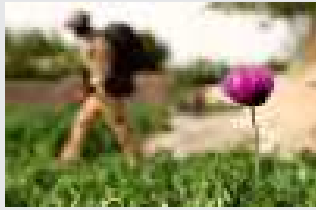


SRI LANKA



Seeking change in the midst of war

Political structure

Executive presidency based on the French model. The president is the head of state, with executive powers. Elected for a period of six years by universal adult suffrage, the president may dissolve parliament 12 months after the last legislative election. The national legislature is unicameral; the 225 members are directly elected for six years by a system of modified proportional representation.

Local government system and local government reform

Under the 13th amendment to the constitution, passed in November 1987, extensive powers have been devolved to nine directly elected provincial councils with a view to meeting Tamil demands for greater autonomy; elections were held in seven provinces in July 2004, and delivered significant gains to the ruling United People's Freedom Alliance (UPFA); polls in two provinces have yet to be scheduled, owing to the ethnic conflict.

Local participation

The preamble to the Village Councils Act states that: *"legislation is enacted with a view to providing greater opportunities for the people to participate effectively in the decision making process relating to administrative and development activities at a local level"*. Although there is provision in the local authority laws to appoint committees and facilitate peoples' participation, this provision has not been used meaningfully in the past.

There has been a general lack of interest by government officials to get involved with the private sector, mainly due to the fear of being found faulty in transactions. However, this is gradually being offset with programs being conducted by the Insti-

tute of Local Governance, highlighting that so long as the process is transparent, public-private partnerships should be encouraged to provide better service to the public.

Local Authorities are faced with increased demands for improved services, infrastructure challenges, fiscal constraints and scarce resources. A few municipalities are responding to this challenge by exploring and implementing alternative methods of service delivery.

Participatory budgeting

In promoting a need-based development, a bottom up strategy has recently been promoted by the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC). The outcome of this was the introduction of a Participatory Budgetary System. In previous years, officials prepared budgets based on the estimates made by the departmental heads on needs which they themselves had identified. However, the needs are now being identified in partnership with the Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

A working committee has been formed, known as the "core group", consisting of CMC officials and NGO representatives. At present, only two NGOs which have been selected based on their past experience in working with the community are represented in this core group.

In addition to obtaining their inputs for budget preparation, the CBOs are also involved in community contracting. CBOs are trained by the CMC to perform this task more professionally.

Women's participation

Sri Lanka, which produced the world's first female Prime Minister, has achieved positive results in connection with women's public participation. This has been a gradual process initiated since independence in 1948. However, since the Rio Summit, specific goals have been accomplished in the areas of developing women entrepreneurs, and capacity building in decision-making, especially through the establishment of a Ministry for Women's Affairs, Women's Bureau, rural credit and savings schemes, women's organizations and community leadership in the areas of reproductive health, gender sensitization and training.

The Women's Bureau implements a number of programmes and projects to improve the economic status of women by providing skills and assisting in self-employment schemes. The creation of the *Women Entrepreneurs Programme* has been promoted as the means to economic empowerment, decision making and also to form women's organizations. This has been implemented as a part of the Integrated Rural Development programs of all Districts. NGOs such as Sarvodaya have played a leading role in this program.

There have been a number of programs and projects implemented under the National Plan of Action for Women 1995. These include counselling services for women victims of violence, integration of women's needs and contribution to the development process, amendment to the Lanka Development Ordinance to ensure equal land rights to women.

There is as yet no separate provision for the participation of women and the disabled in local government. However, there is strong lobby to include a higher percentage of women as candidates in future elections.

Youth participation

There is a legal provision, which requires the contesting parties to include 40% youth representation aged between 18 and 35 when forwarding candidates for the elections. This includes young women and men.

NGO participation

Most NGOs in Sri Lanka have yet to understand the concept and the interlinkages between different subject areas and issues within sustainable development. Probably for the first time,

various sectors led by NGOs are showing interest in understanding the concepts of sustainable development and are attempting to contribute in numerous ways. The Ministry of Social Services, the Divisional Secretariat, the Central Environmental Authority, etc., have registered thousands of NGOs but most of these are inactive. There is also an NGO Secretariat. According to them there are over 10,000 NGOs operating in the country.

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