

Development experts and the post-colonial state

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Abstract

A close link exists between the development experts and the post-colonial state. Development experts originated in the colonial bureaucracy and they were re-created within the post-colonial state as a new category to function in the field of development. The orientation of development policies and programmes designed by these experts closely link with aspiration of modernity. The ruling elites in the post-colonial state often think that their country is backward and underdeveloped and hence invite foreign aid and expertise to change that situation in line with western modernity. The national imagination that the post-colonial state expects to create is closely associated with this modernist stance. They think that 'rural' is always 'backward' and 'poor' and 'urban' is unquestionably 'rich'. Thus their development vision is always oriented towards the achievement of the characteristic features that exist in the West. The case study presented in this article discusses the manner in which a group of development experts attempted to impose this development vision into a local community under the legitimacy of the post-colonial state of Sri Lanka.

Introduction

This article examines the role of development experts in the present development practice. It discusses how development experts function under the state legitimacy for constructing a national imagination in local societies. National imagination of the post-colonial society is closely linked with 'development' and 'western modernity'. The ruling elites in the posts-colonial society think that their country is backward and underdeveloped and hence invite expertise to develop it in line with western modernity. The development of country in line with western modernity is what the post-colonial state attempts to promote as the national imagination.

It is a well known fact that the development discourse is a continuation of colonial relations in a new form. Modern state, its administrative structure and institutions are the legacies of the colonial rule. The technologies of rule that were followed by colonial administrators are adopted in the same manner in the post-colonial state. Despite the temporal break associated with independence and decolonization, still there are structural continuities between the colonial period and present day post-colonial society. Particular ideologies and dichotomies that were used for the construction of colonial institutions and practices still continue in the post-colonial society. Most notable of these is the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. This dichotomy was used during the colonial period to justify the imposition of western forms of rule over the societies in subject territories. In the post-colonial period, the same dichotomy is used to deploy forms of knowledge. The production of forms of knowledge and the practice of it have become a major legitimizing force of state power over society.

Role of experts in the post-colonial state

The term 'experts' is used specifically in this article to denote those who function in the capacity of advisors or consultants in the field of development. They perform a mediatory role between local and national society as well as between national and global. Because of the continuing post-colonial dependency of the Third World countries, the developed West compels these countries to accept cultural traits and the knowledge systems produced in the West. These influences come in the form of aid, development dialogues and setting targets for development as instructed by powerful institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and international NGOs. The mediators of this alien knowledge are the so-called development experts who essentialize modernity.

Development experts originated in the colonial bureaucracy and it performed a vital role in introducing and practicing the western knowledge in the subjugated territories. In doing so, the state-level bureaucracy formulated policy, while local level officers implemented these policies often controlling marginalized communities and their resources. For example, the village headmen in Sri Lanka, in fact, did not participate in policy formulation, but faithfully implemented state policies at the village level on

behalf of his colonial masters such as the Government Agent (GA) and Assistant Government Agent (AGA) of a district. The GAs and AGAs at the district-level had the authority to function independently and to take appropriate action on behalf of the Government. With the gaining of Independence in 1948, most of the colonial bureaucracy in Sri Lanka survived and extended as the functions of the state increased rapidly. However, their role gradually shifted from 'administration' to 'development administration'. For example, former GA now is the District-level Secretary and also the coordinator of the development activities in a district.

Parallel to this shifting of emphasis, a new category of experts was created by the state to create a national imagination at the local level. The new category consisted of development consultants, development planners and advisors of the state. They function directly under the state legitimacy, and therefore, have necessary power to go beyond the authority of bureaucratic officers at the provincial and district-levels. The latter who held power in the colonial state is now responsible for the implementation of development policies and programmes designed by the former category that is, experts.

The orientation of development policies and programs designed by these experts closely link with aspirations of modernity. In association with experts of international development agencies such as the World Bank and IMF, they advise the state to take a modernist stance for the development of the country. Following their advice, the state then invites international development aid for implementing development projects such as highways, irrigation dams, schools, hospitals etc. This process finally leads to a dependence of the state on international development aid and to follow a donor-driven development agenda in the country.

It is a well-known fact that foreign experts who work in development aid agencies largely influence development planning in the Third World countries. Sometimes they use money and power to write the policy on behalf of the local policy makers. In this way ideologies associated with western modernity are injected into post-colonial societies. It should also be mentioned that some experts thus assigned to develop policy want to plan for the benefit of the people who will ultimately get affected by development policy. But their views are very often overlooked or disregarded by aid agencies.

Development projects and programmes are the overt link between the Third World and the First World. In the post-colonial society, development projects and programmes are the means by which the state and local communities are linked. In both situations, experts play a mediatory role, which is vital in reorienting local society in the direction of western modernity. The case study presented below discusses how development experts played this mediatory role for re-orienting a local community in line of western modernity.

The coastal resource management project in Denagama

In 1994, the Coast Conservation Department of Sri Lanka (CCD) initiated a pilot Special Area Management Project (SAMP) at two coastal sites. Denagama was one of them and the other was Hikkaduva. The main objective of the project was to design a 'development plan' for effective management of coastal resources in each site. Coral mining and degradation of the coastal environment were the main issues identified at the Denagama site that need immediate attention. The agencies and personnel involved in the project held the view that exploitation of natural resources is inextricably linked with livelihood issues of the community. Therefore, poverty alleviation strategy was adopted within an economic development approach in achieving the project objectives.

Both the concepts of economic development and effective natural resource management emerged in a specific context of industrialization and capitalist growth in the west. The same concepts were applied to the project where the issues were fundamentally different. The project location was primarily a rural agrarian social system with hardly any signs of industrialization. However, the experts who involved in the project tried to convince the idea that lack of economic development is the main reason of environmental degradation in Denagama.

Perceived environmental issues in Denagama

The environmental issues that were perceived by the project staff are in fact not historically informed issues in the village. Their origin in fact is closely connected with the recent monetization of the Denagama economy. Parallel to this transformation of the economy, a material culture developed in the village, which encouraged individuality, competition and accumulation of material wealth. Basic foundation of the development of a money economy was laid during the colonial period itself, but its real manifestation could be seen from the late 1940s in Denagama. Coral mining as a business began in Denagama during this period.

The Coast Conservation Department (CCD), established in 1979, saw coral mining as a disastrous activity to the natural coastal environment in the site. Apart from that, destruction made to the mangrove strip of Denagama lagoon was also seen as a threat to the natural fish production in the lagoon. Those who burnt coral for the production of lime had tended to use mangroves as fuel wood and hence these intertwine practices directly affected the natural coastal environment in the Denagama site.

The CCD's perception about coral mining was different from that of the villagers. The CCD believed that coral mining and destroying of mangroves are disastrous to the coastal environment of the area and hence it thought that immediate measures are necessary to stop these activities. The justification given by the CCD officials was that the destruction of mangroves in the lagoon system would lead to extinct several fish species and coral mining will cause severe coastal erosion in the site. This perception is primarily based on the scientific rationality found in the classical theories that originated in the enlightenment paradigm of knowledge in the West. The villagers held a different perception about coral mining. They thought that coral mining would not make a serious threat to the life supporting systems of the community and therefore, believed that the resource could be used for generating income and employment. However, the villagers did not deny the fact that felling of mangroves and coral mining are disastrous activities to the natural coastal environment.

Coral mining activity in Denagama

In order to understand the argument raised in this case study, background knowledge is necessary about the origin of coral mining in Denagama. During the pre-colonial times in Sri Lanka, a limited amount of lime was produced from corals for the use in important buildings such as temples and houses of the ruling elite. The production and supply of lime were the duties entrusted to the people of Hunu caste (lime burners) who had concentrated in the coastal districts of the country. Numerically as well as socially they had a lower position when compared with other castes in the coastal area. However, as noted by Brice Ryan (1993), caste-bounded occupations were carried out by the appropriate caste, but members of other castes also engaged in those occupations. However, lime burning remained as a caste bounded occupation in Denagama until the late 1950s.

According to the old villagers in Denagama, lime burning was not an economic activity in the village prior to the period 1942. It was introduced to Denagama by a group of Hunu caste people came from Godavanagoda, a village near Tangalla. Even at that time, a limited amount of coral was mined for the purposes of house construction and white washing of houses but without making severe damage to the coral reef. However, the group of Hunu caste people started the activity of coral mining as an enterprise.

In 1949, a Karava man from the Denagama hamlet (the hamlet where the Karava people are concentrated) started a limekiln by breaking his caste taboos associated with lime production. In the Sinhalese caste hierarchy, Karava caste is placed in the second rank just under the Goyigama and the Hunu caste in the seventh rank. Thus the Karava community in Denagama perceived that lime burning as an inferior occupation. Such a perception about occupational inferiority prevented Karava people from entering into lime burning enterprise, although they were the dominant caste in the village.

However, a tendency of blurring these imagined occupational distinctions started in Denagama from the 1960s, as result of the spread of the money economy. Its first sign appeared in the late 1940s with the starting of a limekiln by the said Karava man but the change was not rapid until the 1960s. Adherence to caste taboos is one way of maintaining a specific identity of a (caste) group and the Karava community in Denagama strictly maintained this principle until the penetration of market forces into the village. It should mention that the limekiln started by the said Karava man in fact did not construct it on his own land, which was in the middle of the hamlet but instead he located it on an unclaimed land adjacent to the village cemetery. The reason is clear. He knew that the fellow Karava men would blame him if the kiln would construct within the Karava settlement and therefore, the best way to redress their anger was locating the kiln on this remote land. At this time, the semi-subsistence economy of the village began its transformation into a market-oriented economy. However, basic forms of the traditional social organization did continue with a slow phase of changes. Thus it was not easy for an individual to break away from the traditionally maintained caste taboo, even though he was free to do so within the new economy. This was the reason why the Karava caste people did not enter to the lime burning enterprise promptly. The first Karava man who started a limekiln knew the direction of the village economy was changing but he had a fear of violating the caste taboo openly. The values accompanied by the new money economy clashed with the traditionally maintained values in the village and so that it made easy for those wanted to break away from some of the traditional social barriers such as caste taboos. As a result, several other Karava persons started coral mining and lime production without paying much

respect to the existed traditional occupational distinctions. For example, the number of limekilns run by Karava people increased up to 6 by the year 1955 and their number further increased to 14 by 1961. Since this time, the new enterprising Karava villagers did not hesitate to build kilns within the Karava settlement itself.

The number of lime kilns and persons those who engaged in coral mining increased considerably after the 1980s. A survey conducted in 1990 revealed that almost 30% of households in Denagama hamlet had engaged in lime burning and coral mining activities. According to the survey data, 179 persons engaged in the lime production in 64 kilns and 180 persons in coral mining. In addition, 55 households were engaging in fuel wood supply to kilns and transporting of coral from the beach to the kilns (Ranaweera Banda 1990).

Some of the Hunu caste people who started the lime burning enterprise in Denagama shifted to alternative employment such as carpentry and masonry when the dominant Karava group increasingly involved in the enterprise. Those Hunu people who remained in the enterprise also began to supplement their income with alternative means of livelihoods as they failed to compete with the Karava people. At present, there is no single Hunu caste person engaged in lime production in Denagama. Almost all coral miners and lime producers are of Karava caste. They no longer consider lime burning as an inferior-caste occupation. Instead, they believe and also express openly that the Karava caste has a customary right to exploit these resources.

State intervention and development

Degradation of the coastal environment in Denagama provided a justifiable reason for the state to intervene into affairs of the village. This intervention came in the form of a coastal resource management for 'development'. Until this intervention, the beach, coral reef, mangrove strip, lagoon and its fisheries remained as communal properties of the villagers. The CCD as an agent of the state saw this situation as a drawback for the efficient management of these natural resources and thereby generating income to the state. Thus the CCD took steps to replace the existing communal ownership of natural resources with a system of private ownership in them. A clear evidence of this motivation of the CCD was the attempt it made to convince the villagers about potentials available for private investment in tourism in Denagama. The Coast Conservation Act, No.57 of 1981, and the Amendment Act, No.64 of 1988, are the most important legal instruments used by the CCD in this intervention. According to the section 31 A (1) of the Amendment Act, "no person shall within the limits of the coastal zone engage in the mining, collecting, processing, possessing, storing, burning and transporting in any form whatsoever of coral". By using these legal instruments, CCD instructed the police station in Tangalla to sue those who violate the clauses of the Acts. Accordingly, a police post was also established in Denagama in 1993 to control coral mining. In addition, the police supported the CCD to demolish all lime kilns located within the limits of the gazetted coastal zone. The broader meaning of taking such drastic measures was that the people in Denagama are responsible for the environment degradation, and therefore, the state has the rights to intervene to change the situation. However, although the CCD thought that situation could be improved by law enforcement, the environmental problems in Denagama further aggravated. The authorities (CCD) soon realized that coral mining and other environmentally hazardous activities in Denagama are difficult to control by law enforcement alone. The alternative that they identified was a Special Area Management Project (SAMP) to mobilize community participation in the management of natural resources. This was a development model borrowed from Rhode Island of USA. In proposing such an alternative, the authorities highlighted that 'poverty' is the primary reason for environmental degradation in Denagama. The concept of 'poverty' is an invention by the West during the post-war period and 'development' is the remedy that it suggested to overcome poverty in the Third World. The CCD now proposes the same alternative to address perceived environmental issues in the site. The authorities reinterpreted the situation in Denagama to fit into the concepts of 'poverty' and 'development' and then designed the Coastal Resource Management Project as a new beneficial intervention.

Inventing a backwardness in Denagama

The Coastal Resource Management Project in Denagama is not the first project that invented 'backwardness' to justify state intervention into a rural community. The British rulers, for example, interpreted the chena cultivation (slash-and-burn) as a primitive form of agriculture and imposed restrictions upon it by encouraging villagers to do cash-cropping, which they saw as the civilized form of agriculture (see for an example, Administration Report of the Assistant Government Agent of Hambantota in 1909). The Hambantota Integrated Rural Development Project (HIRDEP) is a recent

example that illustrates how 'backwardness' was invented in the Hambantota District in order to pump massive amount of funds that came in the form of development aid from the NORAD. A series of development programmes ranging from primary health to education, infrastructure development, agricultural credit, fisheries, and animal husbandry were implemented as a (self-defined) strategy for alleviating poverty in the district. Denagama was one of the villages selected for implementing these development programs. It is certain that Denagama would not have been labeled as a 'poverty stricken' village, if a 'development' project like HIRDEP were not implemented in the Hambantota District. These are examples to show the manner in which the state and development agencies create 'backwardness' to justify their interventions. In such a process, those who intervene always position themselves at a superior position compared to those who are being assisted. It is assumed that the 'imagined' superiority of the interventionist lies in the knowledge system and modern technology that it possesses. In Denagama, for example, they intervened considering it as 'unlawful' community, which has violated the Coast Conservation Act. The next step was the introduction of a development project to make the community lawful, which is a characteristic of the imagined superiority of the interventionist.

A number of parties with their experts participated in preparing this development project in Denagama. Among the parties involved, the CCD, and USAID funded Coastal Resources Management Project (CRMP) are important. Government officers, the CCD and Coastal Resources Management Project (CRMP) staff liaised with community groups to identify resource management problems and priorities of the villagers. While studying resource management issues and technical questions, Special Area Coordinating Committees, comprised of both community representatives and government officers, were established under the project. Meanwhile the experts those who were hired as consultants of the project prepared technical reports and environment profiles. Based on the findings of technical studies and recommendations of the Coordinating Committees, the experts prepared a Special Area Management Plan for Denagama in 1996. It contained 16 strategies and 116 specific actions that should be adopted in dealing with four key problems:

- (a) Poverty in the community
- (b) Over-fishing in the lagoon
- (c) Reduced flow of fresh and sea water in the lagoon
- (d) Coral mining, lime production and sand mining

Among the four key problems, inadequate water circulation in the lagoon and coral mining were the issues directly relevant to Denagama, but poverty alleviation was also considered as a key area to be addressed by the Project. Although the village lost the prosperity that it had in the past as a result of environment degradation, Denagama had never been a 'poor village'. A death due to starvation had never been reported throughout its known history. In fact, its inhabitants experienced hardships at the times of crop failure, but they could survive without much difficulty. The villagers always had a surplus to sell or exchange in an emergency. In the past, people from neighboring fishing villages came to Denagama to exchange fish for cereals and pulses. Village paddy fields usually produced ample food for all villagers. In the 1930s, Denagama was one of the main citronella oil producing centers in the district. Monetary returns gained from agriculture steadily increased since then and the Talpitiya hamlet (one of the six hamlets in Denagama) became a main vegetable producing centers in the area. Fishing did not give large monetary rewards, but the sea, lagoon, and fisheries have always been sources of livelihoods for the villagers.

According to a socio-economic survey conducted in Denagama in 1994, only sixteen percent households depended on remittances and government welfare programmes. The rest were engaged in agriculture, fishing, and coral mining. Meanwhile 54% of households in the village were benefiting from the Janasaviya Programme (one of the poverty alleviation programmes implemented by the government in the early 1990s) but it does not mean that half of the households in the village fall under the category of poor. Because most of the Janasaviya recipients had been selected on the basis of their political party affiliation rather than income levels or ownership of other physical assets (Ranaweera Banda *et al.* 1994). Thus it is difficult to lend support to the basic assumptions on which the CCD's Coastal Resource Management Project was designed.

Imposing a development vision on Denagama

One of the major components of the project was a social mobilization programme to convince the villagers that proper management of natural resources is the way to overcome poverty in the village. A young male graduate was placed in the village for a period of two years to initiate and coordinate an

awareness-building program called 'social mobilization'. He selected and trained a group of female social mobilizers to conduct awareness- building exercises with the villagers. He, the project coordinator at the village- level, organized workshops with the community on themes such as resource management and development. It was an exercise of projecting an ideal model of 'developed' Denagama into the minds of the villagers. According to the model, if natural resources would be well managed, new income earning opportunities would become available for reducing the level of unemployment and thereby poverty of the villagers. Research institutes and universities would identify the well-maintained natural resource system in Denagama as a laboratory to conduct their research programmes. For this, a resource center would be equipped with a library, a laboratory, an auditorium and guestrooms. Such agencies would insist the local authorities to improve infrastructural facilities such as the road system, water supply, electricity supply and communication. Finally, these developments would lead to a transformation of the traditional Denagama into a modern village where the thinking and practices of people are different from the earlier period.

Imposing this development vision on the villagers was the task expected from the social mobilizers. For that purpose, they visited each and every family in the village over a period of two years. At the beginning, the villagers did not cooperate with the social mobilizers, but the situation gradually changed as a result of various promises they made on behalf of the project. The social mobilization programme made two important changes: One was the voluntary agreement of stopping coral mining and the other was an inclination to manage natural resources, particularly the conservation of mangroves. The greatest achievement was the community support to implement the project in the site. To this end, the villagers themselves formed an informal organization called 'Community Coordinating Committee' to act upon the issues pertaining to socio-economic development of the village. Coastal resource management was one of the priority areas of its work. Some of the members wanted to work independently from the experts hired for the project but the majority inclined to get advice and guidance from them as they thought that the experts are more knowledgeable than the villagers themselves.

The Project staff and their experts used this ideological dependence of the villagers to guide the community to the direction that they desired. The formation of the Denagama Development Foundation (DDF) in 1996 was an outcome of such guidance. It was a result of convincing a particular vision of development to the Denagama community. When looking at it carefully, this was a turning point of a series of planned activities. The initial step of the process was an invention of 'backwardness' to the village by imposing an ideology of development. This ideology then projected to the minds of the villagers through a systematically designed social mobilization program. The villagers responded to it by organizing themselves into an action group - coordinating committee-which was ready to think a planned change to the village, i.e. development. Finally they formed the DDF to act upon it. In this series of activities, the focus shifted from coastal resource management to 'development', a vision that goes beyond the community. It is the vision that always advocated by development experts working in international development organizations and also those who work under the legitimacy of the post-colonial state in the Third World. The functioning of the DDF is a clear example to show how experts have injected this international development vision to local communities.

The Denagama development foundation

The Denagama Development Foundation (DDF) is the brainchild of the Coastal Resource Management Project. The organization was registered as a NGO in 1997 to look after the 'development' activities initiated under the project. It functions as an umbrella organization represented by seven community level organizations. Each community level organization represents in the *Mahasabhava* of the DDF, which is the main decision-making body of the organization. The members of the *Mahasabhava* are entrusted with the responsibility in seven areas of development activities viz., agriculture; fisheries; lagoon and environment; Self-employment and micro-enterprises; health and education; vocational training; and awareness building. A Board of Directors consists of 15 members acts upon the decisions pertaining to these activities. Two members from each community level organizations are representing in the Board of Directors.

The members of community level organizations meet monthly to discuss development issues in the village/hamlet and their proposals are then submitted to the implementing body, i.e. the Board of Directors, for action. Sometimes, the proposals, which are difficult to execute within the resources of DDF, are submitted to a committee at the Divisional Secretary level for appropriate actions. This is a committee represented by various government institutions and community organizations in the area.

A number of development projects have been implemented by the DDF through such a process of external support. Poverty alleviation, providing of educational facilities and improvement of health and sanitation were the primary objectives of most of the projects so far it implemented. For example, out of the 32 development projects that the DDF implemented till 1999, poverty alleviation was the objective of 8 projects and the improvement of sanitation in the village was the objective of 5 projects. Poverty and lack of sanitary facilities, particularly latrines, were seen by the DDF as characteristic feature of under development of Denagama. These images (i.e. poverty and sanitation) were in fact creations of development experts who involved in the implementation of development projects within the area. For example, improving of sanitary facilities in Denagama was one of the priority areas that considered by NORAD in its intervention in 1980s. Again, Plan International (Canadian NGO) reinvented this same image in 1997 by providing funds for 140 families in Denagama to construct latrines. This shows that the DDF itself has now been inclined to accept the invented backwardness for Denagama people. The following example of a project, i.e. the Foster Parent Programme, implemented in Denagama shows how the DDF accepted the invented backwardness as a reality.

The foster parent programme

In January 1997, Canadian NGO called Plan International (hereafter PLAN) opened a project office in Tangalla to work with women groups in the area. Through a preliminary survey, PLAN identified Denagama as a suitable location to implement its development activities with women groups. However, the organization faced a problem in approaching women groups in the village, as the villagers were reluctant cooperate with PLAN to implement its women focused development projects. Their argument was such projects would create new problems at the community and household levels of the villagers. They, particularly the men, pointed out that women focused development projects would support for a reordering of existing women's role within and outside the family. It was, in fact, a male biased argument, but they questioned the development approach of the NGO. As a result of these conflicting views and lack of cooperation of the villagers, PLAN finally decided to work with DDF since some of the women groups in Denagama had already represented in it.

On the request of DDF, PLAN agreed to provide assistance to implementing a Foster Parent Programme in Denagama. It was a programme in which the children of 'poor' families in the village would be linked with some Canadian nationals as foster parents and then they would look after the welfare of such children. A child who is linked to the programme would receive certain material benefits in the form of money or gifts sent by the foster parent(s) in Canada. This enables the child to meet his/her expenditure in education, clothing, medical treatments etc. The procedure that has to be followed in linking a child with potential foster parents is a complex one. At the first step, the local project partner i.e. the DDF in this case, identifies a child by using certain poverty indicators such as house type, income of the family, ownership of physical assets and household size. Thereafter, formal application along with a photograph of the child has to be forward to the Project Office of PLAN. Then the Project Office sends the application to the Head Office in Canada through the Country Office in Colombo. The identification of foster parents is done by the Head Office through publicizing the information about the child in the media such as TV, newspapers and radio in Canada. When a positive response is received from a willing family/person to look after the child as foster parent(s), the details of the child will be provided to such person(s). Through this process, a link would be made between the two parties and then necessary administrative procedures would be arranged by the Head Office in Canada to send money or gifts to the respective child through the Country Office in Colombo, Regional Office in Badulla, Project Office in Tangalla and Partner Organization (DDF) in the area. In each of these linking stations, an administrative cost will be charged from the money sent by foster parents. Finally, arrangements will be made to receive the money or gifts to the beneficiary child through the partner organization.

Assisting the poor children in the village was the explicit objective of the project. However its underline conception is that 'village' is poor and hence the 'urban' rich in Canada should develop it. In a sense, it is an attempt to convince the superiority of the Canadians over the Denagama community. It is an invention of poverty for these villagers. By recruiting children to the programme, DDF justified the conception of the Canadian organization that Denagama is poor. In linking the village children with the programme, DDF created an image of poverty among villagers. The project considered a family living in a thatched small house as 'poor', although, a house type does not indicate the income levels of households in rural Sri Lanka. Sometimes the rich in the village live in small houses while poor families sometime live in large houses. The house type was used by the DDF as a criterion to 'fabricate' a 'poverty' image in the village. A photograph of a half-naked child standing in front of a thatched house demonstrated an image

of poverty that was needed for the rich Canadians to donate and establish their developed and non-poverty image. A project document (PD) was prepared for each identified child to testify that the household lives in poverty. The DDF prepared PDs in such a way to justify the family to which the child belongs is unable to look after him/her due to their chronic poverty. Poverty was the most important factor that was emphasized in writing a PD. Accordingly, it is a concretization of the already 'invented' poverty by experts involved in the Coastal Resource Management Project.

Summary

The case study shows how global development vision reaches rural communities in the Third World countries through First World development projects. The agent of importing such development projects is the post-colonial state, which acts up on advice of its development experts. A justification for the state action is provided by them in a manner of inventing poverty and backwardness in rural communities. The Coastal Resource Management Project in Denagama provides a best example of this situation. The experts involved in the Coastal Resource Management Project invented 'poverty' for Denagama in order to 'essentialize' development. For them, lack of 'development' was the primary cause of the natural resource degradation in the area. Those experts held the view that 'rural' is essentially 'poor' and 'urban' is unquestionably 'rich'. However, in reality, Denagama is neither poor nor rich. It has its own system of survival, which is difficult to explain using the western concept of development.

A social differentiation based on material wealth has been developing in the village since the 1940s, but it is still difficult to decide the village as poor or rich. The concept of poor and poverty are impositions by development experts.

The case study shows the relationship between 'development' and 'expert knowledge'. The CCD hired experts from internationally (e.g. the University of Rhode Island, USA) and locally, to plan and evaluate the development project. Those experts, together with local consultants, concluded that the lack of awareness about the natural resource management among villagers was the reason for resource degradation and poverty in Denagama. They neglected the fact that how and in what manner the natural resources in Denagama survived until recent times. They missed the crucial fact that these resources survived not because un-exploited, but because of the local knowledge applied to manage the natural resources, which provided livelihood to the people. Instead of exploring the local systems of resource management, those experts who came from outside wanted to impose a 'development vision', which they thought would resolve the problems.

Denagama people, however, did not behave as passive recipients of what the experts offered to them. They rejected tourism, which the experts thought the best alternative income earning avenue for the coral miners and the unemployed youth in the village. The majority of villagers did not consider money as everything; they thought that preserving the local culture is more important than economic rewards.

The case study demonstrates how (a) development experts invent discourses that support in the construction of Third World as a reality for development and for the deployment of knowledge produced in the West; (b) the experts who practice development under the legitimacy of the post-colonial state blame rural people for resource degradation while overlooking needs and aspirations of local communities; (c) the ideology associated with dominant development paradigm makes it difficult for rural communities to define their own interest in their own cultural terms; and (d) the current practices of 'development' controls rather than enhances local communities' access to natural resources.

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