



Socio-cultural factors that determine the success and failure of a development project. (With special reference to Samanala Wewa development project in Sri Lanka)

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ABSTRACT

Development can be defined as a specified state of growth or advancement; a new and advanced product or idea; an event constituting a new stage in a changing situation. In its involvement in enhancing living conditions in the poor, developing countries might well be very different from those in the rich countries since development covers areas like social, cultural, spiritual and economic. The Samanala Wewa development project was commissioned in 1992. It has become the key factor for many socio-cultural changes in the area. The Samanala Wewa dam is located in the Uda Walawe basin, near Balangoda. The main objective of this study was confined to finding out the appropriateness of the Samanala Wewa project in paving the way for a development that would open new opportunities for the people of the area. Data for the study were collected through an interview schedule from fifty households out of 153 in three villages located near the Samanala Wewa reservoir. According to the results of this research, 86% of those who answered as “satisfied” with the project gave the reason for it as “improvement in infrastructure and access to society” brought about by the relocation to suburban areas, while 14% of those who answered “unsatisfied” raised as reasons “loss of self-sufficient economy and rural life,” showing that reaction to the change in environment caused by the relocation from rural to suburban areas varies by the resident. It is presumed that dissatisfaction or “loss of self-sufficient economy and rural life” is caused by financial difficulties such as difficulty in finding jobs and low cash income. Accordingly, this project can be identified as one which is not merely unsuccessful. However, it should be carried out with some social development projects to uplift the quality of life of the people concerned.

KEYWORDS: *development project, infrastructure, rural life, economy*

1 INTRODUCTION

Development is simply defined as a “good change”, and perhaps in its common usage can be considered as the objective of moving to a state relatively better than what previously existed (Arce and Long, 2000). It represents an increase in the capacities of society to organize for its own objectives to carry out its programs more effectively. Development is a universal problem which has drawn the attention of the third world or the developing countries to the twin problem of nation-building and socio-economic progress (Makhan Jha, 1994). National development has become the major goal of the developing world. The developing world faces the challenge of accelerating the rate of socio-economic development as they move to modernity (Baster, 1972). Development is probably one of the most depreciated terms in social science literature, having been used more than it has been understood (Chambers, 2014). Accelerating national development is a great pressure to governments because they have to make use of up-to-date and relevant technological innovations, adopt and facilitate necessary institutional changes, increase national productions and make full use of human resources to improve the level of living conditions.

As change is a process, this definition of development tends to denote a process towards a desirable state in society. Whether this state is achieved in the short or long term, change has several implications for the society. Disruption may occur in the established patterns of living within the society as it moves towards good change, and thus reflects a

contradiction to its intended meaning, and generate a discourse on what constitutes this good change. As a result, the term development in both academic and non-academic fields has enjoyed an ambiguous position of being alluded to a diversity of meanings defining or evaluating what good change is, and who this good change belongs to (Gardner and Lewis (1996), Haviland, (1975)).

The Mahaweli and Laxapana hydroelectric power projects were implemented as a solution to the high demand of electricity in Sri Lanka. The Samanala Wewa power plant was commissioned in 1992. The Samanala Wewa project is the second-largest hydroelectric scheme in Sri Lanka after the Mahaweli project. The Samanala dam is located in the Uda Walawe basin. It was built at the confluence of the Walawe River and the Belihul Oya, a location 400 meters above mean sea level. The Samanala Wewa dam is 110m in height and has a length of 530m at crest level. The volume of the dam is approximately 4,500,000 cubic meters. Rainfall in the area has an annual average of 2,876 millimetres and the catchment area is 372 square kilometres. This project aimed to address the shortage of electricity supply in Sri Lanka by constructing a reservoir-type hydroelectric power plant with a maximum output of 120 MW in the upstream of the Walawe River, approximately 160 km southeast of Colombo, thereby contributing to the economic development and improvement of the welfare of Sri Lanka (JICA, 2006).

The objective of this study was to introduce the Samanala Wewa project and find out its appropriateness in creating a safe and attractive living atmosphere for people who live in the area by educating them about this development project as paving the way to development and redevelopment that will lead to new business, employment opportunities and services, and to identify strategies for enhancing the facilities and commercial needs of people who live in this area in facing this new condition.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Sources.

There are two kinds of sources used in this research, the literal and non- literal. Literal sources were used to get the relevant literature on previous research and reports in this study area. As far as non- literal sources were concerned the relevant documentary films, videos, television programmes and also the places related to the theme of socio-cultural change were studied in this research. Not only those resources, people who lived in the research area were also used as non – literal sources and following explanation determines the actual procedure of sample selection.

a. Sample and procedure of data collection

Qualitative data and quantitative data were gathered during the research in Handagiriya Rye Plantation and Wikiliya area located near the Samanala Wewa reservoir. During the research, respondents were interviewed using an interview

schedule from fifty (50) households out of 153. The purposive sample selecting technique were used to select sample size. Four districts were visited in this study other than Mahaweli-C District to interview the relocated households and also conducted an individual survey among 50 residents of Rye Plantation No.2 and No.3 Districts where relatively a large number of relocated householders were living. This research was launched adopting a qualitative approach. Primary and secondary sources were used to collect the relevant literature. The study had to depend on secondary sources in order to get a clear knowledge about the research topic. Primary data were collected through the interview method using an interview schedule. Apart from such methods, in-depth interviews were conducted with informants such as scholars and university lecturers who are interested in this topic.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

According to the results, 42% (21) of the respondents are “satisfied” with relocation and 32% (16) are “unsatisfied” with relocation. Among them, 26% (13) have no opinion on their situation. Respondents who said “satisfied” were so because they have an improvement in infrastructure and access to the society. Respondents who said “unsatisfied” were so because they have lost their self-sufficient economy and the rural lifestyle, showing that reaction to the change in environment caused by the relocation from rural to suburban areas varies by the resident.

If measures such as vocational training had been taken to support settlement in addition to compensation, there would have been less dissatisfaction. Of all respondents, 92% (46) answered that “supply of electricity“ is “better than before relocation” and 96% answered that “access to school” is “better than before relocation,” while 98% (49) answered that “securing drinking water” is “worse than before relocation.” Shortage of water for drinking and cultivation due to wells drying up during the dry season was pointed out as a serious problem also in the interviews with the residents living in the relocation sites. According to the provincial government, drought in the dry season is a common problem widely faced not only in the relocation sites but also in the surrounding regions.

As a countermeasure, the government tried to build a small water supply system, although progress was slow due to the limited budget of the provincial government. It is significant that the standard of living is the lowest in the village of Handagiriya among all resettlement sites. In the survey, many people in Handagiriya expressed dissatisfaction with inadequate infrastructure. Compensation for the underwater property was provided under the legal system of Sri Lanka at that time. However, many respondents (74%) said they were “not satisfied” with compensation. Compensation was delayed in the Handagiriya area because it took time to ascertain the ownership of the land.

On the other hand, increase of living expenses, lack of opportunities to earn cash income, lack of allocation of land for paddy cultivation, and lack of land to hand over to their children were raised as problems which caused dissatisfaction among the relocated households. In the Imbue District upstream of the reservoir, the procedure of relocation compensation (monetary compensation) is currently underway for 49 households that have difficulty in accessing the community road when the reservoir is full. However, actual relocation has not yet taken place. As a tentative measure, the Sri Lankan government has constructed an access road and provided them with boats to cross the reservoir.

Education levels of respondents

There were some people who have gone to school up to Grade 8, 9 and 10. However, comparatively more people, both male and female, were educated up to O/L s and most of the population have completed A/L s and are still engaged in higher education. Since these people shifted around the Ratnapura district after the development project, some of them were able to go to schools which are in the Balangoda town. Many schools are situated in Wegapitiya, Kinchigune and Imbulpe areas and they have many opportunities to select a school. The government also helps in the development of schools and with the competition for the leading schools, most of the parents have been able to put their children into the leading schools situated in the Balangoda town and the Ratnapura town. The

Sabaragamuwa University is also situated near this area and the Faculty of Agricultural Science of the Sabaragamuwa University is situated near the margin of Kinchigune village.

Livelihood in the study area

People who live in these areas had jobs assigned to the “Dewalaya” and they descended from the associated castes. They descend from the King Parackramabhahu era. They had got accustomed to do their ancestral occupations. When starting the Samanala Wewa project they had to move from their lands. Thus they lost their initial land and its associated caste. The government gave them five opportunities such as tea planting or going to the Mahaweli area at Lunugamwehera, etc. So families who decided on tea planting came to the Rye village. Nowadays all the communities that live in Rye village have tea lands. Monthly they get good profit. They also plant pepper besides tea. Not only that, they also do government jobs or private jobs besides tea planting. Government jobs are teaching, bank officers, police officers, etc. They do garment jobs as private jobs. Very few of the villagers carry on grocery shops. However, Kinchigune residents have an opposite economy when compared with the Rye village. Most of them (76%) who live in this village have chosen cultivation as their livelihood. Vegetable planting, cinnamon planting, pepper planting are the most concentrated jobs. Several people have paddy fields. Most of the people in this village do minor jobs. There were some boutiques as well.

How this development project affects the family unit and its benefits

Some people have wrong attitudes about the Samanala Wewa project. The Sri Lankan government introduced tea planting to the villagers and informed them about its profit. Tea plantation is highly suitable for this environment and is the best plant that can give the best results. This was a long term plan to educate the people on getting benefits. When we asked the villagers about their opinion on the Samanala Wewa project, we received both positive and negative opinions. Most of the elders gave their negative opinion saying that they have lost their ancestral lands and valuable gem lands. Still, they think the project covers most of the gem lands. The younger generation does not have any deep idea on this.

According to the above result, we can understand that the villagers’ socio-cultural environment has not changed. Their customs, religious activities have not changed. These villages live within an area of 20-25km distance, the project has not affected their socio-cultural life. It is proven by the fact that all the respondents had given the same answers to the questions posed to them. When we consider their livelihood, many respondents said that their livelihoods have changed. Before they lost their land, they had done mining and agriculture. Mainly they did agriculture, but after they lost their land they had to convert their livelihood to tea planting. They said that those days the government also promoted tea planting

and they had given instructions on how such planting can be done in the proper way, but it had been very difficult for the villagers who lived in Samanala Gama, because they needed subsistence agriculture and they had to transfer it to commercial agriculture. As for those people who did mining as their livelihood, because of this project they have lost the valuable land and their property. So many respondents said that their livelihood patterns have changed due to this project. Before this project started, government officers had come to this village and mentioned about compensation. So as they mentioned, the government offered land and compensation (Rs.80, 000). The respondents said that they got compensation and started to change their lifestyle according to the new surroundings. However, some respondents said that they have not received the expected benefits, and they mentioned about their land. Some said that they had a large land area but the government had not paid them fairly. However many respondents said that they were satisfied and they received their expected benefits. Very few of them said that they have no idea about it because they are new arrivals to this area.

Overall efficaciousness and inefficaciousness and the advantages and disadvantages of the project (Personal attitude of the family and the data benefactor)

When we consider the responses of the informants we could understand that 72% (36) of the whole population (50) like this

project while some do not like it, and very few (10 individuals) do not have any idea about this project. 65% of the sample are satisfied with it because, as they said, these lands are very close to the Balangoda town and the associated facilities. The new generation is satisfied with this project, but the 1st generation did not like these lands; they said the previous lands were more valuable than the present lands, since those lands had gems and people did mining. They have now lost those lands, so the people of the 1st generation did not like this project. They have complained to the government about this project. Some respondents (24%) did not like this project because they did agriculture in the earlier days. After this project, they had to leave those lands and migrate to Raiwatta, Kinchigune, Imbulpe, etc areas. In addition, they had to change their livelihood, too. So they had to move from agriculture to the plantation of tea. This was very difficult for them because they did not have any experience in planting tea. So they are not satisfied with this project. 34% of respondents do not have any idea about this project. Some are new arrivals, so they said its good and they cannot say anything about this project because at the time before the project started they were not staying in that area.

How this development project affects the family unit and its benefits

The socio-cultural environment of the study area has been drastically changed. That is because the people have had many paddy fields in their previous villages, and they had cultural items that had come

down traditionally to them. Sokari is one of those traditional items that they had, but had lost when they had left their land. They also did not have any leisure time which they did have during the time of agriculture. Some people who live in Kinchigune had some paddy fields.

Suggestions

Mainly these people suffer from the problem of scarcity of water, especially in Kinchigune. The government should take action to solve this problem. Now their main livelihood is planting tea. When they sell their harvest they face many difficulties; so the government should get involved in this matter and should introduce a fixed price for tea. In tea plantation, they have to spend a lot of money on insecticides, pesticides and fertilizer. As a government, they can get involved in this problem and they can give some relief to these people. Decreasing the price of insecticides, pesticides and fertilizer can be pointed out as one of the proper solutions. In this area, there is a garment factory and it is very useful for the villagers; a number of villagers are employed in this factory. Its development may be a good avenue for enhancing job opportunities for the villagers. It is very important to implement a proper transportation system. Plenty of local and foreign tourists used to visit the Samanalawewa dam and other nearby areas. This will also be helpful for the villagers to increase their income. This area is very famous because of the Sabaragamuwa University and the Samanalawewa Dam. Hence, the

government can provide more facilities to this area and it will be beneficial for the tourists as well as university students to travel to these places safely and more comfortably. Accordingly, the development of infrastructure facilities should be urged. It will also be helpful for the villagers for creating new income and to uplift the quality of their lives and livelihoods. Via these suggestions, it would enable the success of this Samanalawewa project as a more profitable investment.

4 CONCLUSION

According to the above results, we could understand that this project is not very detrimental to the villagers. However, according to the people, they suffer from the problem of water. Lack of water has become the most harmful issue. Apart from that, in Sri Lanka, there is no fixed price for tea, and therefore, tea planters often face a lot of difficulties. Now, many villagers plant tea but they do not get a fixed price for the harvest. Also, the lack of attention on socio-economic factors on the part of project designers can be seen. The people said that they could not get a good profit; hence some people are dissatisfied with this project.

However, some people are satisfied with this project due to the benefits. The present lands are located very close to the Balangoda town and hence the 2nd and 3rd generations like this project, due to those facilities. The government paid compensations and this is also a reason for them to be satisfied with the project.

According to above-mentioned factors, some people migrated to Badulla, Bandarawela, Ratnapura and other areas of the country. Here we could understand that some villagers have rejected the lands that the government had offered. When conducting research, the researcher met some respondents who did not have any idea about this project. Here, among the new comers there were Tamils as well as Sinhalese people. Apart from this project, the government has started a project called “Diyawara Gammanaya” and given lands to people in this area. However, those lands had not been given to the villagers who lived in Samanala Gama or any other people who lost their lands due to this project. This is also another reason for the dissatisfaction among some respondents over this project. Actually it is also unfair because they still face many difficulties because of this project. In some areas, they face the water problem. According to the above results, it can be realized that there have emerged some problems due to this project though it was not a completely unsuccessful one.

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