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1. Introduction: Research Problem

One key problem in Sri Lanka’s process of ethnic conflict management and the restoration of peace is the inability for about twenty years of any significant agenda of political reform that would constitute a framework for inter-ethnic accommodation and pluralistic democracy. This is despite the fact that state reforms for regional autonomy are central to addressing Tamil and Muslim minority grievances and mitigating the reasons for the continuing conflict. How would a democratic state reform process derive meaning, relevance and legitimacy from the perspectives of men and women on the ground? This is the key problem this research explored.

The project sought to go beyond identifying barriers to political reform as a means to ethnic conflict management. Rather it explored the actual possibilities that can offer new perspectives for policy formulation. The project inquired into these new possibilities by studying (a) institutions and institutionalized practices of local governance, (b) forms of micro-politics and non-institutional practices that exist at the level of peripheral communities and (c) women’s socialities and informal organization that would also lead to a recognition of their own potential for community leadership and participation in government. Thus, the project’s focus has been on the existing practices of democracy, conflict management, reconciliation and peace-negotiations at the level of local governance and community practices as well as among women that provide both context and meaning to what the formal institutions can or cannot do in terms of democratic governance.

Towards the research and interventions proposed for the project, we emphasized two guiding principles. The first was that sustainable peace-building in Sri Lanka requires political reform initiatives not only at the level of macro-political structures, but also at the level of the community and in the periphery. The second was the idea that sharing state power in relation to ethnic conflict management should be framed not only on ethnic identities, but also in a manner that foregrounds the principle and practice of subsidiarity. Subsidiarity empowers and strengthens the institutions located at the lowest level of governance and decision-making. We emphasized the approach of ‘state reform from below’ as a strategy to catalyze an argument for the transformation of the state from below as a part of a holistic approach to conflict transformation.

Thus, this project sought to build an overall argument for linking the goal of conflict transformation with an agenda of state reform on the foundation of two broadly political perspectives. The first is the perspective of deep democratization. Towards this have developed a
case for deepening, along with broadening, the idea of democratic governance. We are arguing that deepening of democracy at the local level in Sri Lanka requires linking political democratization with ‘societal democratization.’ We also point out, based on extensive field research, that establishing alliances between local level political institutions and informal community institutions of citizens is crucial to democratize local governance. This, as our argument shows, calls for critically assessing the practices of actually existing associational life of citizens in the periphery as well, since they reflect both limitations and potential of democratization under local conditions. We also aimed at re-politicizing the case for federalist reforms, foregrounding democracy with ethnicity in envisioning a political solution to the ethnic conflict. In both, themes that emerged as central to our concerns are (a) local governance at the lowest possible institutional level, (b) patterns and cultures of community level micro-politics, (c) centrality of informal local alliances in practices of informal local governance, (d), networks of solidarity that make local governance possible and meaningful to citizens, and (e) transformative agential roles of citizens at the very end/margins of the state.

**Research Questions**

In this Project, we have explored the following clusters of questions:

(i). What potential do the existing institutions of devolution and local governance in Sri Lanka possess in order for them to function as institutions of local democracy and local autonomy? What political and institutional barriers have emerged to curtail their local-democratic capacity? Are there possibilities within the existing institutional framework to make these institutions work in a manner that will enhance local autonomy as well as greater popular participation?

(ii). Can the institutions of local government in Sri Lanka be re-invigorated through new opportunities for minority representation?

(iii). What are the links between democratic local governance and enhancement of social change and economic equity? Have Sri Lanka’s institutions of devolution and local governance had the potential to promote social transformation and equity, including gender equity? What can we learn from informal processes and mechanisms at community level towards the formal processes of local governance so that they may be more attuned to the needs and demands for social change and equity? How can formal processes of government be strengthened by the introduction of mechanisms that operate at the micropolitical level of communities? What possibilities are there for establishing new strategic partnerships between local government and local civil society groups?

(iv). What can be learnt, in particular, from how women practice a micropolitics of peace at the community level? What do we learn from the ways in which women secure the peace in the everyday through negotiation and strategy within households, families, neighbourhoods, community organizations and workplace; and in a context of
militarization, with military presence and regulation? How does this knowledge, in turn, contribute towards women’s understanding of their sense of responsibility, agency and ability as peace and decision makers? How do they visualize the institutionalization, at local government level, of the mechanisms they adopt as peace builders in their everyday lives?

2. Project Activities

The following were the activities under this project:

2.1. Research and Publication

(i). Field research in field locations in Colombo, Gampaha, Kurunegala, Badulla, Moneragala and Batticaloa districts. Qualitative and survey data gathered from this field research have provided the foundation for the final volume we have prepared under the title “Re-imagining Local Democracy: Towards Re-framing cultures of inclusion and Exclusion.”

(ii). A volume, based on research under the title “Re-imagining Local Democracy: Towards Re-framing cultures of inclusion and Exclusion.” Chapter Abstracts are given in Section 7 of this Report.


The Chapter titles of the book Dimensions State Capacity for Reform in Sri Lanka: Issues of Class, Ethnicity and Gender are as follows:


(v) Policy Briefs related the project. Three Policy Briefs have been finalized under the following titles: (a) “Reforming Local Government: Ideas for Better and More Democratic Local Government,” (ii) “Inclusion of Women for Better Local Government,” (iii) “Women’s Political Manifesto.”


2.2 Video Production and Video Archives

(i). Production of Educational Documentary Film on issues of Local Governance in Sri Lanka. The title of the film is “Re-Imagining Local Governance and Local Democracy.” The film is based on extensive video interviews in all field locations with citizens, political actors, local political representatives, civil society activists, women’s groups and members of marginalized caste and ethnic communities.

(ii). Extensive recording of field interviews on video on the themes of local governance, local democracy and marginality. These video recordings will constitute the basis for digital archives on local governance and local democracy in Sri Lanka, freely available to students and researchers.
2.3 Capacity Building

Capacity building of local government institutions in the periphery, civil society organizations, women’s and citizens’ groups was one of the objectives of our project which had an action research orientation. We view these capacity-building interventions as crucial to our own goal of deepening local democracy in Sri Lanka. Some of the capacity-building activities were also a part of our practices of reflexivity as researchers. One of our key focus areas has been women and marginalized social and ethnic groups. Our research has specifically addressed such themes as their citizenship rights, democratic participation, aspects of social and cultural exclusion and linking their concerns with the debate on state reform in Sri Lanka. We are pleased that we have begun to make this important contribution to the academic and political debate on these issues in Sri Lanka through this project.

Capacity-Building of Local Government Institutions in the Periphery:

(a). As a part of the field research on state reform from below, we had a series of meetings with the Chairman and members of the Pradeshiya Sabha (Local Council) in Bibile, in the Moneragala District. These meetings turned out to be opportunities to explore new avenues and mechanisms for (a) strengthening citizen participation in local governance, (b) establishing sustainable links between the local council, local civil society and the local business community, (c) raising revenues from new local sources, and (d) involving the local intelligentsia in the planning and development activities of the Council.

(b). One of the proposals we made was to pass a statute by the Pradesh Sabha, using powers available under the Pradeshiya Sabha Act, to levy a tax from the heavy vehicles that come to the Council area to transport timber, sand, bricks, paddy and vegetables. The Statute has now been passed by the Council and it is with the Ministry in Colombo seeking government approval. If this experiment succeeds, we are seeking to expand our involvement with the Bibile and a few Pradeshiyasambas.

(c). During the focus group meetings we organized in the Bibile Pradeshiya Sabha, we were able to facilitate a closer interaction between the Council members, its officials and the local business community. In the discussion facilitated by us, participants explored the avenues for corporation to initiate development and employment-oriented activities that could enhance the functions of the Pradeshiya Sabha. We suggested that they set up a mechanism for cooperation between the Pradeshiya Sabha and the District Chamber of Commerce who have links with richer business communities outside the District. We recently learned that the Bibile Pradeshiya Sabha is now working on setting up industries to produce animal feed from the corn produced in the area. Bibile is a major corn producing area in Sri Lanka. We are pleased that we could set this process in motion. If successful, this would be a pioneering experiment.
(d). During our field research discussions with Chairmen and Pradeshiya Sabha members in Bibile, Ridimaliyadda, Mahiyangana, Ibbagamuwa, Hatton and Nuwara-Eliya, we found that there is virtually no interaction and cooperation among Pradeshiya Sabha members, except through personal links and political party contacts. There is no common forum for them. When we suggested the idea of meeting between at least a few Pradeshiya Sabhas to share their experiences and cooperate in their future work, they enthusiastically welcomed the idea. We were actually, planning to have a two-day residential Focus Group Discussion with Five Pradeshiya Sabhas. However, we had to postpone the idea because of the provincial Council, Presidential and Parliamentary elections held in 2009 and 2010. While the members were busy with these multiple and intense election campaign, we also wanted to avoid being perceived as interfering with the election campaigns. Our ideas was to invite members from all political parties and play a neutral role in facilitating their meeting and discussion in such a way it will lead to capacity strengthening of local bodies.

(e). We had a three-day workshop in November 2010 for members and officials of Pradeshiya Sabhas and civil society activists in Wariyapola in the Kurunegala district. The Workshop had two objectives, (a) research and (b) capacity building. The research objective was to obtain more qualitative information about issues relating to local governance and local democracy by facilitating a intensive dialogue among Chairmen, elected members and officials of Pradeshiya Sabhas and local civil society activists. (b) The capacity-building objective was to provide a forum for Chairmen, members, and officials of Pradeshiya Sabhas and civil society activists to collectively discuss and explore innovative methods to promote popular participation in local governance, to overcome the present conditions of detachment between local government institutions and citizens, and to share experiences in managing local development issues. As participants of the Workshop, this was the first time for them to join a collective forum to share experiences and lessons. In vies of the fact, Pradeshiya Sabhas in rural districts usually function in isolation from each other, this Workshop set a new example of capacity building among local democratic institutions of governance.

Members of the Following Pradeshiya Sbhas were represented at this Workshop: Ibbagamuwa, Narammala, Wariyapola, Polpitigama, Bibile, Ridimaliyadde, Mahiyangana, Welimada, Moneragala, and Polgahawela.

(iv). Promoting Civil Society-Pradeshiya Sabha Interaction: One of the key deficiencies in local democracy which we identified during our research is the lack of closer interaction between local representative institutions and local civil society institutions. In order to address this question, we facilitated a series of discussions.
(a). In Hatton, we organized a focus group discussion between members of the Pradeshiya Sabha and local trade union and civil society activists. Among the themes in this discussion were the ways in which cooperation between the Sabha, local trade unions and civil society groups can be facilitated. We are now closely working with one of the key political and social activists there who has close links with both the trade unions and political parties. We will take this further ahead up in the planned Pradeshiya Sabha Focus group Meeting in October-November, 2010.

(b). Devasarana Development Center is one of the most active civil society organizations in the Kurunegala district, involved in community development, community education, human rights and conflict resolution activities. We had a series of meeting in 2010 with the officials and activists of the Devasarana Center on civil society participation in local governance. One key point made to the Devasarana activists, a point which we learned through this research, is that the local civil society has already become constituent of the structure of local governance and local democracy. We also made the point that they have become an important link between the state and citizens and the local Pradeshiya Sabha and the citizens. This mediatory and linkage role of civil society institutions is a key aspect of local democracy. After our discussions, the Devasarana Center has now included in their future activity plan projects for strengthening local democracy by promoting close cooperation between local councils and local civil society.

©. As a result of discussions with us, the Devasarana Center took steps to facilitate citizens’ participation at the Pradeshiya Sabha meetings. We found in our research, that although the Pradeshiya Sabha auditoria have ‘Public Galleries’, there is no public participation at all during Sabha meetings. Occasionally, local media personnel can be seen the public gallery, on the invitation of a member to cover ‘an interesting story’ like a financial scandal. In the Pradeshiya Sabha legislation, there is provision for public participation at Council meetings. We discussed this problem with Pradeshiya Sabha chairmen and civil society organizations. There is now an on-going experiment initiated by the Devasarana Development Center to promote civil society participation in the monthly meetings of the Ibbagamuwa Pradeshiya Sabha. We will continue to support these initiatives in future as well.

(v). Assisting Civil Society Organizations:

(a). While working in collaboration with local civil society organizations during the research for this project, we had to respond to requests made by them to assist them in their capacity development. In February –March 2010, we assisted Devasarana Development Center, one of our key partners, in the conceptualization and formulation of their work plan for the next three years, which they submitted to their funders. Our
assistance was to (a) facilitate a one-day meeting of the Devasarana staff and activists, (b) assist them to identify areas of intervention in promoting local and participatory democracy, and (c) work with them to transform their ideas into a funding proposal for donors.

(b) We also facilitated self-reflection on the part of Shrabhimani Kendraya regarding its relations with the State. Historically, NGOs in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone were established in the 1980s and 1990s to monitor labour conditions in the FTZs. This objective often led to hostility between the NGO sector and the State. Through our focus group discussions at Shrabhimani, interviews with its team leaders, and the workshop in Colombo held in April 2010, which brought all our research partners together, Shrabhimani is re-thinking its strategy for engagement with the State. Whether there will be a change in its policy towards the State or not is difficult to ascertain, but through our research process we have been able to engage the organization on how to bridge the gap in civil-society-State relations in the FTZ.

© Participation of women in local governance has been one key thematic concern in this project. During research, we found that although there is a fairly high level of women’s participation in local associational politics, their participation in local electoral politics is very low. While researching this theme, we established contacts with Women’s Resource Center (WRC) in Kurunegala. The WRC has been engaged in training women in electoral political participation in the North-Western Province. We entered into a dialogue with WRC activists and as a result of our interaction, they initiated interventions by women in local government affairs. During discussion with us, the WRC developed a series of new initiatives for women’s participation in local government. They include (a) monitoring by women of the performance of local Pradeshiya Sabhas, (b) observing monthly meetings of Pradeshiya Sabhas (c) mobilizing local women’s groups to develop local development plans and present them to their local representatives, and (d) making women’s inputs to planning and budgeting at the Pradeshiya Sabha.

The SSA has also begun to jointly raise funds to expand the capacity-building activities of the WRC.

(d). While working with local civil society organizations on issues of democracy, participation, state reform for our research, we realized that these organization do not have enough educational material for their community work. They have repeatedly requested from us to provide them with reading material in the vernacular languages. Our community library development initiative partly addresses this problem. At the same time, there is an urgent need to produce new educational material in the vernacular languages. This is a crucial capacity building requirement. In responding to this need, SSA has begun to write and publish a series of new educational books in vernacular
languages. We began to respond to this request early 2010. The titles of books (we have already made reference to these titles in the report) which we published are:

(i). *All are Equal? Theory and Practice of Citizenship* – Written in Sinhalese, the book is 152 pages. It introduces the reader to key political theories of citizenship – from Aristotle to Will Kymlicka! -- and critically reviews the question of citizenship from the perspectives of women, ethnic minorities, and marginal social groups. This is the first book in Sinhalese on the political theory and practice of citizenship in Sri Lanka. It helps the reader to understand, from a democratic perspective, issues and problems of citizenship in ethnically-divided, multi-cultural societies like Sri Lanka.

(ii). *Rulers, Subjects and Citizens: Theory and Practice of State* – In Sinhalese, this book is 252 pages in length. It introduces the reader to political theories on the state starting from ancient Greek political thought to contemporary political thought. It also reviews the question of the state from the perspectives of gender, ethnic and cultural minorities, and socially excluded. This is also the first book in Sinhalese on the subject. It enables the reader to think critically of the issues of modern state building in Sri Lanka from the perspectives of democracy, pluralism and multiculturalism.


(iv). *Democracy: Why Democracy, Whose Democracy, Who Benefits?* – This pamphlet, 35 pages in length, introduces the reader to theories, models and issues of democracy as a model of government as well as a form of culture, social organization and public culture.

(v). *Reforming the State: What, How and for Whom?* – This pamphlet is 35-page long. It enables the reader to get a basic, yet essential, understanding of the idea of reforming the state, the state reform discussions in Sri Lanka and why and how Sri Lankan state should be reformed. It presents to the reader democratic, pluralistic and citizens’ perspectives on state reform in Sri Lanka.

(vi). *Civil Society: What it is and for Whom?* - This book has 86 pages. It briefly covers political theories on civil society, ranging from Hegel and Marx to Habermas and Charles Taylor and introduces the reader to theoretical and political debates on the nature and role of civil society in social transformation and democracy-building.
These books are written at present in Sinhalese. We have gifted copies of them to community and civil society organizations to use them in their community educational work. They are also available for sale on a nominal price. Students are usually given free copies.

3. Preliminary Observations

The project exceeded the original time schedule. While we sought the extension of the Project by one Quarter, from December 1, 2010 to February 28, 2011, the IDRC was kind enough to extend the Project till September 30, 2011

There are very significant findings coming out of this Project. A summary of tentative and final findings are given separately. They have theoretical, policy and social action relevance.

The project has directly contributed to the research capacity as well as the intellectual profile of the SSA.

We are pleased that the project progressed without major difficulties. The problems we encountered have been manageable. Details of these problems are given in this report.

It needs to be noted that we implemented this project under politically unstable conditions in Sri Lanka. The country was just emerging out of the bloody end of a protracted civil war. Political conditions continued to be volatile with acrimonious debates on issues of human rights, accountability on war crimes, reconciliation and minority rights. The hostile debates on these issues between the Sri Lankan government and the international community, particularly the UN and leading Western governments, had created tension in the country. Researching the themes of state reform and minority rights under these conditions required precautions to prevent the Project from gaining adverse attention of the state agencies. Therefore, the research had to maintain a constantly low profile. Similarly, we were careful not to expose participants of our research to adverse political attention within their own communities.

4. Methodology

The research component is the main activity of this Project. In our research, our methodological approached was guided by two main considerations. They were (a) the multi-disciplinary framework within which we conceptualized our research programme, and (b) the action-orientation of the research agenda. The multi-disciplinarity of the research programme entailed that our methods of data collection, interpretation and analysis synthesized a pluralistic approach of social science, humanities, cultural studies and gender studies. For example, we approach the question of the state and political institutions merely as objective categories that exist their in the political world, but socially and culturally constructed processes that are subjected to the intervention by human agency. This was linked to our action-orientation in the research
programme. Philosophically, our idea of action-orientation is rooted in the belief that knowledge production can be socially valuable when it has a social emancipatory goal. Our key formulation in the proposal ‘state reform from below’ encapsulated this idea. Translated into methodological terms, our approach looked at the structure-agency dialectic in terms of social and political transformatory capacity of the human agency. Our focus on state reform from the perspectives of the marginalized social groups and citizens is essentially derived from this methodological commitment to highlighting the capacities and constraints of human agency for change. This explains the critical-phenomenological orientation of our analysis, as developed in the chapters of the main volume.

In a methodological reflection, it needs to be acknowledged that our research programme was implemented in politically charged conditions in a society that has been emerging out of a bloody end to a protracted civil war. In that context, our research programme was not a neutral agenda of knowledge production. Neither could we, the researchers, remain un-involved in, and insulated from, the volatility of the political process. Researching under politically volatile conditions on themes that have a potential to attract the unfriendly attention of political actors and the state is a risky enterprise. It has methodological as well as ethical implications. It calls for research ethics of reflexivity.

In a spirit of critical reflexivity, it is important to acknowledge that as researchers into a most political and politicized theme, – state reform, in this instance – the research exercise itself is a political intervention in the life of the individuals and communities who are participants in our project. Research into political themes is thus not an innocent ‘scientific’ enterprise, devoid of political consequences to people who we study. This becomes a particularly salient issue when the researcher is publicly identified with specific political positions and values. As experienced during field research, people interviewed would initially tend to respond to questions to suit or even contradict positions with which the researcher is publicly identified. To be aware of this risk was important during the field research. We also found that extended, qualitative interviews were helpful to overcome this problem. Long, informal conversations proved to be useful to overcome this ‘initial identification bias.’

Engaging people in research oriented conversations on politically sensitive themes also places an additional burden on the researcher. Field work discussions on such themes as marginalization, social exclusion, and minority rights, particularly in the format of focus group discussions and dialogues can turn themselves into intense political discussions as well. In such instances, the researcher becomes an agent for a certain kind of political knowledge and a certain set of political and social values. Actually, the researcher begins to play an agential role, although unconsciously, when the field research process begins. A lesson we learned is that there is absolutely no point in denying this ‘predicament’ of the researcher just for the sake of the ideology of ‘scientific objectivity’ of social science research. It is better to recognize and be aware of the fact that qualitative social science research may sometimes carry the risk of its own claims to objectivity being compromised because of the very nature of research process.

The point that the researcher’s visit to a community can carry the risk of it becoming a defining moment for the community should not be under-estimated. People in the village will begin to talk about, analyze and interpret the researcher’s intentions, motives and actions in political ways. Responses they give to the researcher’s inquiries would initially be cautious, or politically
biased. As we experienced, repeated visits to the community can normalize the relationship between the researcher and participants.

Research interventions can also generate fears and expectations among participants. In one occasion where we began field research in a village of extremely marginalized caste communities, villagers were reluctant to talk to us, due to fear of their conversations being reported in newspapers. In this village, a conflict between the villagers and members of the dominant caste community had earlier been reported in national newspapers. This public disclosure of the conflict had angered the dominant caste group and it had led to the intensification of the conflict. Research participants in such contexts of conflict tend to suspect and judge the researchers intentions, loyalties and consequences of research. The methodological challenge is to win the confidence of the participants through dialogue and engagement. On the other hand, engagement can generate expectations too. In this particular instance, some participants wanted the researcher to bring their socio-economic conditions of poverty to the attention of the government and facilitate a meeting for a delegation of their representative with the President of the country. For the participants, the sharing of their stories of exclusion and marginalization should lead to an ameliorationist outcome.

5. Research Findings

Our research findings are presented in this section in two parts: (a) Interim research findings we recorded while the research process was on, and (b) final research findings as developed, formulated and presented in the chapters of the final volume.

5.1 Key Findings during the Interim Phase.

State-Society Relations in the Rural Society

(i). The state penetration in the rural society has taken a variety of forms. The administrative and bureaucratic network (Divisional Secretariat and the Grama Niladhari are the two state agencies) constitutes the main state network in the periphery. Schools, the post-office, the hospital, the police station, agricultural office and development oriented government agencies constitute the second tier of state presence in the periphery. Among the officials who represent the central government ate the village level are the Grama Niladhari (Village officer), Samurdhi Niladhari (Poverty Alleviation Officer), and the Public Health Midwife. At one level, the state has penetrated the village extensively through its bureaucratic network. But, on the other hand, citizens’ relationship with the state agencies and officials is limited. Their interactions with state officials are need-dependent. The state-society integration takes place much more intensively and extensively through political parties and during the election process. The penetration of political parties into the rural society is visible at many levels. Frequent elections for local councils,
provincial councils, and parliament as well as Presidential elections have in recent years emerged as a major mechanism for citizen-state integration.

(ii). State penetration into rural civil society is a surprising finding. The study on rural civil society institutions in Ibbagamuwa, Bibile and Mahiyangana showed that Funeral Assistance Societies and citizens associations linked to the temple as the only citizens associations that are independent of the state. When cross-checked this information with other areas, it became clear that this has become a country-wide tendency. Now the tendency is to form citizens’ associations on the advise and support of government departments and the central government, based on the doctrine of citizens’ participation in development and governance. (Provide an account of these associations and their relationship with state agencies. Also a case study of Maga Neguma rural road development initiative which by passed the local councils in the implementation of local development programmes).

(iii). A surprising finding in this research is the increasing trend for the recruitment of women to the state bureaucracy in the countryside. In the Moneragala and Kurunegala districts, women are now being recruited as Grama Seva officials (Village Officials) who are the bottom of the state bureaucracy. Some Divisional Secretariat offices have a majority of women officers. Women offices as recruited as rural development officers, Samurdhi (Poverty Alleviation) officers as well. This can be seen as a tendency towards partial feminization of the state presence in rural society.

(iv). A major paradox in local democracy as revealed in this research is the relative detachment between the citizens and the institutions of popular representation. In the rural areas, the Pradeshiya Sabha (‘Local Council’) is the only institution of governance elected by the people. However, the relationship between citizens and the local council remains weak. This stands in sharp contrast to relatively closer relations which the people maintain with bureaucratic agencies of the central government. Further study of this issue showed us that relationship between citizens and the representative of their local councils is actually strong, but it takes place informally, outside the office of the local council and often at the private residence of the member. Funerals, weddings, religious functions at the village temple and the village tea shop are often the place where interactions between citizens and their elected representatives take place.

(v). One of the surprising findings about the accountability in local governance is the fact that what citizens expect as accountability is quite different from the notion of accountability promoted by donor agencies. By accountability, people seem to mean what the elected representative does to the village or the families of the voters in terms of material benefits. Corruption is not a major issue as long as the representative makes the benefits of development available to the voters. What it means is that the people’s notion of accountability is conditioned and defined within a deep-rooted patron-client culture which is embedded in the electoral politics.
(vi). This research revealed that local civil society institutions often function as the bridge between the institutions of central government and the local councils in a context where there is no framework for linking the domains. They are the link that brings together representatives of the central government, elected representatives in the local councils and the citizens. The study also shows that civil society institutions often facilitate the functioning of the central and local government institutions.

_Citizenship_

(vii). While doing this study and engaging in field research, we became aware of an important dimension of state-society relations which we had not conceptualized at the time when the proposal was conceived. It is about differentiated citizenship status under conditions of ethnic, cultural and social marginalization. We began to realize the implications for citizenship of social, cultural and ethnic marginalization while interviewing members of marginal caste communities in rural Sinhalese society and members of the plantation Tamil community. They have the formal, legal status of citizenship. However, their civic, political and social citizenship rights remain incomplete under conditions of social, cultural and political exclusion and marginalization. ‘Full citizenship rights’ should incorporate group-differentiated rights for the marginal social and ethnic communities.

_Marginal Ethnic Minorities – The question of Representation of the Unrepresented.

(viii). A major finding of our research on ethnic minorities is that marginal ethnic minorities have no representation whatsoever at the level local governance. Many of them are dispersed communities and therefore their numbers are too small for them to secure representation even at the local government councils. Because of their marginality, they do not have direct access to state institutions. The way out they have found is establishing close links between their community leaders and national political leaders. For example, the indigenous Vedda communities in Badulla and Moneragala districts approach the country’s President to get their grievances redressed. The leaders of Malayalam and Thelugu ethnic minorities in the Colombo city have established direct links with individual Cabinet ministers of the ruling party. However, their communities do not have the Right of access to state institutions through representation. It is something like a ‘privilege’ granted to them in a patron-client structure of politics. In this research, we want link the problem of representation of marginal minorities with the larger issue of minority rights, group rights and representation.

_Women and Local Politics_

(ix). Our research found that women in rural society are quite active in voluntary associations, economic networks, self-employment activities and economic networking. Most women are members of voluntary citizens’ associations, giving the impressions that women in the periphery have an active associational life. Actually, women’s engagement in local civil society is widespread. However, as we found in our research, this active engagement in associational life
by women is not translated into active engagement in electoral politics. Women’s involvement in political parties as political activists, branch officials or party members is quite low. Women’s participation in rural electoral politics is very limited. We see this as major deficit in Sri Lanka’s democracy.

Gender- Capital and the State in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone

(i). The Katunayake Free Trade Zone provides a unique perspective on state-societal relations because of the dominance of multinational capital in the area, and the interface of the global and the local. We found a three tiered hierarchy operating within the state itself. The top-rung was represented by the Board of Investment, the state agency mandated to develop and implement the government’s economic policy of attracting foreign investment. The second encompasses the transnational factory management which has close contact with the BOI. By-passed by both these tiers is local government, placed at the bottom, third tier. Local government officers such as the Grama Seva Nildhari are acutely aware of these distinctions. At the same time the spatial features of the zone, marked by barbed wire fences and securitized surveillance, heightens the distinctions between there different spheres.

(ii). Migrant Workers: the workers of the apparel sector in the KFTZ are internal migrants whose places of origin are in other districts. This has led to a host of problems when it comes to citizenship rights and entitlements. They are unable, for instance, to access state compensation allotted to flood victims in the villages of the KFTZ because they are not considered permanent residents of these villages. When verification of their identity etc. is required, they have to return to their home villages for this authorization as it cannot be provided by the place of temporary residence. In this manner these migrant workers (as with IDPs), are neither acknowledged as residents in their places of origin, nor their host communities. This has led to their inability to access entitlements and negates their full citizenship rights. Our research highlights these issues, and also takes into account the proposed local government reforms from the perspective of ‘non-territorial’, dispersed communities such as migrant workers who seek greater participation and representational rights.

(iii). The Broker: our research highlights the function of brokers who mediate between the workers and the state. These brokers maybe organic to the community (such as the landlord who uses his friendship/influence with the local government officer to obtain what the worker needs). Or they may be civil society institutions which monitor the state and negotiate with it on behalf of the worker. Both these brokers function in the gap created by the alienation of the worker from a lethargic, autocratic, inefficient state. As representative of civil society they draw their power, therefore, from the inefficiency of the state. This has a bearing on their efficacy as advocates of state reform.

(iv). Dispersal and cultural locations of the State: While our research has shown that the KFTZ is a place where distinct spheres of influence operate - which upholds a theory of the state as a top-down source of authority - this does not capture the entirety of how the state works. Our findings also show that the state works with, and through, local village elites, factory supervisors and fellow workers to regulate KFTZ workers. Therefore it is possible to see the state as an
institution that is dispersed. It is also culturally mediated. This has an implication on how workers use cultural sources to ‘know’ the state, and how they strategize in their dealings with the state according to the cultural resources available to them. In bringing in a cultural studies approach to the state, the research seeks to add to the dominant theorizing of the state from within political science and international relations.

(v). Gender: the research highlights several issues related to gender including the masculinization of the public sphere and the gendering of KFTZ workers including the strategy of resistance-compliance as a tool of survival on the factory floor.

(vi). Faith Based Organizations: While much research has been done on the NGO sector, less attention has been paid to Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) which have, by and large, been grouped together with NGOs in an undifferentiated category. Our research studies the work of Shrabhiman Kendraya which is engaged in labour rights, development activity, and interfaith dialogue in the KFTZ to assess how they mediate gender and state relations in the zone. A key finding is of its use of Paulo Freire’s ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ in equipping the workers with skills in participatory democracy and engagement with the state.

5.2 Research Findings at the Conclusion of Research.

(i). Chapter on “Local Democracy and Citizenship in the Social Margins.”

Conclusions:

(i) Political democracy has penetrated Sri Lankan society in a horizontal direction. Citizens, notwithstanding their social or class status, are entitled to universal franchise and other rights linked to electoral democracy. However, political democracy has not been accompanied by social and cultural democracy to communities which are considered socially inferior. Political democracy without social and cultural democracy remains both incomplete and only partially relevant to the lives of those who are denied social and cultural rights.

(ii) The democratization process has not yet enabled the citizens of marginal caste communities to enjoy full democratic participation. Their half-hearted enthusiasm for electoral participation is often confined to the times of parliamentary, presidential and local elections, which enables the citizens of marginal communities to feel that they are a part of the country’s citizenry. They have political rights in the form of voting rights, but beyond these minimal political rights, they continue to experience exclusion in the domains of social, cultural, educational and employment rights.

(iii) Evidence suggests that citizenship rights of the marginal caste communities remain incomplete despite the role played by universal franchise, the welfare state, Left
movement and the democratic process to bring social justice and equality to the center of political discourse of modernity in Sri Lanka. They remain incomplete in political, social and cultural spheres. Incomplete citizenship is the conceptual notion through which the actually existing local democracy can be critically examined and problematized, and strategies for intervention conceived.

(iv) Political democracy has adopted itself to unequal social relations and embedded itself into inegalitarian social structures. This has created the rather peculiar outcome in which the democratic process has incorporated caste distinctions and inequalities, instead of eradicating them. Thus, political democracy accommodates both social and political exclusion.

(v) Political democracy has provided space for intermediate caste groups to gain representation in and access to state institutions. However, it has not impacted on the state of exclusion of caste communities which are in the social margins and the poor sections of the intermediate caste communities. In other words, electoral democracy no longer provides them with avenues and mechanisms for democratic participation and inclusion beyond the right to vote. The democratic exclusion they encounter is an outcome of a range of political practices embedded in the actually existing political democracy. The link between political parties and citizens of marginal caste communities is non-existent, or at best weak and fragile. Political parties treat them only as voters useful at elections. There are no political party branches formed among the marginal caste communities. They are not recruited as party members or candidates at elections either. Not even radical or Left-wing parties work among these communities. There is political isolation among these citizens, which in a way constitutes one of the key mechanisms of reproducing their marginality.

(vi) Even though rural society has a rich associational life, citizens’ associations reproduce caste hierarchies, separation and exclusion. This is a surprising finding made during field research. In citizens’ association in the rural society, class hierarchies have been partially overcome, but not caste hierarchies. Voluntary citizens’ associations have excluded the citizens of the kinnara community from membership. The latter have in turn formed their own voluntary associations, exclusively for members of their own caste community. Temples and Temple Patrons’ Associations, which are integral institutions of rural civil society, have institutionalized ideologies and practices of social as well as cultural exclusion. Rural associational life, which constitutes an important dimension of rural democracy, is not always caste-neutral, socially egalitarian or democratic.

(vii) Societal democratization, as this chapter shows, is the key to deepening of democracy in the rural society where caste based social exclusion prevails in open and subtle forms of social and cultural practices. As the three case studies elaborated in this chapter propose, the idea of deepening democracy has two meanings, namely (a) taking
institutions and practices of political democracy further into the social groups that continue to remain marginal beneficiaries of democratization, and (b) societal democratization in the sense of addressing the issues of deep social inequalities, erasing practices of caste and class-based social exclusion, and enabling the communities in the social margins to acquire capacities for social and economic emancipation.

(ii). Chapter on “Local Governance in the Periphery: Re-framing Local Democracy”

Conclusions:

(i). Local democracy lacks popular social bases: This study points to a significant paradox in Sri Lanka’s democracy. State agencies, official networks and political parties have deeply penetrated rural society. Citizens are closely and intensely connected to national political processes and debates through mass media, electoral and party mobilization, frequent election campaigns and ever-expanding communication links. The same citizens who show keen interest in national political processes have only marginal interest in the affairs of local government. This constitutes a key problem concerning local democracy in Sri Lanka – a distance and detachment that exists between citizens and elected local government institutions.

(ii). Local government is an arena for minimalist democracy: This study shows that local government by itself does not promote participatory democracy. Local government has been functioning within a framework of minimalist democracy, but has failed to facilitate participatory and substantive local democracy. The minimalist democracy is limited to representatives of local councils obtaining a mandate of authorization from citizens. Citizens in turn limit their participation to voting. Once elected, local government councils have no authority, power or resources to address substantive social issues such as poverty, underdevelopment and social marginalization. Nor do they have a commitment or even a conceptual understanding to involve citizens in the affairs of local government. As a result, the Tocquevilleian dream of ‘subsidiarity’ and ordinary people getting an opportunity to be involved in decision-making in their localities by becoming local representatives has not worked. This has led to another consequence that negates the local government’s capacity for spreading democracy: local elected representatives who manage local government institutions have emerged as local power elites with vested interests. The conclusion which this suggests is that Sri Lanka’s local government is not an arena where ‘more democracy’ is available to the common people at the local level. As an arena of minimalist democracy, it replicates the national government.

(iii). Spheres of governance are separated from each other: As repeatedly observed in this study, Sri Lanka’s local government institutions in the periphery are not only isolated from most citizens, but are also detached from local civil society and overshadowed by the executive agencies of the central government. The political, social and mediatory spheres of local
governance – local government, civic associations and nongovernmental agencies – function in isolation with each other with only very limited informal links.

(iv). **An institutional inertia has set in**: A pervasive culture of inertia, except in a few instances, of the local bodies and their elected representatives is a symptom of a deep crisis in Sri Lanka’s local democracy. The institutionalized inertia is an outcome of a range of factors. Crucial among them are the marginalization of local government in relation to agencies of the central government, continuing lack of resources for new initiatives, power and control exercised by national politicians with local power bases, the disinterest among citizens in the activities of local councils, and the generalized absence of pressure on local government institutions and actors from local citizens and local civil society to be innovative and relevant to local community needs.

(v). **Engagement with local associational space is limited**: Although Sri Lanka’s rural society has an active associational life, local government institutions have developed an institutional culture of functioning without interacting with citizens’ associations. The citizens’ associations, too, reciprocate by maintaining a studied detachment from local government institutions on the premise that the latter are ‘political.’ Only recently have a few local government bodies begun to interact with local citizens’ associations in planning and budgeting, on the encouragement by the Ministry of Local Government and the Asia Foundation. The continuing disjuncture between local government and rural associational space to some extent explains the institutional inertia mentioned above. One key reason for this state of affairs is the absence of a dynamic social movement for political and social reform, with a commitment to construct a radical local public space for popular mobilization, participation and intervention in local public affairs on a countrywide basis.

(vi). **Downward democratic accountability is not institutionalized**: The absence of an institutional process of downward accountability to citizens has become a defining feature of Sri Lanka’s local government institutions. Accountability as it is practiced in local government is essentially an upward process, towards the provincial council, the Ministry of Local Government, the president of the republic and party leaders. Downward accountability exists as an informal practice and it functions in association with patronage politics. Downward accountability embedded in patronage politics nourishes inegalitarian and counterdemocratic practices in local governance.

(vii). **Associational society and political society are separated**: The lack of interaction between the political society and associational society characterizes rural society. Political society is comprised of political parties, local government bodies and elected representatives of the local government councils. Associational society is comprised of the voluntary and nongovernmental sector. The field study reveals a paradoxical situation in relation to the political society and associational society in the sense that they function with very little or no mutuality of interests or inclination towards collaboration. Despite, and perhaps because of, the high level of
politicization of the rural population along political party identities, most rural citizens are reluctant to allow political party representatives, candidates or activists to occupy key positions in voluntary citizens’ associations. The only exception is women’s associations where rural women leaders with political party affiliations and ambitions for future political office obtain positions. Funeral assistance societies, rural development societies and senior citizens’ associations do not normally include local politicians in their committees of officeholders. “Politics pollutes the unity and solidarity among the villagers” is the usual explanation offered. Male politicians also consciously keep themselves away from rural citizens’ associations. This detachment between local political and associational societies has contradictory implications for local democracy. It protects the associational domain from narrow political agendas of politicians and political parties and negative politicization. At the same time, however, it makes the associational domain apolitical and even depoliticized, because these associations are not the mechanism available to citizens to use to negotiate policy, or ‘controversial,’ issues of common concern with local political leaders and networks. They are also not the forum where local politicians and representatives are called upon to be publicly accountable to citizens. This is the fundamental drawback, as this study reveals, of the local associational society, when it is looked at from the point of deliberative public space.

(viii). **Reform from above has limited success**: Local government reforms initiated and implemented by the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils have succeeded in introducing new ideas and practices for ‘strengthening’ local governance, but have not contributed to a process of ‘reforming’ local democracy in a substantial sense. Democracy reforms from above are essentially directed at strengthening institutional capacity for efficiency, legal accountability and better management. Thus, the concept of ‘strengthening’ is limited in scope. A key argument emanating from this study is that Sri Lanka’s local government requires democratic revival and renewal. This calls for an agenda of structural reform for deeper democratization that can address political, societal and structural conservatism of existing local democracy, of which local government is a key arena. Reform from above, whether the impetus comes from the ministry in Colombo or an international donor agency in the Washington, DC, hardly looks at local government reform from such a democracy reforming perspective. Thus, as this study shows, deepening local democracy should be a project that goes far beyond institutional strengthening of local government.

(iii). Chapter on “Minority Rights, Political Inclusion and State Reforms: The Case of the Upcountry Tamil Community in Sri Lanka”

Conclusions:

(i). The main political challenge which the Up-Country Tamil community faces in developing a project of political rights, as frequently pointed out in this chapter, is not the formulation of reform proposals as such, but the presentation of them in a manner that will result in their acceptance as both legitimate and non-threatening. The fusion of ethnic-group specific political
aspirations with a broader proposal for democratization is the option available to the reformist
constituencies in any minority community in Sri Lanka. There is, however, no guarantee that
state reform initiatives arising out of minority rights perspectives will receive acceptance within
the larger political debate in the country.

(ii). If minority proposals for reform are seen as only benefiting minorities, or one specific ethnic
minority, such proposals, however democratic or relevant they may be, are certain to generate
impassioned resistance from the majority ethnic community. Similarly, proposals by one ethnic
minority might run the risk of generating suspicion and resistance among other minority
communities. Secondly, state reform is possible only when all communities claim ownership to
the reform project on the possibility that reforms benefit all and threaten none. These two lessons
propose another: in an ethnically divided society, state reform initiatives can work only through
intersubjective dialogue and negotiation. In this sense, state reform is a dialogical process that
might or might not produce satisfactory outcomes.

(ii). Gaining political acceptance and legitimacy for state reform proposals by an ethnic minority
is a challenge in Sri Lanka. One way out is to highlight the essentially democratic and reformist
character and objectives of minority political demands, and then argue that not only a particular
minority community, but all will stand to benefit from such a democratization initiative. The
second is to recognize that in a context where ethnic politics has come to define all political
struggles, processes and negotiations, the articulation of democratic demands by ethnic
communities is a welcome feature of the society’s struggle for democratic state reforms.

(iv). the struggle for power-sharing should not be separated from the struggle for economic and
welfare rights which the neo-liberal state views with some disdain. The struggle for political
inclusion and inclusive state should not displace the struggle for economic and social rights of
the plantation Tamil community. The three rights domains are integral and inter-connected as
constitutive spheres of full citizenship.


Conclusions:

(i). Expectations of economic benefits to the family is the most important single factor that
motivates poor rural women to join community-based associations, as revealed in this study, is
the expectation to receive some redress to alleviate the economic difficulties of their families.

(ii). Voluntary women’s association are in actual fact more or less extensions of the bureaucracy,
since they are mobilized and function under the control of the divisional-level administration, to
which are attached officials from different central ministries.
(iii). With regard to women’s participation in active politics in the form of representation, there exists an anomalous situation: while the village-level women are involved in associational politics as well as in other forms of political activity such as canvassing, attendance at political meetings, etc, most of them vehemently deny their intention of seeking electoral representation.

(iv). Social and class exclusion which impacts on women’s political involvement in rural society. Even the very few local women who enter electoral politics are from affluent social backgrounds. This shows that while community-level associational space is relatively open to most women, the space of electoral politics is not.

(v). Associational activism is robust mainly among women of the rural elite, who are very few in number. Women of poor and socially excluded backgrounds may join voluntary associations with the limited objectives of obtaining economic or welfare benefits, but still be passive members of these associations. Women who are active members of voluntary associations, even functioning as leading office bearers, are invariably from the village elite, or backed by the village elite. They are better educated than most poor rural women, and have social status, family networks and access to the structures of power in local society. Often they are women with political ambitions.

(vi). The detachment of young rural women in active associational politics and electoral politics is a matter for concern. There seem to be generational barriers to young women’s participation in both these spheres. Deepening local democracy will remain incomplete if young women continue to remain detached from the public sphere. This is a major democracy deficit we observed during field research. Addressing this particular democracy deficit is an unavoidable task in promoting women’s political participation.

(v). Chapter on “Borders, Brokers and the State Effect: State-Social Relations in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone.”

(i). Contrary to the commonly held view that globalization fosters a merging of the global and local, the structures of both state and space in the KFTZ signal complex distinctions. Whether it is a centralized state which works directly with global capital often bypassing local government, or the closely guarded factory which marks its trans-national and trans-local power, or local government officials and KFTZ workers who construct a gulf between themselves, each of these separations generate resources of power. Several actors (the ‘boarding aiyah’, civil society organizations) come forward to broker the gaps particularly between state and worker. At the same time, the collaboration between state and society (the GSN and landlord), or the state and factory supervisor towards the uninterrupted production of goods and capital, points to how the state is not only a top-down source of disciplinary authority but one that is dispersed and distributed amongst various strata of society. Looked at this way, the separation of state and society becomes diffused.
(ii). The perspective on ‘state effect’ makes it necessary for us to acknowledge that borders between state and community are not distinct but porous. State reform therefore requires, as a first step, a re-thinking of these boundaries as constructs. The implications of this are many. Foremost amongst them is that as the state is dispersed through us, any address on state reform must not only be to policy makers at the centralized and highest institutions of the state, but also to members of communities who work with and through the state. Looked at this way, the question of state reform is also very much about local elites and brokers at the community level who may have to give up some power so that others with less may obtain more.

6. Fresh Insights and Contribution to the Global Discussions on Local Governance and Local Democracy

This research study enabled us to clarify some of the conceptual categories with which we have been working and give them meanings grounded in concrete social and political conditions. We are of the view that these clarifications are also contributions this Project makes to global conversations on democracy, governance and democratization. We present these fresh insights under four headings: (a) Theorizing local governance, (b) Local democracy, (c) State–Civil Society Relations – ‘Local Governmentalization’, and (d) Deepening of Democracy.

6.1 Theorizing Local Governance

Local governance, like governance, is a concept widely employed in social science literature as well as policy discussions. Governance refers to several things associated with political management of societies as well as administering corporations. First, it refers to the activity of government as well as practices of administering corporations and institutions. It also entails how governments are elected and how rulers obtain their mandates to rule. In political science literature, local governance usually refers to local administration by elected local bodies. It is often used as a neologism for local government.

While studying the relationship between the state and citizens in local contexts, we found that local government institutions constitute only one domain of ‘local governance.’ Institutions and personnel linked to the central government play a more dominant role in governing citizens in local contexts than the elected local government bodies do. We also found that non-governmental bodies and voluntary citizens’ associations have a significant function in connecting citizens with local government institutions as well as the local agencies of the central government. This is due to the institutional distance between citizens and local government as well as state bodies. In instances where poor or socially excluded citizens have no direct access to local state institutions and officials, or even elected representatives, the mediatory link is the local NGO or the office-bearers of the local voluntary associations. These non-state bodies also facilitate service delivery functions of elected local government as well as the agencies of the central government.
This constitutes a picture of local governance in which three spheres of governance exist in interaction with each other, calling for a nuanced understanding of local governance. They are (a) actions and activities of the agencies of the central government and local government institutions, which administer the provision of public services on behalf of the state within a sphere defined as ‘local’ as distinct from ‘national,’ (b) functioning of the networks of state officials – state functionaries – who represent the state at the local level and connect local public institutions with citizens, and (c) activities of non-state agencies as well as voluntary citizen groups in community self-governance, providing services that do not fall within the mandate of state agencies and officials.

It also became clear during the field study that local governance is the domain in which state, local government and non-state agencies compete with each other in making claims as to how the services of the state reach the local public. As we found, while governance is the central function of the state, it is not the exclusive monopoly of state agencies in the periphery of the state. Non-state actors carry out certain public functions traditionally performed by the government, specifically in the provision of welfare, social services and economic support to the poor. The presence of both state and non-state agencies in governance is seen more clearly in the peripheral and rural regions of the state than in the central, urban regions to which the centralized state agencies have direct and easier access.

In this light, we theorize ‘local governance’ as constituted by three spheres, namely (a) public, (b) mediatory, and (c) social. The public sphere of local governance – ‘governance from above’ – refers to the presence and functioning of the state and its agencies, both representative and administrative, in carrying out the activities of the government in discharging its responsibilities towards citizens. In the mediatory sphere – ‘governance through intermediation’ – are activities of non-state agencies that function as links between citizens and local state institutions. The social sphere – ‘governance from below’ – refers to the organization and functioning of voluntary associations of citizens that self-regulate and serve localized and family-centric community needs, which do not come under the purview of national or local state agencies.

6.2 Local Democracy

Local democracy is another concept the meaning of which was needed to be deepened in the light of our field work observations. In much of the political science work, the idea of local democracy refers to the spatial aspect of democracy, democracy in local contexts as opposed to national context. The notion that the elected local government institutions constitute the mainstay of local democracy is derived from this spatial construction of local democracy, but its emphasis is on democracy – local democracy. We learned during field research, democracy is local not because its spatial location as distinct from national, but because local contexts appropriate and re-define democracy in a variety of ways. In the second meaning of local democracy, the emphasis is on the quality of democracy as shaped by local conditions.

The second meaning -- local democracy --, encompasses the context-specific aspects of actually existing democracy in the periphery of the state. It is localized democracy, democracy adapted to and adopted by local conditions some which may even be anti-democratic. This way of looking at local democracy enables us to see through the actually existing local democracy critically,
while being sensitive to its achievements, setbacks and limitations. For example, the continuing reproduction of social deficits of democracy by excluding the rural poor and the extremely marginalized caste communities is an aspect of local democracy in many rural districts of Sri Lanka. In such instances, local social conditions have appropriated, conditioned, and redefined democracy while even blunting democracy’s radical egalitarian edge. In this second meaning, local democracy refers to local-specific characteristics, potentialities and limitations of the existing democratic institutions and practices.

6.3 State–Civil Society Relations – ‘Local Governmentalization’

Defining civil society in relation to the state is one of the most contentious issues in contemporary political theory. Political theorists seem to share three different perspectives on this question. The first, which is linked to the Kantian notion of autonomy and the liberal democratic construction of an autonomous private sphere free of state control and intervention, see civil society as the social space for autonomous political action in opposition to the state. The second, which comes from Gramscian tradition of Marxist theory, see civil society, located in the ‘superstructure’, yet acting as the key mediatory links between the state and society. A third approach, which is strongly argued for by political theorist Nira Chandoke, is deeply suspicious of the autonomy argument on the ground that by separating citizens from the sphere of political action vis a vis the state. For Chandoke, the contemporary civil society discourse, linked particularly to the global governance framework, is a ‘depoliticizing discourse,’ because it seeks to substitute civil society activities “for the activity we call politics” (Chandoke, 2002, “The Limits of Global Civil Society,”).

During our field work, we found that the hostile dichotomy between the state and civil society is not tenable in local social and political contexts. Two aspects of state-civil society relations we observed in the field suggest that state-civil society relations are more complex and nuanced than the pictures offered by state vs. civil society as well as civil society vs. politics perspectives. First, local civil society organizations – NGOs as well as voluntary citizens’ association – work in close alliance with state institutions on the ground and often facilitate the functioning of state institutions. They also function as the mediatory link between state institutions and citizens who have no direct access to state agencies. In this sense, civil society bodies as act a vital link between the state and society in local contexts. Second, the state has penetrated the local civil society in a significant way. Many of the citizens associations – for example, rural development societies, women’s associations, senior citizen’s associations, farmer associations and rural credit societies – are formed through the direct involvement of local state in order to facilitate development activities of the central government. Regional and local level state officials monitor these ‘voluntary’ associations and provide guidance and support for their management as well as activities. The only rural civil society body which we found to be free of state intervention and monitoring is funeral assistance societies.

What does this suggest with regard to theorizing state-civil society relations? It suggests that a demarcation between the state and civil society does exist in the local level, yet it is not one of one against the other. Sometimes, the relationship can be one of symbiosis and cooperation. At another time it can be relative autonomy of civil society from the state. In rare instances, it can be competition, conflict and hostility. One way to theorize this somewhat complex relationship
between the state and civil society in local context is to frame it as ‘local governmentalization.’ For administering and governing citizens, development, service delivery in local contests, the state agencies do need the participation and cooperation of non-state agencies. Thus, the rural civil society we encountered in this research is not a Tocquevillean sphere of autonomy from the state where organized citizens look after their own local affairs and guard this sphere of autonomy from the intrusion of the state. The state does need non-state actors to reach its citizens and to govern them. This we may call, borrowing a formulation from Foucault, ‘governmentalization of the state’ at the local level.

Governmentalization of the state leading to state-civil society cooperation in governance is specifically visible in the plantation Tamil society where the presence of the state is somewhat problematic, actually weak, due to the fact that plantation Tamils are an ethnic minority. The vast majority of the state institutions and officials do function in the plantation Tamil areas in the language of the citizens there. The state functions in the Sinhalese language. This has created distinct conditions of detachment between the Sri Lankan state and plantation Tamil citizens. Yet, the state has to find strategies to reach these citizens in order to govern and administer them. The strategy is to work in close cooperation with political parties as well as trade unions in the plantation Tamil society. Trade unions constitute the mainstay of the plantation Tamil civil society. Plantation Tamils are also the most organized section of Sri Lankan society in the sense that every plantation worker is a member of a trade union. The Sri Lanka state works in alliance with trade unions in this sector to deliver its services such as welfare, education, health, housing, pension benefits, and basic citizenship rights. The state cannot function in this sector without the cooperation and collaboration with trade unions. And trade unions need the state to fulfill its commitments to their members. This condition of mutuality in governance involving the state and the trade unions constitute a specific instance of governmentalization of the state.

6.4 Deepening of Democracy

In recent theorizations of democracy, the idea of deepening democracy as well as deepening the very idea of deepening democracy has come to occupy a prominent place. We are also committed to greater democratization of social and political life but are reluctant to frame our thinking in the language that highlights institutional assumptions of democracy. ‘Strengthening of democracy’ is such a category. It focuses on institutions – institutional reform, institution building and institution strengthening. It also looks at democracy from a procedural perspective – strong democratic institutions are necessary to sustain the rule of law, to ensure free and fair elections, to guarantee individual rights and freedoms and make the business of government transparent and accountable.

Now, working in Sri Lanka on issues of democracy, we were alert to the fact that Sri Lanka represented a host of anomalies and contradictions in the way in which democracy has been functioning. One side of these anomalies are the following: (a) the country has fairly long history of universal franchise and representative governance dating back to the early 1930s under the colonial state; (b) democratic institutions of governance have been functioning without major disruptions, despite a series of anti-state rebellions since the early 1970s; (c).Rulers have been regularly seeking popular authorization of their mandate to govern through elections, even though elections have not always been free and fair, (d) institutional checks and balances to
ensure democratic governance, such as the judiciary, the civil society and the media, have been functioning well, even though there have been restrictions on their functioning at times, (d) and political parties have penetrated every corner of society, resulting in high levels of political mobilization of citizens as well as voter participation at elections. The other side of Sri Lanka’s democracy story has the following elements: (a) parliamentary democracy has evolved itself into an ethnic majoritarian democracy, (b) the ethnic foundations of the state have remained non-pluralistic, (c) despite institutional democracy, there have been armed rebellions against the state, (d) for four decades after the 1970s, Sri Lanka has been governed under a state of emergency, which suspended some of the key democratic freedoms and rights, and (e) despite the flourishing of democratic institutions and practices, representation of women in elected assemblies of governance has been dismally low.

Sri Lanka’s democracy anomaly as constituted by these two sides of the democracy story in a way questions the notion of strengthening of democracy. It suggests that the problem with Sri Lanka’s democracy is not only with its institutions, but also some where else as well as. This somewhere else is the state. Institutional deficiencies of Sri Lanka’s democracy emanate from the nature, dynamics and trajectories of the state. What kind of democracy does the state need at a particular phase in its formation? What types of more democracy can the state accommodate in different regimes of political economy, such as import substitution industrialization, export-oriented industrialization, liberalized economic reforms, globalization and global governance? Isn’t democratization actually embedded in an agenda for state reform? What linkages and ruptures, possibilities and limits are there in the relationship between democratization and state reform? Exploration of these questions is crucially necessary to understand democratization in contexts which actually condition state-democracy relations. The point then is to deepen the theory of deepening democracy, it is necessary to move beyond democratic institutions and practices and locate them in relation to reforming of the state.

Deepening of democracy is an attractive idea. John Gaventa (2006), surveying the contemporary scholarly literature on the theme, has identified four strands of deepening of democracy argument. They are: They are (i) by building civil society, (ii) through participation and participatory governance, (iii) through deliberative democracy, and (iv) through empowered participatory governance. In our work, we found that some of these democracy deepening strategies needed to be further problematized and explored, in order to further deepen this important idea of deepening of democracy.

In the local contexts where we studied actually existing institutions and practices of democracy, theorization of deepening of democracy has account for, for example, the following conditions: (a) Rural civil society is not always democratic, socially open or egalitarian. It is a site where inequalitarian and unequal power relations are practiced and reproduced. Building civil society needs to be backed by a process of democratizing civil society. (b) In social formations where dimensions of class, caste and gender work in producing and reproducing social exclusion, participation runs the risk of reproducing political exclusion produced by social exclusion. (c) Unless practices and consequences of social exclusion are addressed, deliberation runs the risk of being a conversation among those who already have access to power. (d) Empowerment for participatory governance should entail bringing institutions of state power closer to the marginalized citizens, particularly ethnic minorities, marginalized caste communities and women of socially and economically disempowered contexts.
Deepening of democracy while addressing, and in order to address, conditions of unequal social, class and gender relations – this is the issue we think should be brought to the center of democracy reform debate. It calls for strengthening the agential role of those excluded from the existing processes of democracy. This in turn calls for an agenda of what we have terms ‘societal democratization,’ that is democratization of social relations that have produced unequal regimes of democratic governance in both political and associational spheres of democracy. Lesson from Sri Lanka is to socially deepen democracy in order to enable the socially excluded to appropriate democracy for social transformation through their access to political institutions of democratic governance.

7. Abstracts of Chapters

7.1 Local Democracy and the Citizenship in the Social Margins

Among key deficits in democracy in Sri Lanka has been the recurring marginalization of ethnic and social minorities from state power, governance and political institutions. While the marginalization of ethnic minorities has been highlighted during Sri Lanka’s civil war, the exclusion of some social minorities, or caste communities placed in social margins, have been rarely discussed in relation to governance and democracy. Democracy in a way has produced its own political exclusions as well. This is particularly visible in relation to how rural democracy functions in Sri Lanka.

This chapter focuses on the following problem: Does Sri Lanka’s local democracy provide space for extremely marginalized caste communities to participate in the democratic process as equal citizens with other members of rural society? If it does not, in what ways can institutions and practices of local democracy be reformed to make local democracy relevant to them? In exploring the above problem, this chapter is also concerned with understanding how social conditions of marginality impact on the democratic as well as citizenship rights of members of marginal caste communities.

The key argument developed in this chapter is: The existing forms and practices of local democracy do not weaken the social and cultural conditions that produce marginality in social as well as political spaces. Therefore, the existing local democracy has become a socially conservative form of democracy that has lost its capacity for egalitarian social transformation in rural society. An argument for state reform from below should begin with a critical understanding of the conditions, forms and practices of unequal local democracy that continue to reproduce social marginality. The state reform from below should focus on reframing and re-forming local democracy in a socially inclusive perspective as well.

Key Words: Marginality and marginalization, social minorities, social and political exclusion, inegalitarian democracy, societal democratization, deepening of democracy.
7.2 Minority Rights, Political Inclusion and State Reform: The Case of the Upcountry Tamil Community in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka’s minority rights discourse during the past few decades has been dominated by the civil war between the state and the Tamil community in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. In this context, political rights of the Plantation Tamil Community, who consider themselves a minority within the Tamil minority, have not been mainstreamed. Their political demands for recognition, political inclusion and regional autonomy have found articulation in recent years. The political reform ideas embedded in their political rights demands provide useful inputs to Sri Lanka’s contemporary state reform discourse.

This chapter focuses on voices of political and social activists in the upcountry Tamil community who are articulating a specific state reform agenda from below.

The chapter maps out the different ways in which struggles for inclusion through citizenship, economic and political rights have shaped the political discourse of this community. The chapter makes the following key points: (a). Even in post-civil war conditions in Sri Lanka, political rights of ethnic minorities continue to be articulated through identity politics. (b). While identity politics continue to be the framework within which minority demands are conceived, their addressing requires a non-ethnic framework so that minority rights claims are not seen as zero-sum processes. (c). Re-framing minority demands in the language of democracy and democratization can offer them greater acceptance and political legitimacy to be included in a broad state reform discourse.

**Key Words**: Marginal minorities, identity politics, politics of inclusion, regional autonomy, state reform.

7.3 Local Governance in the Periphery: Re-framing Local Democracy

This chapter examines Sri Lanka’s local government as a possible space where ideas for state reform from below can emerge. The chapter investigates the following questions: (i). How does the actually existing local democracy work in the periphery of the Sri Lankan state, in the spheres of local government and associational democracy? (ii). What are the impulses, initiatives and proposals for reforming existing institutions of local democratic governance and what are their consequences and limits? (iii). What substantive critique can be developed of the existing forms, institutions and practices of local democracy from the point of view of scholarly concerns for democratization? (iv). What is the agenda for reform that emerges from such a substantive critique and how would such an agenda be merged with a broader agenda for state reform from below?

The chapter identifies structural and institutional as well as democracy dimensions of the multiple crises of Sri Lanka’s existing local government and argues that these crises have led to an erosion of the democratic capacity of local government institutions. Mere institutional reforms and institutional strengthening would be inadequate to reform local government. Rather, the chapter argues, local government reforms need to be re-framed as deepening local democracy.

The reform agenda outlined in this chapter has the following key points: (a) A shift from
minimalist local democracy to substantive local democracy in order to reinvent local democracy as a space where political democracy promotes societal democratization. (b). Revitalizing the local public space for deliberative local governance. In this effort, local civil society groups should mediate the creation, defence and sustaining of the local deliberative public space. (c). Making the local public space an egalitarian public space in order to overcome practices and cultures of exclusion associated with existing local democracy. (d). Construction of deliberative public spaces is to make a meaningful contribution towards deepening rural democracy to societal democratization.

Key Words: State reform from below, local democracy, minimalist local democracy, deliberative public space, egalitarian public space, deepening local democracy.

7.4 Women and Politics in Sri Lanka: Evidence from the Field.

This chapter examines the relationship between gender and democracy on the ground. It does so through a study of attitudes and perceptions of members of women’s societies with regard to political representation and democratic participation at the local level. The chapter also tries to understand a paradox which seems to be reproduced at all levels of political representation. Despite many advances which Sri Lankan society has achieved throughout the twentieth century, representation of women in governance continues to remain low. The study focused on women’s political participation in local-level politics, by defining local politics broadly to include women’s participation in political spaces of electoral politics as activities connected with citizens’ associations.

The study found that high level of women’s participation in local associational politics is mainly due to economic hardships of the family. The majority of women mobilized in CBOs come from the rural poor. They are mobilized for a range of development initiatives undertaken by state and non-state agencies aimed at poverty alleviation through rural development. The study found that these women of poorer social backgrounds have no incentives to join electoral or representative politics. The sphere of electoral politics in the rural society is usually open to women from the rural elite. The elite dominance in the sphere of women in politics is also linked to existing social practices of class and caste exclusion. The absence of institutional mechanisms through which CBOs of women are linked to the local authority of the area leads to further detachment of women’s associations from local public affairs.

The study also found that young rural women not active either in associational politics or electoral politics. There seem to be generational barriers to young women’s participation in both these spheres. The chapter argues that deepening local democracy will remain incomplete if young women continue to remain detached from the public sphere.

Key Words: Gender deficit in local democracy, associational politics, representative politics, exclusion of women, local public affairs, deepening of democracy.

7.5 Border Effects: State-Social Relations in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone
This Chapter draws on an influential essay by Tim Mitchell (1999 & 2008) which argues that the boundary commonly drawn between state and society is an effect of the state. Where political theory, international relations and security studies have focused, by and large, on the sovereignty of states as they exercise power in relation to its external borders and over its citizens, an understanding of the state as distinct from society has grown. Mitchell drew attention to the possibility that the “state’s boundary never marks a real exterior [which] is why it seems so often elusive and unstable’, and pointed to how the distinction between state and society ‘is itself a mechanism that generates resources of power.’ The chapter illustrates this argument by providing an analysis of state-gender relations in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone, taking as its case study the female garment factory workers in the zone and their issues of citizenship and migrant labour. Paying attention to the particularities of space in the KFTZ as the global intersects with the local, the chapter highlights the state’s ‘everyday tracks’ of rule including its formal and informal structures, what and how citizens learn about the state, how its procedures circulate, and how its boundaries are drawn and re-drawn by both state and non-state actors. The chapter argues therefore that state-citizen relations are important site of construction, intersection and fluidity. They are also affective in that it is through their everyday encounters with the state that citizens make meaning of it, and learn sentiments and practices related to it, which thereafter circulate, shape and re-produce the community itself.

**Key Words:** ‘State effect,’ state-gender relations, state-citizen relations.

7. 6 Post-tsunami Resettlements: State-Gender Relations in Batticoloa

The focus of this Chapter is on the ‘rationalities’ of the state in gender-based post-disaster reconstruction. It foregrounds important aspects of state-gender relations in shaping how a re-settled space can, or not, become a meaningful place, and argues that these relations carry important implications for women’s citizenship and the project of deepening democracy from below. Taking as a case study, the re-settlement of a group of Burgher women of Dutch Bar, Batticoloa who were displaced by the 2004 Asian tsunami and who, after temporary shelter at the Thiraimadu welfare camp for tsunami victims, were relocated to Panichchiyadi, Batticoloa in 2007, the chapter first charts the shifts that have occurred amongst this group with the tsunami and re-settlement. It thereafter highlights ‘a grammar of becoming’ (Colebrook 1999) that marks the emergence of the women as active and resourceful members of their community, in particular through their membership in the Women’s Rural Development Society (WRDS). Finally it analyzes the axis of state-gender relations on the grounds of post-tsunami land and property ownership. Inflected by, and through specific discourses of gender, development and citizenship, the above focal points flag, on the one hand, public policy on displacement and post-disaster rehabilitation, and on the other, democratic achievements and deficits that occur at a critical juncture following a disaster.

**Key Words:** Post-tsunami re-settlement, state-gender relations, gender and citizenship.
7. Existence, Accessibility and Practice of Conflict Resolution mechanisms at the Katunayake Export Processing Zone (KEPZ).

This chapter examines the role of the state as the responsible agent for and a primary beneficiary of the Export Processing Zone. Explores state practices in a micro setting the chapter addresses the question of how the state does or does not it facilitate the handling of community level and workplace issues that arise for the migrant workers as citizens. Female migrant workers employed in factories in the KEPZ are mostly rural women from Sinhala Buddhist extended families. In the KEPZ, they are not only wage workers, but wage workers in a globalized set up of production and labour control. State-led support structures at community level can facilitate the transition process for these workers from their homes in the distant countryside to the globalized and urban EPZ. Satisfactorily accessing such support structures in resolving the day-to-day issues that arise in the zone is a right the internal migrant workers are entitled to, as citizens. Do young female workers in the EPZ have access to such support structures in managing their transition and resolving workplace disputes? The case study discussed extensively in this chapter examines the existing community level conflict resolution methods and their practical accessibility for the female KEPZ worker as a citizen. Using theoretical literature on Dialogical Self, interviews and survey data, the author suggests that existing state-led conflict resolution methods at the ground level fail to consider the context of EPZ and its worker, and consequently, are rendered inaccessible in practice for the female internal migrant worker. The existing mechanisms need to be reformed to accommodate the female EPZ worker in a way that is not only practical, but also inclusive.

**Key Words:** Internally migrant female labour, citizenship, conflict resolution, dialogical self,

7. State and Governance in the Eastern Province: Antinomies of Political Processes During and After the Civil War.

This chapter is about recurring contestation for power and the presence of the state in unusual forms during and after the conflict in the periphery. Based on the recent political histories of Sri Lanka’s Eastern province during and after the civil war, it explores how conflicting and intensely contested imaginations of the state have shaped, re-shaped and even brought into crisis political life in the province under extreme conditions of violence. While tracing the history of the conflict in the east and specifically in Batticaloa, the chapter examines the issue of governance in the context of this contestation over the existence of the state and the challenges it faced during the period of conflict in the specific socio-political context of Batticaloa. The ways in which the state struggled and negotiated its very existence in the face of a challenge funded by the Sri
Lankan Tamil diaspora community dispersed throughout the world is also a theme discussed in this Chapter.

The analysis developed in the Chapter shows that the challenges to the post-colonial Sri Lankan state and its eventual violent response to neutralizing those challenges have been embedded in the very form of the state and its fragile and tenuous nature. This fragility of the state has included a constant threat of violence by the state to any challenge to its existence. Even after the civil war ended, the political process in the Eastern province has not recovered from the direct consequences of war and violence. The past experiences of uncertainty and violence have made people weary of any serious political engagement with institutions of governance. In the context of protracted conflict a new generation has also emerged who are not necessarily aware of “normal” democratic process. The people who had to suffer the consequences of violence by the armed forces and the rebels had detached themselves from that process of politics.

The context of recent history and the legacy of civil war and violence have made the question of state reform in the Eastern province a process fraught with acute contestation, instability, uncertainty.

8. Impact

A. Impact on Public Debate on State Reform, Minority Rights and Local Democracy

A key objective of this project has been to develop a body of knowledge leading to re-framing Sri Lanka’s current debates on state reform, minority rights and local governance/local democracy. We took steps to introduce these new ideas to local level political actors and civil society activists so that ideas will spread among politically active constituencies. The main ideas we developed, which we will continue to disseminate through publications, community education programmes and interventions, are as follows:

(i). Local governance constitutes a crucial area for state reform and democratization of governance in Sri Lanka. Local governance reforms should go beyond mere institutional reforms of local government institutions. It calls for strategic alliances between the local government bodies and the local associational sphere. Such reforms do not need to wait for the difficult agenda of reforming the state at macro level to be completed.

(ii). Democratization of local governance requires participation of citizens as well as their associations in the local government. At present these two spheres are detached from each other. There are innovative strategies available to local political actors and citizens to experiment and institutionalize popular participation in local governance.

(iii). The local democratic process has produced undemocratic practices and outcomes. Many acknowledge this aspect of existing local government. Yet, there is hardly any collective effort to review them and identify options for policy and practices. Local citizens’ and women’s groups
are specifically receptive to address this problem and we have already begun engagement with such groups and local government bodies.

(iv). Through this Project, we have begun to highlight the crucial link between the political democratization and societal democratization at the local level. We highlight that political democratization without societal democratization has produced undemocratic consequences for local societies, thereby truncating the capacity of democratic institutions to be democratic. Our argument for linking societal democratization with political democracy is a key argument that has the potential to alter the terms of local democracy debates in Sri Lanka.

(v). Re-framing minority rights discourse is crucial to face challenges of minority rights in Sri Lanka’s post-civil war conditions. Minority rights campaigners are compelled to devise new forms of arguments to re-legitimize the political claims of the minority communities. We have developed an approach for such-reframing minority rights claims in this research that centre-stage democratization, autonomy and ‘deep-democratization.’ We have begun a dialogue with minority rights activists on this theme.

B. Impact on Marginal Social Groups

This Project had potential to have a direct impact on the intellectual and public discussions on the rights, entitlements, group rights and representational rights of such marginalized social and ethnic groups as working women in Free Trade Zone, marginal caste groups in rural society, marginal ethnic communities in the Upcountry plantation areas as well as the Colombo city. In our research, we looked at the question of state reform from the perspectives of these marginal groups and foreground their concerns in theorizing state reform. For details, please see the section on ‘Research Findings’ in this report.

A key objective of this research project is to identify possibilities for state reform from below. The study shows the following:

1. **Local Democracy and Marginal Groups:** Citizens’ access to institutions of state is often mediated by factors such as social class, ethnicity, caste status and links with the formal and informal power structures. In areas where ethnic minorities are concentrated, such as Nuwara Eliya and Hatton, the lack of Tamil-speaking officials in the offices of central government is a key barrier for citizens to have access to state agencies and public goods. There local government bodies with Tamil-speaking representatives and staff ensure greater accessibility to citizens of minority communities. In areas where local council area is huge, citizens’ access to even the local Pradeshiya Sabha office is limited. Similarly, for caste communities of extreme social and political marginalization, access to state institutions is limited by their status of exclusion. These conditions calls for the following reform perspectives:
(ii). We sought to make the policy proposal to establish new units of local governance below the existing Pradeshiya Sabhas. This will make the lowest level of representative institutions of local governance more accessible to citizens in the periphery. The existing Grama Nildhari division can be the unit of the new village-level local council.

(iii). Recognition and enhancing the role of rural civil society institutions as the mediatory link between local government institutions and the local representative institutions so that the citizens in the periphery, or margins, of the state will have better access to state institutions. At present, citizens relate themselves to the local council as individual citizens and there are no avenues to represent citizens’ common interests, except through political parties. Political parties are linked to party-based patron-client networks. However, citizens in the village are organized in a variety of associations which address their common interests. Thus, the rural civil society’s role as mediatory institutions that link citizens with the local representative institutions, parallel to the role of political parties, needs recognition.

(iv). As mentioned above, in our research, we approached the question of state reform from the perspectives of those citizens who have been excluded from full citizenship rights. These citizens are members of marginal ethnic communities and marginal caste communities. State reform, in our conceptualization, should address the question of incomplete citizenship of these communities. ‘Incomplete Citizenship’ entails a range of experiences of marginalization consequent to social, political and cultural exclusion and economic deprivation. Incomplete citizenship offers formal and legal status of citizenship, and the benefits of that legal status are conditioned and dependent on the degree of social, cultural and political integration of the community to which the citizen belongs. As our research shows, individual citizenship rights are mediated by the degree to which the social or ethnic group of citizens has access to state institutions, representative bodies, political parties, bureaucratic structures and civil society networks. Extreme marginalization that we have identified in our research is a condition in which citizens’ access to public goods – education, employment, membership of political parties, and membership of civic associations – are obstructed, restricted and blocked.

The question of full citizenship rights of social and ethnic minorities needs to be taken up as a theme in political reform debates. We hope that our publications and interventions will enhance that process. We will continue to work with political and civil society institutions to lobby for their full citizenship rights.

C. Capacity-Building Work with Marginal Groups

The Project on ‘State reform from Below’ has two direct capacity-building components. They are (a) Media Training, and (b). Community Library Development We also took part in other capacity building activities such as (c) capacity building of Pradeshiya Sabhas, and (e)
Promoting Pradeshiya Saba- Civil Society interaction, and (f) facilitating NGO self-reflection on relations with the State.

(i). Media Training: Three civil society institutions in the periphery and margins are benefiting from the media training initiative. They are Shramabhimani Group in Liyanagemulla, Devasarana Development Center in Ibbagamuwa, Kurunegala and the Batticaloa Burgher Women’s Association. Our objective is to develop the capacity of these community organizations to use visual media in their community educational work. They have not had any opportunities to have their own media teams and media equipment. During the training programme, we could observe how the young women who received training were developing a sense of empowerment. The trainee teams are now undergoing advanced media training. Even after the training is over, SSA will continue to assist them in the use of video and visual media in their community education and developmental work. We have already suggested to the Devasarana Development Center to set up a Women Media Group which can work with other community organizations. Once our training is progresses, Devasarana Center will begin to seek funding set up a permanent media unit, run and managed by women. We have suggested similar ideas to Shramabhimani and the Batticaloa Burgher Women’s Group.

(ii). Community Library Development: In the rural areas, the lack of community library facilities is an issue that has not received much attention of the government or the donors. We wanted to begin an initiative through the ‘State reform from Below’ project. We have assisted the community libraries in Kurunegala at the Devasarana development Center, two libraries in Mahiyangana and Bibile run by the Uva Development Center and small community libraries run by plantations trade unions in Nuwara Eliya and Hatton. The majority of the users of these libraries are students and school teachers. Among the plantation Tamil people, educational facilities and opportunities still remain at a level of acute underdevelopment.

While working on this project we realized that donating books is only one aspect of community library development. There were other needs we could not meet from our project. These needs are about infrastructure facilities to house community and staff to manage the libraries. Except the Devasarana Development Center, other community organizations had only temporary buildings which could not house libraries. This is due to general conditions of the Sri Lankan rural society in which public facilities such as buildings are not readily available. This delayed the full implementation of the community library development component of our project. A key lesson we learnt from this experience is that provision should be included to support infrastructure development as well in our future community library development work.

9. Project Implementation and Management

We did not encounter major problems in the implementation of the project except a few delays and under-spending of some budget items. Delays occurred in
(a) the commencement of research in Batticlaoa and Hatton due to unsettled political situation as well as delayed engagement of field researchers,

(b) the participation in the project by some Senior researchers due to their other commitments,

(c) the conduct of focus group discussions with Pradeshiya Sabha (Local Council) members, due to the intervention of three national election campaigns, and

(d) Under-spending in a few budget items due to above reasons and other factors. This was explained in our Interim Report.

(e) Project Evaluation: Professor Navaratna Bandara of the University of Peradeniya did the Project Evaluation during March-April, 2011.

(f) Delay in three publications: The printing of the following three publications have been delayed:

(i) Local Democracy in Sri Lanka: Towards Re-framing Cultures of Inclusion and Exclusion – This is the main volume based on the research, with seven chapters. We were earlier hoping to print it before September 30, 2011. However, the reviewing and copy-editing process took more time than we anticipated. The text is at present with the copy-editor for final copy-editing.

(ii) Dimensions of State Capacity for Reform in Contemporary Sri Lanka: Issues of Class, Ethnicity and Gender: This is a separate volume which contains six background chapters. Finalization of the text has been delayed due to delays in pre-publication reviews and copy-editing.

(iii) Annotated bibliography on the academic literature on State Reform in Sri Lanka – Finalization of this text got delayed due to illness of the researcher who was contracted to work on it. It is now being finalized by another researcher. The text will be ready by the end of December.

The first two publications are now at the copy-editing stage. The text of the annotated bibliography is being finalized.

Challenges to the Research Project

(i) Garment factory closures during the initial period of our research due to the global financial crisis meant that many women workers whom we interviewed left the Katunayake Free Trade Zone and returned to their home villages. This had an effect on us not being able to corroborate our initial questionnaires/interviews with them or obtain a stable sample.
(ii) The political climate in the run-up to the war and soon after the war was marked by hostility towards NGOs and non-state activity, including research, which focused on the state. We had to be extremely careful and strategic, therefore, in how we spoke about our research and the exposure we gave the research project.

(iii). Heightened election campaigns (Provincial Council, Presidential and Parliamentary) during the second half of 2009 and the first quarter of 2010 compelled us to be very cautious, discreet and careful in our research work. In a political climate hostile to NGOs,

(iv) Capacity of research assistants in Batticola was weak, given the protracted conflict, brain drain and hesitancy of women researchers in particular to do field work on their own. It was difficult therefore to obtain the services of a full time research assistant who had the necessary skills for the project. However, this problem was addressed without delay.

(v). Production of books have taken longer time than we have anticipated. In our fairly extensive dissemination programme, we initially focused on publications in Sinhalese, since they had an immediate relevance to the unfolding political debates in Sri Lanka. Writing, reviewing, copy-editing and proof-reading have been time-consuming and labour intensive work. We are glad that we managed to print 6 titles in Sinhalese, one in English and one in Tamil during the project period. The delay in finalizing in printing our main volume and the other volume in English – (a) Local Democracy in Sri Lanka: Towards Re-framing Cultures of Inclusion and Exclusion and (b) Dimensions of State and State Reform in Contemporary Sri Lanka – has been due to delays in reviewing and revising the drafts and copy-editing. The texts are with the copy-editor for final copy-editing and we hope to print them in January 2012.

10. Project’s Contribution to SSA’s Activities - Synergy

As direct outcome of this Project has, the SSA has initiated the following new activities:

(i). Project on “Women, Political Participation, and Addressing Gender Deficit in democracy in Sri Lanka.” This project seeks to further explore issues of women’s political participation we found during the State reform from Below project. The IDRC is funding this Project.

(ii). While working on the State Reform from Below Project, we established close cooperation with a number of civil society and local government institutions. In order to take this collaboration and activities further, we developed a new project proposal in partnership with the Deavasara Development Centre and Women’s Resource Centre in Kurunegala. The Project title is “Promoting Women’s Participation in Politics, Local Governance and Local Leadership.” The Project proposal has been submitted to the NORAD office in Colombo. We have also been working in collaboration with Women and Media Collective in Colombo.
(iii). We also worked in collaboration with the International Center of Ethnic Studies (ICES), Colombo. The ICES had a World-Bank funded project on state reform in Sri Lanka. We took part in their meetings and workshops, and provided inputs and advice to their research team.

(iv). During our project, we had interactions with a number of young researchers on issues of state, governance, political reforms, gender and democracy. These discussions have led to the formation of a group called Young Researchers’ Collective (YRC) in early 2011. This group is institutionally located at SSA. The SSA has organized a series of research training programmes and activities for the YRC. These training programmes have been taking place at the SSA premises. The SSA’s goal in this initiative is to train young social science researchers in research, analysis and writing on themes related to state, governance, political reforms, gender and democracy.