondents indicates a person's degree of satisfaction over the involvement of the project and the performed activities. The values of the index can theoretically variate between -100 and +100. Perceptions are favorable when to the extent that the values are above zero while it is not favorable when values are below zero.

Table 2: Composite index – Overall estimates

| Total N	Missing	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
173	0	-22.30	25.47	16.62	25.47

Table 1, 2 and 3 provide basic descriptive statistics with regard to the results of the estimation of composite index. The analysis that collected data from 173 respondents estimated that minimum and maximum values of the index ranges between -22.30 and 25.47. However, Figure 1 shows that the index values are negatively skewed and most of the values have been concentrated in the positive side. This means that the perception of respondents on the involvement of the project is highly positive.

Table 2: Composite Index by Divisional Secretariat

		Composite Index					
		Total N	Missing	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
Divisional Secretariat	1	56	0	-15.40	25.47	15.95	21.41
	2	51	0	-22.30	25.47	17.19	16.17
	3	66	0	-9.29	25.47	17.59	25.47

Table 3: Composite Index by Stakeholder Group

		Composite Index					
		Total N	Missing	Minimum	Maximum	Median	Mode
Stakeholder Category	CBO	14	0	-11.10	24.12	14.80	-11.10
	JGOSL	12	0	-3.98	25.47	22.32	25.47
	OHH	21	0	-11.60	25.47	15.29	-11.60
	POP	12	0	-9.19	22.14	11.40	18.06
	RCC	42	0	-19.70	24.95	15.74	-19.70
	SGOSL	9	0	9.98	25.47	21.64	16.17
	VOU	39	0	-22.30	25.47	18.02	25.47
	WON	13	0	-3.74	22.48	10.59	-3.74
	YOU	11	0	-19.50	19.61	17.19	-19.50
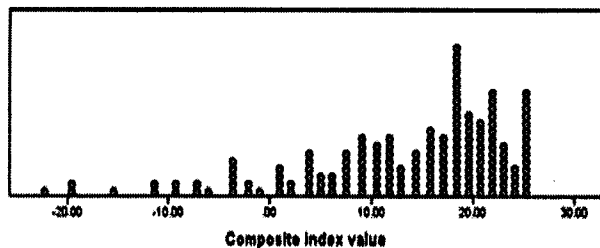
Fig 1: Overall Distribution of Composite Index

Table 2 shows the distribution of index values at Divisional Secretarial Division (DSDs) level of the sampling area. The three DSDs, Hambantota, Suriayawewa and Tissmaharamaya are denoted by 1, 2 and 3 in that order. Distribution of index values shows the same pattern between the three divisional secretariat divisions.
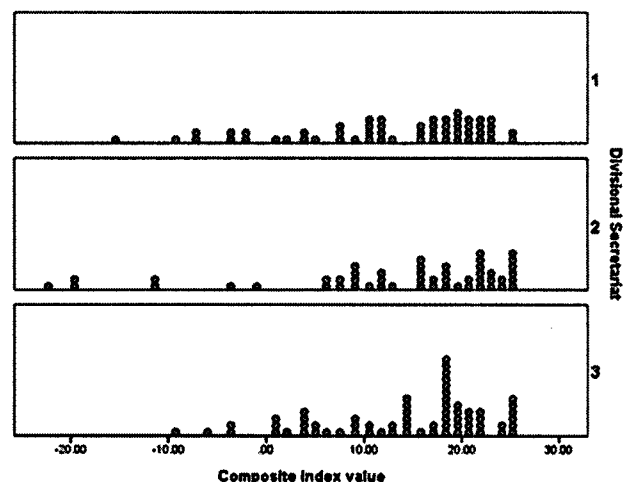
Fig 2: Spatial Distribution of Composite Index

The results obtained in the descriptive analysis are well confirmed by the stakeholder-wise distribution pattern shown in Figure 3. The index summarizes that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of stakeholders. This means the activities of the project have being beneficial to all the stakeholders so as not to provide an opportunity for divergent behaviors from some groups.
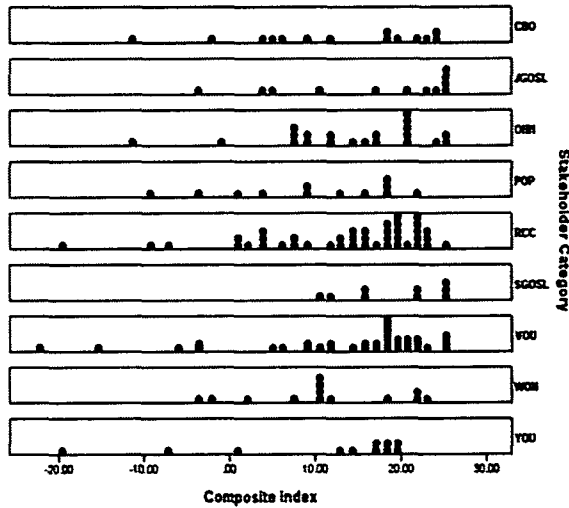

Fig 3: Distribution of Composite Index on Stakeholder

5.2. Results of the Test of Homogeneity of Variance of the Composite Indices of Stakeholders

The one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out to determine whether there was any significant difference between the mean values of the composite index of different stakeholders.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of ANOVA Test

Stakeholder Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
CBO	14	171.074	12.21957	118.5352
JGOSL	12	202.47	16.8725	108.638
OHH	25	90.815	3.6326	708.543
POP	12	117.213	9.76775	95.4147
RCC	42	550.138	13.09852	97.84586
SGOSL	9	174.522	19.39133	35.16932
VOU	42	392.266	9.339667	495.4777
WON	13	141.699	10.89992	75.46992
YOU	12	34.74	2.895	779.9994

Table 5: Results of ANOVA Test

Source of Variation	ss	df	ms	F	P-value	F crit
Between groups	3458.314725	8	432.2893	1.354748	0.219785	2.616168
Within groups	54883.81903	172	319.092			
Total	58342.13375	180				

The null hypothesis was that the means of all stakeholder groups are equal:

- H0: CBO Mean =JGOSL Mean=OHH Mean=POP Mean= RCC Mean=SGOSL Mean=VOU Mean=WON Mean= YOU Mean

The alternative hypothesis, Ha, was that at least one of the means is different:

- Ha: At least one of the means is different

Results can be detailed with the help of Table 5. The P value (0.2197) is greater than the significance level (0.01) so the null hypothesis cannot be rejected that the index means of different stakeholder groups are equivalent. And F (1.354748) being less than F crit (2.616168), it cannot reject the null hypothesis.

Hence, it can be concluded that there is no difference between the means of all the stakeholder groups. Therefore, there is no need to conduct a post hoc follow-up-test to determine which means differ from each other.

5.3. Results of the Key-driver Analysis for Perceptions

Key driver analysis is used to understand which strategies or approaches of the project have the greatest influence on the perception/satisfaction decision of project stakeholders. This analysis is based on a linear regression model which attempts to identify the attributes that correlated most with satisfaction. This is used to investigate the relationship between the overall composite index scores and their various components. The chart illustrates the relative contribution of each item to the overall rating while the Items which do not reach statistical significance are omitted.
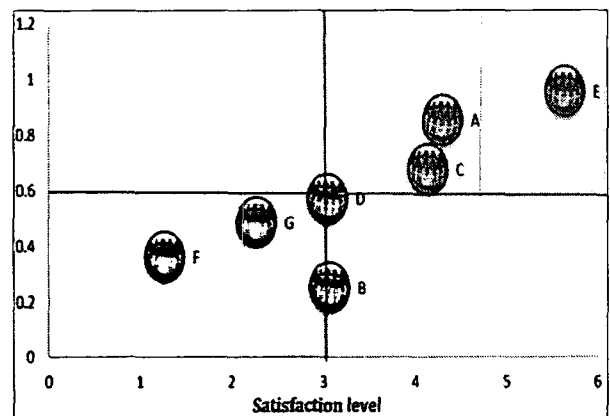

Fig 4: Relative Importance of Different Sections

The sections shown in Figure 4:
a. Promotion of sustainable livelihoods
b. Enhancing social positions of women, youth and poorest of the poor
c. Resource Mobilization and Infrastructures Development
d. Socio-economic impact due to the project
e. Improving governance and participation
f. Community Mobilization

g. Facilitation for participatory community development process

In Figure 4, the highest ratings in perceptions have been received by the three sections of involvement, improving governance and participation, promotion of sustainable development and resource mobilization and infrastructure development. Hence, these three are the key-drivers of positive perception over the project. The activities which have been conducted under these three main sections have been the most important in winning the perception of the people.

6. Conclusions and policy implications
6.1. Conclusions
The following conclusions can be drawn from the findings of the study:
➢ It is clear that the perception of all stakeholders on the all activities involved by project remains highly positive. Among the main activities, improving governance and participation, promotion of sustainable development and resource mobilization and infrastructure development, are outstanding in satisfying the people.
➢ People and the resources are well mobilized and utilized for development when the newly introduced governance structures, VOUs and RCCs, are operated within the system. This shows that there is a gap in the existing governance that prevents people's participation in the development process.
➢ Highly favorable perception of both senior and junior government officials is an indication of the sustainability of the newly introduced structures, procedures and cultures and practices.
➢ Among the marginalized groups, women and poorest of the poor are highly satisfied with the project and have been participated in collective activities, participation of youth has not been very satisfactory.
➢ Stakeholder perception on the improvement of network infrastructure is not very good since it's a slow-moving growth compared to that of point infrastructures. This highlights the need for a more integrated coordination in the village level and the upper level governance bodies in order to accelerate the growth of infrastructures which have a link with other areas.
➢ A perception gap may exist between directly involved stakeholders and the indirectly involved stakeholders in the project activities. This shows that the perceptions of different persons on the same situation can differ.
➢ Respondents seem to have been less satisfied on the provision of adequate information on marketing and promotion of linkages.
➢ Sixth, respondents are not well satisfied in the case of the participation of males in the project-related activities.

6.2. Policy Implications
Based on the major finding and conclusions of the study the following suggestions and implications can be drawn:
➢ It is clear that in order to mobilize people and resources, i.e., all underemployed and unemployed resources, additional governance structures and procedures should be introduced by restructuring the existing system.
➢ Strategies should be further developed in order to involve the youth in governance and development.

➢ The coordination mechanism among the existing regional governance bodies should be strengthened until new governance structures are introduced, restructured or corrected.
➢ Since there is a perception gap between some directly involved stakeholders and indirectly involved stakeholders, views of both of these categories should be incorporated when setting priorities in development plans.
➢ Strategies should be found in order to involve the all relevant individuals, households or groups in the development activities so that antagonistic behaviors from others would be minimal.
➢ Since the study helps prove that perceptions can differ from reality, it implies that decisions on restructuring the remaining local governance system should be based not only on stakeholder perceptions but also on real impact assessments. A compromise between the two is necessary for sustainability.
➢ Agricultural marketing being one of the main issues in most of the rural areas, programs aimed at empowering people in such areas should be given attention.
➢ It is not only women, lack of participation of men in some activities is also a problem for the success of such activities. Hence, this should also be taken into consideration by the policy makers of the rural sector.

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