

Improving Management of Small-Scale Irrigation Systems

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Improving Management of Small-Scale Irrigation Systems

*A Possible Field of Assistance for Nongovernment
Organizations? Experiences from Harnbantota
District, Sri Lanka*

INGE JUNGELING

INTERNATIONAL IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

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Summary: This paper analyzes the contributions of a nongovernment organization in improving management of small-scale irrigation systems in Sri Lanka. It documents the decision-making processes in the nongovernment organization and the context in which this decision making takes place: government policies and policies of nongovernment organizations in improving the performance of small-scale irrigation systems and in assisting the rural population in general. The site selected for research was the Tank Settlement Project in Hamhantota District, southern Sri Lanka.

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Executive Summary

IN SRI LANKA, there is a contradiction between the diversity in small-scale irrigation systems and the rigidity of the government programs that aims to increase agricultural productivity under these systems. In the fields of assistance of these programs: the use of the physical system and the way water management is pursued, small-scale irrigation systems show a great variety. This variety is expressed at two levels: first, by the different interests water users have in the different small-scale irrigation systems, for example, because of differences in agronomic features, location of the systems in a chain of systems, and possibilities for marketing of irrigated crops; and second, by the different interests of water users within one system, for example, because of labor availability, other employment opportunities and individual networks.

The programs aim to facilitate a more controlled irrigation management as this would lead to a more efficient water use and thus to more prospects for higher yields. Such controlled irrigation management is only sustainable if it is supported by the water users; but because the innovations introduced often do not suit the interests of water users, the results of the programs have been meager.

The question arises whether the technical line department responsible for the programs, the Department of Agrarian Services, can adequately deal with this diversity. This requires adaptations in the delivery of technical services, suited to the needs of different small-scale irrigation systems, and resources

to facilitate a decision-making process among water users in a system to ensure that the improvements are sustained by the water users.

This paper examines the contributions that nongovernment organizations (NGOs) could make in small-scale irrigation development precisely because NGOs may have more resources (e.g., time, knowledge, networks at local level, and finance) to seek the commitment of water users in specific locations.

The study is based on field research in a tank rehabilitation project in Hambantota, Sri Lanka, where a NGO (the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement) has been engaged to improve irrigation management in the rehabilitated tanks. This project is part of the Norwegian funded Integrated Rural Development Program (HIRDEP) that covers the whole of Hambantota District. The project started in 1979, and basically comprised the renovation of 18 tank irrigation systems, whereby the newly formed tank-based settlements are provided with an integrated package of services – housing, roads, health, education etc., apart from agriculture. The study also examines contributions of other NGOs in irrigation development in Hambantota District to understand the context of the general policies of NGOs in their service delivery in irrigation development.

The starting point in the research is that the NGO involved takes part in a complex of decision-making processes that comprise the whole of the intervention process (i.e., the project). This focus reveals how the objectives and strategies of the different actors involved (i.e., government agencies, funding agency, water users, and the NGO) comply with the objectives of the program, and how each actor tries to condition the decision-making processes in such a way that results match individual objectives. This research is restricted to the performance of the NGO, regarding the project objectives, in relation to the implementing agency responsible for water management (and rehabilitation at a later stage of the project), the managing agency, and the project beneficiaries.

In Hambantota District, repairs to irrigation tanks is a common activity taken up by NGOs. Yet, in the cases reported, none of the NGOs (except for the Sarvodaya involvement in the Tank Settlement Project) aim to support improved irrigation management. Even the repairs to the tanks are often not a major objective of the NGO, but serve, for instance, to provide the participants with

an allowance or work experience; or to make the participants aware of the advantages of group labor. Many NGOs in the area have close ties with government departments or government officials, and often operate in line with government policies to supply the rural population with subsidies, without requiring much resource mobilization from the beneficiaries.

The main contribution of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya) to irrigation management in the Tank Settlement Project was that it initiated communal work camps for repairs to a number of tanks. Yet, the work camps were not continued on a regular basis (e.g., annually). In later stages of the project, Sarvodaya shifted its attention to welfare aspects of community development (e.g., housing and preschools). The involvement of Sarvodaya can be seen as a complex of decision-making processes that are conditioned 1) directly by the contributions of the project manager, HIRDEP and indirectly by its donor, the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD), and other supporting agencies; 2) by the actual objectives of Sarvodaya; and 3) by its approach in practice. Accordingly, crucial features of the intervention process are recognized. These include:

* NORAD and HIRDEP never made clear what they actually expected of Sarvodaya and therefore did not translate vague expectations into concrete programs. This had two important consequences. First, it is difficult to give adequate support to Sarvodaya if priorities in its activities are not set. Second, it is easy to change expectations when current activities appear poorly performed, but still without creating the necessary conditions to achieve expectations.

* There was no technical line agency that could support Sarvodaya in its activities. The Department of Agrarian Services only started work in the project area in 1984. It required a lot of effort from HIRDEP to assist and guide the Department of Agrarian Services in increasing its operational capacity in general, and in performing its duties in the project area specifically. By that time, expectations in the ability to improve irrigation management had shifted from Sarvodaya to the Department of Agrarian Services.

* Since the beginning of the project, evoking the commitment of the project beneficiaries has not been a project strategy: it was assumed that the water users would use the facilities as envisaged. Disappointing performance,

measured in agricultural productivity per crop and in the number of cultivations **per** year, has led to the introduction of a program to improve water management under the project tanks and to provide cultivation loans to the project beneficiaries. This program assigns, in line with the national policy, more responsibilities in irrigation management to field-level officers of the Department of Agrarian Services. Although in a number **of** cases, the program has met positive results, it brings the project further from its original aim to support 'self-reliant' Water Users' Associations.

The Sarvodaya approach was not very suitable to assist water users in improving water management. Sarvodaya did not recognize that water users in a tank are a specific interest group. The communal work camps were more valued for its attendance by outsiders, than for its effects on long-term maintenance capacity **of** the system. Furthermore, Sarvodaya supplied its services on the basis of supply rather than of demand, whereby the community workers were assigned limited decision-making room, due to the rather top-down style of management of the organization, and the limited guidance that the community workers received.

Any involvement of a NGO in such a development program needs a careful consideration of what the NGO is supposed to initiate, how the objectives and the approach of the NGO suit the strategy of the program, and what can be expected from supporting agencies. Yet, more fundamental is the need to ensure that strategies and objectives of the different actors involved, i.e., the agencies, the NGO, and especially the water users, are compatible with the envisaged project results. This leads to the concern about what can be expected from water users in terms of commitment, resource mobilization, and actual responsibilities in irrigation management. And, what (flexible) service delivery can be expected from the Department of Agrarian Services over the long term (and not on a project basis). There is a need to clarify this complex of responsibilities.

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Several officers from the Department of Agrarian Services, the Land Commissioners' Department and the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, in Hambantota, taught me the various aspects of the Tank Settlement Project, and made it possible to join them on numerous field trips to the project area. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the help of Mr. M.S. Singhawansa, District Engineer of the Department of Agrarian Services, Mr. D.D. Samarasekera, Assistant Land Commissioner, and Mr. Vidyaratne, Regional Coordinator, Sarvodaya.

It would not have been possible to obtain an overview of NGO involvement in Hambantota District, in a relatively short period of time, without the help of Mr. D.D. Herath, Government Agent of Hambantota, who also introduced me to representatives of various agencies working with local-level NGOs.

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Even with all this assistance, I am responsible for this paper; the views expressed are my own and not necessarily those of the above reviewers, or of any institution with which I have been associated.

Inge Jungeling
1989

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

INTERVENTION IN MINOR IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

SINCE THE LATE 1970s, the Sri Lanka Government's efforts to increase agricultural production in minor irrigation systems (i.e., systems that have a command area of less than 80 hectares [ha]) have very much expanded. There has been particular emphasis on improved water management, through rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure and new water-management regulations. Since 1979, the Department of Agrarian Services, within the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Research has been responsible for water management in minor schemes. In practice, water-management responsibility is only taken up in those schemes that have been officially renovated (by the Department of Agrarian Services or by the Irrigation Department), which are thus considered suitable for the introduction of efficient water management, and where responsibilities have been officially handed over to the Department of Agrarian Services.

This responsibility, which is formalized in the Agrarian Services Act No. 58 of 1979, marks the historical and political process of increased regularization of agricultural production (especially of rice production) by the government (Karunanayake, 1980).

Apart from the political reasons underlying increased responsibilities by the government, the question arises whether the Department of Agrarian Services can effectively assume these responsibilities from the point of view of cost control and quality. If the Department of Agrarian Services assumes water-management responsibilities in all minor irrigation systems, as is the current intent, the staffing intensity of the department would have to increase dramatically. In Hambantota District, for example, the number of Technical

Officers would have to increase about ten times, by projection of the current practice of one (at divisional level) for five to six minor irrigation systems.

With respect to the quality aspect of **the** programs, it is exactly in the fields of assistance of these programs (the use of the physical system and the way water management **is** pursued) that minor irrigation systems show a great variety. This variety is basically expressed by the different interests water users in one minor irrigation system may have compared to those in other minor systems (e.g., because of agronomic features, location of the system in a chain of small systems, and possibilities for marketing of irrigated crops in a certain location), and by the different interests of water users within one system (e.g., because of labor availability, other employment opportunities, and individual networks).

The programs aim to facilitate a more controlled irrigation management as this would lead to a more efficient water use and thus to more prospects for higher yields. In **minor** irrigation systems such a controlled irrigation management **is** only sustainable if it is supported by the water users; but because the innovations introduced (which are basically the same for every system under these programs and which are based on the Walagambahuwa model) often do not suit the interests of water users, the results of the programs have been meager (Moore, 1988).

The persons who have an interest in an irrigation system include not only the direct water users, but also landowners (who are not necessarily water users), fishermen (who may have access to the tank), encroachers, merchants (who use the products of irrigated agriculture), and politicians (who depend upon the support of water users). Taking a broad view, one can consider that any person who may influence the decision making regarding the management of an irrigation system, also has an interest in that system. In this paper the term "water user" refers to all these interests (Box, 1986).¹

Water users' long-term support for a program can only be expected when they are convinced that more controlled water management is a profitable affair, considering their own interests. Theoretically, this means that water

¹*Box (1986)* used this conceptual meaning not for water users but for cultivators in general.

users should create a demand for improvement of their system, and that the Department of Agrarian Services should consider this demand and may respond with a flexible service supply (e.g., assisting in repairs or construction of physical structures, and assisting in the design of appropriate schedules).⁴ Also, water users should absorb as much of the costs of the assistance as possible to enhance their long-term commitment to the system and for the Department to maintain cost effectiveness.

Yet, water users may not know about the possible services that might be delivered to them, and may not be able to cooperate in such a way that a sustainable demand is created. The Department of Agrarian Services, on the other hand, is not well-g geared to engage in a complicated and time-consuming communication process with water users, especially when it has to concentrate on ways to meet technical demands of water users (Jiggins and Roling, 1982). Hence, there is a need for a facilitator.

Nongovernment organizations (NGOs) may play an important role as facilitators in programs that aim to improve water management performance

²Merrey and Bulankulame (1987) suggest for these reasons that the Department of Agrarian Services should turn over ownership and management responsibility to legally constituted Water Users' Organizations, and that the government should provide: "...financial and technical assistance as needed and requested by the farmers." (ibid.:1). This statement assumes government departments involved to be able to provide these services in a way agreeable to all persons that bear an interest in a certain minor irrigation system and also agreeable with the objectives of the respective department. Merrey and Bulankulame also make the points that: (1) "Sri Lankan farmers have been observed to manage such systems better than expected,..." and (2) "...handing responsibility for these small systems over to farmers' groups would enable the government to concentrate more effectively on the larger systems and make better use of limited resources." (ibid.:2). With respect to this first point, assessment is very difficult because this is very much dependent on the objectives used; the Department of Agrarian Services would argue that the farmers do not manage their systems very well. Since the agricultural output is too low, while others argue that, given the various constraints, farmers' water-management practices are very much planned and rational (see for example Begum, 1987). Furthermore, this reason assumes there is a clear distinction between systems entirely managed by farmers and those not entirely managed by farmers. This distinction is debatable, given earlier involvements of the government in minor irrigation management. The second point refers to the cost aspect, although implying that resources could be spent another way.

in minor irrigations systems. A NGO may have more resources (e.g., time, knowledge, networks at local level, and finance) to assess water users' interests and to facilitate a decision-making process that would reveal ways to meet the specific needs. This paper analyzes such involvement of a NGO, the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, in Hambantota District. The next section outlines a theoretical framework for assessing this involvement. To understand the context of this case, an outline of the involvement of other NGOs in minor irrigation development in the district is made as well.

Decision-Making Processes

The starting point for analyzing the involvement of the NGO in this paper is priorities of the decision-making processes during the intervention program. An understanding of these processes will reveal the way the different actors are involved and the way their interests are considered.

This analysis assumes that any action is the result of a decision-making process (Kampfraath and Marcelis, 1981). An action may be the result of a thinking process of one person, or the result of a chain of decisions made by several actors. As decisions are made during the program, these decisions limit or constrain the scope for new decisions. Every decision made at a certain level restricts the scope for a decision to be made at the next level; to reach a certain (planned) result, the 'decision-making room' will be more restricted for actors involved in later stages of the decision-making process. This process of sequential decision making is visualized in figure 1.

During the implementation of a development program (which for the purpose of this paper will be considered as one process, but in reality comprises a complex of processes) envisaged results have to be met. To reach these results, the involvement of the different actors in the decision-making process (NGOs, government-line agencies and water users) can be conditioned by a program manager. Such conditioning may comprise: involvement of the actors in different stages of the decision-making process; assigning different levels of authority and entitlements; and ensuring whether certain information is accessible or not. Figure 2 shows how, in a conventional project approach, (formal) decision-making room can be assigned to the different actors.

Figure 1. Sequential decision making: reaching a planned result.

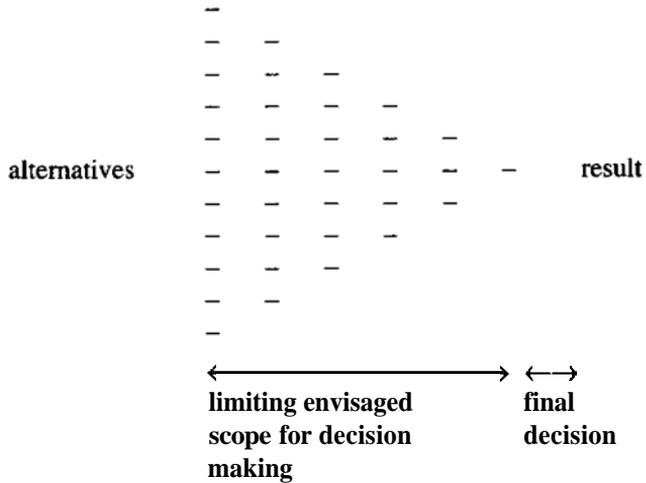
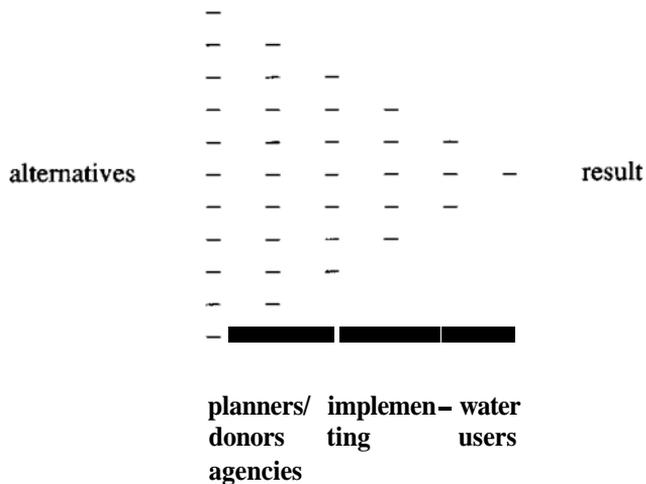
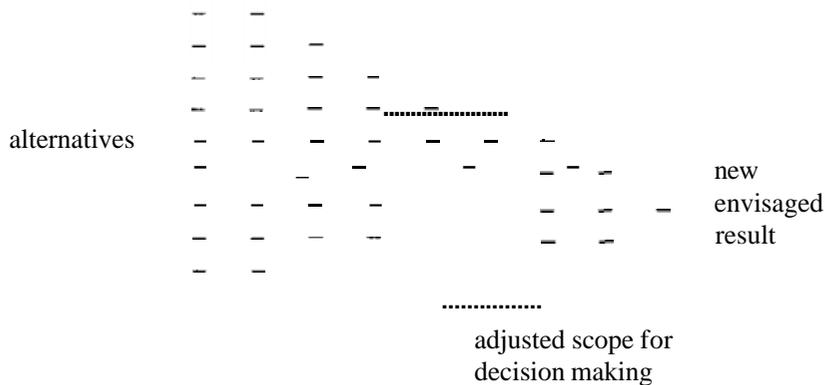


Figure 2. Assigning decision-making room to different actors, in a conventional project approach.



Often actors have a large scope for informal decision making, outside the envisaged decision-making room. Therefore, it is important that the process is conditioned in such a way that the objectives and strategies of the different actors comply with the objectives of the program. During the intervention process it might appear that the envisaged results **are** unrealistic or that the conditions to facilitate the contributions of the actors have to be adjusted. Through a feedback process readjustments can be made in the decision-making room. Figure 3 visualizes the process of readjustment in the decision-making process.

Figure 3. Readjustment in the decision-making process, for example, if the scope for decision making assigned to a certain actor appears to be unrealistic, or if the envisaged result has to be changed.



Yet, for the **various** levels in the decision-making process, it is not equally easy to change the scope. For example, if an implementing agency is involved at a certain stage of the process and if that agency does not act as expected by the planners, it may be undesirable to withdraw that agency from the program. In such a case, the program manager may try to involve a second agency to assist the first agency.

Often water users are involved only in a very late stage in the intervention process; the decision-making room that would guide them to the final action

process; the decision-making room that would guide them to the final action (e.g., the use of water-management facilities in the envisaged way) is very small. Thus, the program assumes that the planned final decision will be in the interest of the water users. The agencies responsible will usually not force the water users to use the facilities as envisaged, although they might have the legal authority to do so. Consequently, the water user in minor irrigation systems is, in relation to the government, an independent decision maker.

Each of the actors involved, water users, agencies and perhaps the NGO, has his/or its own objectives (formally and informally) or interests, which may be different from the planned objectives, and each actor tries to condition the decision-making processes in such a way that the end results match individual objectives. There is a continuous feedback process: successful strategies may shape the objectives and vice versa. The NGO may contribute to the process in such a way that the envisaged results are agreeable to the actors involved.

This paper does not attempt to provide a comprehensive picture of all decision-making processes in the case study, as this would require an understanding of the interests, objectives, and strategies of all actors involved. Rather, this paper tries to highlight the contributions of the NGO in minor irrigation development, keeping in mind the concept of decision making as outlined above.

Research Methodology

This paper is the result of three months' field work in Hambantota District. The Norwegian-funded Integrated Rural Development Program, which covers the whole of Hambantota District, has been particularly receptive to involving NGOs in their programs. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya) has been involved in the implementation of a Tank Settlement Project, in the eastern part of the district (see figure 4). This involvement, in relation to the implementing agency (the Department of Agrarian Services), the managing agency (HIRDEP), and the clients of the project (the settler families or water

¹Other departments are involved as well, but remain generally outside the analysis.

inventory and analysis of other NGOs that were, and still are, involved in minor irrigation development in Hambantota District.

My research strategy focused on the agencies involved. The sequential process of project intervention is followed through interviews with staff of the respective agencies. My first (unstructured) interviews were with the actors involved in the initial stages of the intervention process and ended with the actors who are now implementing the final stages of the project (i.e., field officers and water users). Numerous field trips were made to the project area in the company of officials of the agencies involved and of Sarvodaya officers. During the course of the interviewing, I frequently jumped levels, in order to re-interview persons as new insights demanded more information.

Initially, I did not focus the research on particular project **tanks**, but tried to go to the field as often as possible with the different officers involved. Usually, these officers had already fixed an appointment to visit a certain **tank** for a certain occasion, and I simply joined them. Later, I concentrated on **three** tanks, because these tanks were most actively monitored by the Department of Agrarian Services and by HIRDEP with respect to water management.

Outline of the Paper

The paper is divided into six chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction. The second chapter discusses the concept of NGO and outlines government policies towards NGOs. The third chapter presents an overview of NGOs involved in minor irrigation development in Hambantota District. The fourth chapter describes the involvement of Sarvodaya in the Tank Settlement Project under HIRDEP, while the fifth chapter discusses the responsibilities and practical effects of the Department of Agrarian Services in minor irrigation management on local-level decision-making processes. The last chapter analyzes the potential role of NGOs and government organizations in minor irrigation development.

CHAPTER 2

NGOs in Irrigation Development: National Context

WHAT IS A NGO?

IT IS DIFFICULT to point out what is exactly meant by “NGOs” in the Sri Lankan context; even their status as nongovernment is often debatable. Many local-level NGOs (e.g., Rural Development Societies, Young Farmer Societies, and Youth Clubs) have been initiated by the government. There **are** also many organizations where government officials participate as nonvoting members (e.g., the former Cultivation Committees) or act as secretaries to the organizations (e.g., the *Gramodaya Mandalaya* [Village Re-awakening Council]); yet they are called NGOs.

For these government-linked organizations, the term ‘voluntary organization’ might be more suitable, because people volunteer to participate. However, in following the general usage in Sri Lanka, and because in Sri Lanka there are specific formal regulations which pertain to many of these organizations, this paper refers to these organizations as NGOs.

NGOs can be established at different levels (e.g., a Water Users’ Association versus an international organization like Amnesty International) and can be represented at higher- or lower-levels (a council of water users’ representatives versus a national Amnesty International group). Other NGOs are linked up in a network of local, regional, national, or even international organizations.

Local-level NGOs that are part of such a network are subject to support and monitoring by the higher levels, including umbrella organizations and donors. This may have important consequences for the objectives of the NGOs and for the way decision-making processes take place at local level. Local-level NGOs who do not have these formal ties operate in a relatively autonomous manner. In this paper, the former type will be termed “national N G O and the latter type “local NGO.”

Local and National NGOs in Sri Lanka

Any informal group of people organized for a common purpose can be considered to be a NGO. A group of water users who come together to maintain a tank bund, regardless of who actually initiated the activity, can be termed a local NGO. In this way, even the organization that looks after regular maintenance activities, to be done by the water users themselves, can be defined as a NGO, but as these organizations usually do not call themselves NGOs, they are not recognized as such.

There is only one registered local NGO that does not receive support or control from higher-level organizations; the Death Donation or Funeral Society. Some other national NGOs are so marginally linked up to higher level, that their decision making is mostly pursued at the local-level only, for example, some Cooperative Thrift and Credit Societies, registered under the Cooperative Department.

All other recognized NGOs with local-level representation like the Rural Development Societies, Youth Clubs, Young Farmers' Societies, Women's Societies, Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies, Voluntary Health Organizations, various Cultural Societies, Social Services Leagues, and Water Users' Associations in major schemes, are initiated by government organizations or higher-level NGOs. These are the national NGOs. There is an increasing number of departments in Sri Lanka that have initiated their own village-level organizations (Wanigaratne, 1977:3).

Sarvodaya is the most prominent of the national NGOs with representation in about 5,000 of the country's 22,000 villages (Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Sangamaya [Inc.], 1982:1). Other national NGOs include: Redd Barna, Freedom from Hunger Campaign, World Vision, Nation Builders' Association, and National Heritage Foundation. In some cases the distinction between national and local NGOs is problematic as some NGOs have ties with other NGOs at different levels. For example, officers of Sarvodaya are engaged to initiate local-level NGOs, called Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies: while field workers of other NGOs may be involved with existing local-level NGOs or may initiate NGOs that bear different names from the supporting organization (for example, Nation Builders' Association provides assistance in the development of Water Users' Associations which have formal linkages with the Mahaweli Economic Authority).

Government Relations with NGOs

There is a seemingly strong support of the Government for NGOs. Fernandez Myrada (1987:46) has noted as follows that there is only minimal legislation to control or to coordinate NGOs:

The Ministry of Plan Implementation, coordinates and monitors the activities of foreign [NGOs] operating in the country. Government (sic) provides funds directly to [NGOs] working mainly in social welfare, family planning and women's programs. Several NGOs have been entrusted by the government with major components of government programs in the rural areas on a non-key basis.

From 1980, the UNP government (which came into power in 1977) has officially recognized that NGOs can help to strengthen the supply of government services, also with a view to satisfying the rural voters who contributed to its victory in 1977 and in 1989. For example, the government has officially encouraged officials to make use of the experience and infrastructure of Sarvodaya (Moore, 1981:21). In addition, NGOs with local representation provide the government with an opportunity to coopt adverse local-level interests. Indeed, given Sri Lanka's extensive government infrastructure and the positive attitude of the government, many national NGOs have linked their programs to the government services.

In irrigation development, NGOs provide services in cooperation with the Department of Agrarian Services, the Irrigation Department, and the Mahaweli Economic Authority. Examples of these programs include, the Social Change Program of the Nation Builders' Association (Pimburettewa Irrigation Scheme Rehabilitation Project and Nagadeepa Mahawewa Water Management Pilot Project), and the program of the National Development Foundation to initiate rehabilitation of 10 minor tanks in Kurunegala District. There are also cases of NGOs working in irrigation development but without linking their programs to government agencies, for example, the Tank Restoration Program of the National Heritage Movement and the Small Tank Restoration Program of the Sri Lanka Freedom from Hunger Campaign Board. See Annex I for a more comprehensive overview of NGOs involved in irrigation development.

Yet, while the government does support NGO involvement in irrigation development, government policies to minor irrigation reveal a reluctance to support devolving decision-making power to local organizations (Wilkens-

Wells et al., 1988:13). Water Users' Associations in minor irrigation systems cannot be registered formally, for example, to allow legal action by members or for money transfers. The Agrarian Services Act, No. 58 of 1979, assigns water management responsibilities directly to the lowest-level field official of the Department of Agrarian Services, the Cultivation Officer. These responsibilities are empowered by legal regulations. Although the Cultivation Officer may not actually assume these responsibilities with respect to minor irrigation management, neither is there a turnover policy to grant responsibilities to the water users or to other NGOs.

CHAPTER 3

NGOs in Small-Scale Irrigation Development: Hambantota District

NGO INVOLVEMENT

MINOR IRRIGATION SYSTEMS in Hambantota District are mainly tank irrigation systems. The area is well-known in Sri Lanka for having the highest density of tank-irrigation systems, whether in used or unused state. Minor systems which acquire water through a diversion weir in a stream (anicut systems) are usually linked up with other systems to a major irrigation system. This type of irrigation occurs in the western part of the district.

Given the wide variety of organizations that can be called 'nongovernment' it is impossible to assess the number of NGOs that are actually involved or have been involved in minor irrigation development in Hambantota District. Apart from involvement of Sarvodaya in the Hambantota Integrated Rural Development Program (HIRDEP) tank-settlement project, none of the other national NGOs (see Annex I) are involved in irrigation development in the district. One reason is that the HIRDEP, itself planned to renovate an extensive number of tanks (87 of about 400 tanks in the district), limits the possibilities for NGO programs.

Yet, there have been a vast number of initiatives to repair minor irrigation systems. It appears that repairing such a system is a highly attractive rural-development activity for local-level NGOs, especially in the eastern part of the district (dry zone area), where tank systems prevail. Repairs include raising the level of the bund and the spill (thus increasing the command area), as well as renovating abandoned tank systems. Since large parts of this area consist of government-owned land (whether encroached or not), land acquisition is not as difficult as in the less dry parts of the district.

NGOs which are involved in tank renovation in Hambantota District are:

Rural Development Societies, Gramodaya Mandalayas. Sarvodaya, groups that emerged due to the Drought Relief Program, and the Youth Clubs. All these NGOs are connected to a national organization. In all cases, except for Sarvodaya, the national organization is a government department or ministry. The NGOs which are formally registered include the Rural Development Societies, the Gramodaya Mandalayas, and the Youth Clubs. Local-level Sarvodaya Societies might also be registered, but the works on the irrigation systems are often initiated by regional or district-level Sarvodaya officers before such a society is legalized. The following sections provide descriptions of the irrigation activities of these NGOs in Hambantota District.

Rural Development Societies

The Rural Development Movement has a long history in Sri Lanka, beginning in the 1940s. The movement became famous by its massive campaigns to eradicate malaria in the dry zone and to grow more food crops. Initially, Rural Development Societies were established at village level to engage in activities ranging from agriculture, poultry, women's affairs, and health to security. Now most of these activities have been taken over by the respective line departments, which have established their own organizations at village level.

In 1978, there were 417 registered Rural Development Societies in Hambantota District (Samaranayaka, 1983:191); by 1988 there were **545** registered Rural Development Societies of which 450 are said to be functioning. There is no straightforward criterion for the label 'functioning,' but this generally refers to Rural Development Societies that have annual meetings where board members are elected. In addition, there are 70 Women's Rural Development Societies, of which 40 are functioning (Rural Development Department, personal communication).

From the 1960s, Rural Development Societies were allowed to undertake small contracts for public works. In the 1970s Rural Development Societies could qualify for contracts up to Rs 100,000 from any department. An official circular note, allowing departments to give contracts to Rural Development Societies without tendering, is still in force. While it is officially the responsibility of each department to award such contracts, in practice the

decision is often taken by the District Minister or by a Member of Parliament. With respect to contract work in minor irrigation systems, Development Societies in Hambantota District do not have a privileged position, although for example in Monaragala District they have.

Departments are often reluctant to give contracts to the highly politicized Rural Development Societies, since they lose financial and quality control over the contract work. Rural Development Societies have allegedly become a lucrative cover for private contractors (and even politicians), since the Societies do not have to pay taxes and security deposits. The role of the Rural Development Society is often confined to the provision of its name to the contractor, with 5 percent of the contract-sum to be donated to the Rural Development Society fund. The members are often not involved as workers.

The Department of Agrarian Services in Hambantota District does contracts with Rural Development Societies if the latter can offer the lowest bid. With respect to construction activities on minor irrigation systems, the Department of Agrarian Services completed two contracts with Rural Development Societies during 1987; and two other Rural Development Societies (two contractors) were still under contract at the end of 1988.

In 1981, the Irrigation Department engaged two Rural Development Societies in the project area of the Tank Settlement Project for downstream development works in two of the settlement tanks. This involvement addressed the need of both HIRDEP and project beneficiaries to provide the project beneficiaries with an income during the construction period. It proved to be an unsatisfactory experience as the work remained unfinished, was of a bad quality, and the project beneficiaries were generally not involved in the works done.

Until the establishment of the Gramodaya Mandalaya (described below), Rural Development Societies could apply for food aid under the Drought Relief Program, to initiate certain works, including repairs to minor irrigation systems. The distribution of the food and the works often caused so much conflict, however, that works remained unfinished and the Rural Development Society involved became discredited until it was able to obtain other subsidies to benefit its members (Baseline study, 1981).

Involvement of Rural Development Societies in irrigation is limited to the contract works under the Department of Agrarian Services. Yet, this involvement is minimal when compared to the total number of 'functioning' Rural Development Societies in the district.

Gramodaya Mandalaya

In 1981, new institutions were introduced to provide better interaction between the government and local-level NGOs, and to enable the latter to implement government-development programs. To that end, District Development Councils (at district level), *Pradesha Sabhas* (at Assistant Government Agent division level), and Gramodaya Mandalayas (at the lowest administrative level – *Gramaseveka* division level) were established.

Members of the Gramodaya Mandalaya include all chairmen of recognized NGOs within one Gramaseveka Division! In Hambantota District, a Gramodaya Mandalaya may include representation from 10 different NGOs, including Rural Development Societies, Youth Clubs and Sarvodaya Shramadana Societies (Leelasena. Schaap and Sri Wickrema, 1987:222). Since 1987, the *Gramaseveka Niladhari*, the village-level officer of the Ministry of Home Affairs, has been the ex-officio secretary of the Gramodaya Mandalaya. Four Gramodaya Mandalaya chairmen are elected for membership of the Pradesha Sabha and they elect a chairman among themselves. The Assistant Government Agent is the secretary of the Pradesha Sabha.

Members of the District Development Council include Members of Parliament and other representatives. The chairman is selected by the party that has the highest number of votes in the district and the Government Agent is the secretary (Samaranayake, 1983,:219).⁵

The Gramodaya Mandalaya has effectively replaced the Rural Development Society with respect to activities implemented under government programs. Although Rural Development Societies are still entitled, provided they are registered, to obtain contract works for departments, many Rural Development Societies have transformed into Gramodaya Mandalayas, with the Rural Development Society chairmen becoming Gramodaya Mandalaya chairmen.

⁴In 1988, a Gramaseveka Division could maximally include 500 households, and the physical areas of these divisions could therefore vary considerably.

⁵The District Development Council formulates the Annual Development Plan and looks after its implementation. The plan mainly covers small-scale development works coming under local authorities (departments, Gramodaya Mandalaya, etc.), other than the village and urban councils.

The names Gramodaya Mandalaya and Rural Development Society are often used interchangeably, in informal speech.

The Gramodaya Mandalaya has not been successful in overcoming the negative reputation of the Rural Development Society, and appears to have hindered relations between the government and local-level NGOs through the establishment of an extra level. According to Hennin (1983:3): "... the Gramodaya Mandalaya Council and Pradesha Mandalaya Council are largely policymaking vehicles which voice local concerns, but do not address increasing the capability and capacity of local organizations to render these initiatives operational." For policymaking purposes the area covered by one Gramodaya Mandalaya is often too large to reach all NGOs effectively. Wiswa Warnapala and Woodsworth (1987:60) argue that because each Mandalaya covers more than one village and benefits obtained by the Mandalaya depend on the (political) relationships between its leaders and the higher-level councils, power has been removed from the village. Another drawback is that due to the present political situation in the area many Gramodaya Mandalaya chairmen resigned from their duties.

Local NGOs tied to higher-level organizations – whether governmental or nongovernmental – have been little affected by Gramodaya Mandalayas (except for the Rural Development Societies). The negative reputation of the councils may even have strengthened the development of village-level organizations linked to government departments or higher-level NGOs. In Hambantota District, the focus of Gramodaya Mandalaya has been in housing programs of the Ministry of Local Government, Housing and Construction. Under the HIRDEP activities, Gramodaya Mandalayas are not involved in tank rehabilitation. Farmers who have access to irrigation facilities are not recognized by HIRDEP as a target group, because they are considered relatively better off than dry-land farmers.

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya) is formally represented in 200 villages in Hambantota District. There are ten divisional centers, and every center engages four field-level workers. The field-level worker heads

a field office (*Gramadana* Center) that has to cover five villages. In practice, most field workers are actively working on only two to three villages.

A fundamental tenet of Sarvodaya is that a better society depends upon enriching human experience and 'group awakening' (Ariyaratne 1978:1). Improvement of the 'psycho-socio infrastructure' is the initial focus of Sarvodaya's community-development work; to that end a *shramadana* (collective voluntary work) camp is organized to show the value of human and group **enrichment**.⁶ The organizers also invite people from neighboring villages, as well as officials and politicians to share the experience. When a *shramadana* has met sufficient enthusiasm, Sarvodaya may decide to start their community-development program in that village.

The actual work done in a *shramadana* is of secondary importance; repairs or construction of access roads, playgrounds, and community centers are common targets. Yet, for repairs to minor irrigation systems, where there is a clear group of beneficiaries (the cultivators **of** the command area), the ideas of the *shramadana* camp and the benefits it accomplishes can be contradictory, especially when new irrigable land is accrued through the *shramadana* works (Premasiri Weliwita, 1981).

In 1981, Sarvodaya and the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) signed a contract whereby Sarvodaya would assist in the Tank Settlement Project coordinated by HIRDEP. The contract specifies that the

⁶Ariyaratne, the President of Sarvodaya, defines a *shramadana* camp as follows:

A *Shramadana* Camp may be defined as a place at which men, women and children, who have accepted the Sarvodaya thought, come to live and work together girding their time, thought and energy for a certain period of time. They accept two objectives when they encamp in the village, namely, experiencing their traditional social living, based on the principles of Sharing, Pleasant Language, Constructive Activity and Equality, sharing their labor to complete a physical task that satisfies a long-felt basic human need of the community. (Ariyaratne, 1978:38).

This booklet is one of several publications of the president of Sarvodaya, explaining the ideas and programs of the Movement. Also much research has been done on the Movement (see the example Cynthia Moore, 1981). Here we are only concerned with activities related to minor irrigation systems. This is a minor activity for Sarvodaya and therefore our assessment does not reflect on Sarvodaya as a whole.

contributions of Sarvodaya would not differ from its regular development program. However, during implementation of the project, HIRDEP and NORAD have tried to persuade Sarvodaya to adapt its approach to better fit requirements of irrigation, specifically to organize water users for irrigation management as a special subject of the community. This process is described in chapter 4. Sarvodaya's direct involvement in irrigation management has been limited. Only in the initial stage of the project, in a few tanks, were shramadanas organized for maintenance of the tank bund and channels.

In 1982, Sarvodaya advanced a contract proposal to NORAD for a project to renovate 50 village tanks and carry out integrated village development in Hamhantota District. The proposal was seriously considered, but was not approved. One reason was the differing view between HIRDEP and Sarvodaya regarding the project. HIRDEP preferred that the Sarvodaya project should be linked to the ongoing Tank Settlement Project and with the Department of Agrarian Services and the Irrigation Department. Sarvodaya feared that interference of government agencies would undermine the relative autonomy and freedom of action which it enjoyed in its other projects (Agroskills Ltd, 1982:14).

Drought Relief Works

An extensive external input to repair tanks has been provided by drought relief programs. These programs are related to local-level NGOs in the sense that to be eligible to receive the food-aid, people have to participate in workcamps (shramadana). The program comes under the Department of Social Services of the Ministry of Social Services, and is coordinated at the district level by the Social Services Branch.

Previously, the World Food Program contributed to the program. In 1978, 14,181 persons received distress relief in the district, all provided by the World Food Program (Samaranayake, 1983:240). From August 1987 to April 1988, 299,980 persons in the district – more than 50 percent of the population (Department of Census and Statistics) – received food from the relief program, while the World Food Program served 21,405 persons (Department of Social Services, personal communication). There has been an increase in the

amount of food aid provided and in the number of beneficiaries. While in the **1950s** and **1960s** relief programs were organized after two years of drought, they are now organized after only one crop failure.

Food-aid programs have been organized in the past three years. Normally, the critical period is August to February, but in **1988** this was extended to April. Participants are supposed to work five to six days a week, but this regulation is not so strictly enforced. Often only one work activity is initiated for the whole period of assistance. The food is distributed through the same channels as the food-stamp system?

When a demand for food aid is made to the Social Services Branch, the Cultivation Officer of the Department of Agrarian Services is supposed to certify that there has been a crop failure in that particular area. The Gramaseveka Niladhari of that area provides data on the families that are poor enough to be eligible to participate in the program. The Gramaseveka Niladhari and the Cultivation Officer together decide what work will be most beneficial to the area. These works mostly concern road repairs or road construction, repairs to tanks and construction of wells. The Assistant Government Agent has to approve the program.

In practice, many drought relief works are initiated in a different way: the Social Services Branch receives requests to provide food aid to compensate for the labor input for a certain, defined, project. The following cases, with respect to repairs to minor **tanks**, are noted:

Case 1. The Department of Agrarian Services makes a request for food aid, because there are no departmental funds to repair a tank. It prepares a workplan and provides materials to build the structures. The Assistant Government Agent informs the people about the plans.

Case 2. HIRDEP requests food aid to repair a canal and a bund of a tank situated in the Tank Settlement Project area, but is not included in the project.

The Gramaseveka Niladhari distributes food stamps to the beneficiaries, who can exchange the stamps at the cooperatives stores. The amount of food is determined according to the size of the family, with a minimum of 10 1/2 kilograms (kg) of rice per month for a single-person family and a maximum of 52 1/2 kg for a family with at least five members. Sometimes other items are distributed in addition: these goods are donated by foreign counmes.

Case 3. Gramodaya Mandalayas have limited funds to sponsor projects. The Social Services Branch provides food to casual laborers, while the Gramodaya Mandalaya pays the specialized laborers. In one case, such a project included the renovation of a small tank.

Case 4. In one of the settlement clusters of the HIRDEP Tank Settlement Project, an ex-chairman of a Gramodaya Mandalaya requests and receives food aid for work camps; in two tanks, access roads have been repaired and in one tank the bund has been cleaned and repaired.

These cases are rather fragmentary, but indicate an important mode of government support channeled through NGOs. Officials in the Social Services Branch in Hambantota have noted that the people have become more and more reluctant to maintain their irrigation systems without food aid as an inducement.

National Youth Services Council

The National Youth Services Council (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment), established in 1969, was given official recognition in the National Youth Services Act No. 69 of 1979, allowing the establishment of local-level Youth Clubs. The Council, which is represented at national, district, and Assistant Government Agent division levels, is responsible for the Youth Club Program, whose formal aim is "... to provide opportunities to youth in fulfilling their aspirations such as sports, recreation, artistic and creative work, leadership, social service, education, personal development and participation in decision making." (National Youth Services Council, [n.d.]:5). The Council aims to establish a Youth Club in every Gramaseveka division. In 1988, about 6,000 Youth Clubs were established in the country (National Youth Services Council, personal communication).

Regarding the economic side of the 'personal development' of youth (defined as between 15 and 30 years of age) the Council is involved in national training and credit schemes (to stimulate entrepreneurship) and a program called the National Service Program, which provides temporary employment for youth.

Under this program labor-intensive works are taken up at village level. Examples of such works are the construction of rural roads, repairs to irrigation systems, and the construction of playgrounds.

When a work project is requested, approval must be obtained from district and national levels. The total workload is estimated by a technical officer from a relevant department or by the Council itself, and youth may subscribe for the work. Usually, membership in the local Youth Club is not a criterion for participation, unless there are too many volunteers for the work to be done. The project site should not be located more than three kilometers (km) from the area where the youth live.

Youth receive a remuneration of Rs 40 per day and the work is supervised by a 'project leader,' who is selected from among the youth. A Youth Services Officer (there are three Youth Services Officers per electorate), visits the site every two weeks to supervise the work and to pay the laborers.

Repairs to irrigation systems comprise a considerable share of the projects initiated. In 1988, 13 of the 45 projects approved by the National Youth Services Council for Hambantota District comprised repairs to bunds and canals of irrigation systems.

As in the case of Sarvodaya, the work is viewed as a means to an end, for example, a learning experience. The work is labor intensive and heavy machinery is not used. The Council has a budget to pay allowances for technical assistance provided by officers of the Irrigation Department or the Department of Agrarian Services and officially requires that these officers be involved before a project is started. But while in the early years of the program the relations with these departments were apparently close (e.g., the Irrigation Department provided cement for the structures), they ceased to exist later on. According to an officer of the National Youth Services Council: "The needs of the bureaucracy are different from the needs of the villagers." The technical departments, he noted, do not appreciate the simple work carried out under the program. In contrast to the case of the Drought Relief Program, the Irrigation Department or the Department of Agrarian Services does not request the National Youth Services Council to provide labor input for specific repairs in irrigation systems.

Officially, any repair to a minor irrigation system, with the assistance of an outside organization like the National Youth Services Council, should be approved by the Department of Agrarian Services, but officers from the

Department of Agrarian Services in Hambantota claim that none of the projects under the National Services Program have been reported to the Department of Agrarian Services prior to construction.

Orientation on Construction Activities

A remarkable feature of all the abovementioned cases is that the activities of the NGOs are invariably directed to the ad hoc implementation of repairs and construction of minor irrigation systems. In none of the cases has the NGO initiated a more structural or long-term program to assist the water users of the system in the overall operation and maintenance of the system.

Often, the repairs to the tank are not the primary aim of the NGO rather the construction (e.g., by Rural Development Societies, drought relief and youth program) works are intended to provide the participants with an allowance in-kind or in cash. With respect to Sarvodaya the work camps aim to make the participants aware of the advantages of shared thought and shared labor time; the actual work is instrumental to this aim and is therefore not subject to a follow-up.

Relations between the NGOs and the Government Departments

Close ties between NGOs and line departments (Department of Agrarian Services, Irrigation Department, or Department of Agriculture) were evident only in cases where the department itself organized the activity. For example, the work done by the Rural Development Societies under contract to the Department of Agrarian Services, or repairs to working tanks through the drought relief program, involve technical assistance to tanks already started for rehabilitation under the program of the Department of Agrarian Services. In other tanks where drought relief works were executed (but which had not been officially selected for rehabilitation by the Department of Agrarian Services), the Cultivation Officer of the Department of Agrarian Services had

to be present to certify that the work was indeed done.' Here, no technical assistance was provided by the Department of Agrarian Services. In the early days of the National Services Program the Irrigation Department did provide technical assistance and some inputs, but this is no longer the case.

With the exception of the Satvodaya activities, the government provides the finances for all NGO work involving irrigation, as well as other public works. The beneficiaries of such funds, whether water users or not, seek to mobilize NGOs for their own goals, attracted by the available funds. Water users have discovered the possibilities of doing maintenance works to their tanks while receiving a remuneration from the government, through the intermediary of a NGO.⁹ The policies for channeling such subsidies to the rural population, however, do not require resource mobilization from the side of the beneficiaries and do not seek to improve irrigation management on the long term.

Dale (1985:38) has noted that lack of interest in maintenance of 'public-productive facilities' (including irrigation systems) is a general feature in the district. He argues that traditional local power structures and organizational arrangements have disintegrated and have been replaced by inefficient political administrative arrangements. Welfare and subsidy schemes have created a type of patron-client relationship between the state and the public (see also Wiswa Wamapala and Woodsworth, 1987).

⁸This is one of the official duties of the Cultivation Officer.

⁹Sarvodaya has met the same problem regarding peoples' attendance in the shramadana camps, which is voluntary. In June 1988, the District Coordination in Hambantota decided that the Divisional Centers have to organize at least three shramadanasper year, and that for each shramadana an amount of Rs 4,000 be put aside to meet costs for traveling, first aid, and meals for the participants. Sarvodaya workers from a Divisional Center claimed that this amount is not at all enough to provide the participants with a decent meal.

CHAPTER 4

Involvement of Sarvodaya in the Tank Settlement Project

IMPLEMENTATION

THE TANK SETTLEMENT project is part of a plan to rehabilitate 87 tanks in the district. This plan was one of the seven projects identified at the inception of the HIRDEP in 1979. Implementation of the projects was to be carried out through the existing line agencies with coordination by the district planning unit.¹⁰

Rehabilitations of tanks in the Tank Settlement Project followed the cluster concept: an existing village would be provided with public facilities (e.g., a school and a health center), where a cluster of about six nearby tanks would be situated close enough to this village to make use of these facilities. Resettlement of sufficient numbers of families from the area was part of the project, thus forming residential tank-based communities around a larger village-service center. The project area itself was the dry eastern part of the district where both abandoned and working tanks were easily identified for renovation.

Three clusters were identified: Weliwewa cluster (six tanks), Mattala cluster (seven tanks) and Gonnoruwa cluster (five tanks) (see figure 4). One major

"The district planning unit comes under the Ministry of Plan Implementation and hosts the Integrated Rural Development Program. With respect to HIRDEP-funded activities, the District Heads of Agencies (sectoral projects) and the Divisional Assistant Government Agents (local-level projects) are responsible to the HIRDEP Project Director (who is also the head of the district planning unit) (W.M. Leelasena et al., 1987:222-223).

tank, Mahaalutgamwewa was originally included in one of the clusters, but became a separate project due to the size of the command area (240 ha). This tank was still under construction and is excluded in this paper.

Construction work started in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters in 1979 and in Gonnoruwa cluster in 1983. Settlement took place when construction was completed. In addition to tank rehabilitation the integrated package for each cluster included: (1) distribution of 0.8 ha of imgable land and 0.4 ha of highland to each family; (2) reforestation of catchment areas; (3) agricultural extension; (4) supply of agriculture inputs; (5) rural roads, and (6) housing assistance. By 1987, all 18 tanks had been occupied by a total of 699 families, from a planned number of 902.

While during the wet (maha) season in 1984-1985, cultivation was possible in all Weliwewa and Mattala tanks, during the wet season in 1987-1988, a considerable number of tanks contained too little water for a successful cultivation." Due to the drought prevailing during the wet seasons in 1985-1986 and 1986-1987, virtually no cultivation was possible in the eastern part of the district.

Various line departments were assigned to implement project activities. The Irrigation Department was responsible for feasibility studies, design and construction of the tanks, for construction of the access roads, and for making the blocking out plans. The Land Commissioner's Department was responsible for the selection of settlers, land alienation, implementation of the land-development program, and housing. The Department of Agriculture was to introduce agricultural extension for both irrigated lands and homesteads. The Department of Agrarian Services would be responsible for provision of a regular input supply and for organizing the farmers in farmer associations as envisaged by the Agrarian Services Act No. 58 of 1979. Other departments involved are the National Housing Authority, the Water Resources Board, the Forest Department and the Survey Department.

"For these tanks designs are currently being made by the Department of Agrarian Services to alleviate the water problems. In some tanks structures and/or the command areas are readjusted. One tank has been provided with a feeder channel and a diversion weir from a nearby river.

Beneficiaries' Involvement during Selection and Construction

The project aimed to select the settlers as much as possible from the project area and from surrounding Gramaseveka divisions. Yet, no provisions were made to involve the settlers in project formulation (Leelasena, 1987:35), and a socioeconomic baseline study was conducted in the project area only after the initial project plans for the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters were **finalized**.¹²

Due to this limited assessment, the project plans made two questionable assumptions: 1) that the selected tanks were abandoned (except for one tank which was at that time already renovated by the Irrigation Department); and 2) that nearly all lands under the tanks were government owned, and could thus be claimed by the Land Commissioner's Department. In practice, 8 of the 18 tanks were working tanks (although in most cases it was possible to extend the command area) (Murthy, 1983),¹³ which had accommodated irrigable lands to about 250 cultivators. In addition, a number of command areas of abandoned tanks had been cultivated with rain-fed crops. Original cultivators could obtain lands under the project, only when they were able to voice their demand to the Gramaseveka Niladhari or to the Member of Parliament, directly. It was only in 1985, that a review mission recommended priority should be given to existing encroachers. This concerned the two final tanks of the Gonnoruwa cluster. The recommendation was followed up.

The HIRDEP considered it important that the settlers be involved in downstream development works as this would provide them with an income during the construction period and would make the settlers familiar with the system. Therefore, HIRDEP negotiated with the Irrigation Department in 1980, to give two contracts for channel cutting work to two Rural Development Societies. This proved (as mentioned in chapter 2) to be an unsatisfactory experience as the work remained unfinished, was of a bad quality and the project

¹²This study did not specifically focus on the selected tanks, but gives a rather general picture of socioeconomic aspects of the area.

¹³Murthy (1983) reviewed this aspect for the first two clusters only, and came to a number of five working tanks in these clusters. For the Gonnoruwa cluster I referred to other project reviews, and made my own observations.

beneficiaries were generally not involved in the works done. Thereafter, the Irrigation Department was reluctant to give any contracts to NGOs or to the beneficiaries of the project. Sarvodaya, which was involved in the project only after this experience, was unable, after several requests, to obtain similar contracts.¹⁴

The HIRDEP proposals and statements of objectives emphasize community participation as instrumental to successful project implementation. In 1981, Sarvodaya was appointed to address this issue in the project area, and this contribution is discussed in the following sections.

Objectives of the Involvement of Sarvodaya

Since 1979, the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD), which is the funding agency for HIRDEP, had been discussing with Sarvodaya a possible involvement in the Tank Settlement Project. In 1981, Sarvodaya presented a proposal for a one-year program in the Weliwewa and Mattala settlement clusters. The proposal gives the general objective of promoting 'people's participation' in the HIRDEP program, to initiate self-development programs following the Sarvodaya approach. The proposed target area included both the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters and 10 nearby villages outside the HIRDEP project area: a basic tenet of Sarvodaya is that development should take place in an entire area and should not be limited to specific locations within that area (e.g., the settlements).

In contrast to the initial proposal, the actual contract between NORAD and Sarvodaya outlines very broad responsibilities assigned to Sarvodaya; it does not mention the specific target group, nor the Sarvodaya approach, but states that Sarvodaya should help to strengthen existing village-level organizations and institutions. This last contribution is rather peculiar, because Sarvodaya normally does not work with existing village-level organizations, but as a rule

¹⁴As compensation, Sarvodaya obtained contracts for the construction of access roads in nearly all settlements.

establishes its own organizations. See Annex II for an organization chart of Sarvodaya.

During the first year of Sarvodaya involvement, the issue of the target group raised misunderstandings. Midway into the year, it was agreed that Sarvodaya would confine its activities to the two clusters only. Yet, at the end of the year, both NORAD and HIRDEP noted that Sarvodaya was not adequately involved with the settlers of the project tanks and had extended its program to the 10 outlying villages mentioned in the original Sarvodaya proposal. NORAD also questioned the approach used by Sarvodaya. It was not clear how the settlers would be organized and why Sarvodaya did not cooperate with the Rural Development Societies (the existing organizations implicitly referred to in the contract) which were at that time engaged in the channel-cutting works).

The President of Sarvodaya, expressed misgivings regarding the project to the District Minister of Hambantota: "...interference of the government will undermine the relative autonomy and freedom of action which [Sarvodaya] has enjoyed in the case of its other projects, and which it would like to preserve." (Agroskills Ltd., 1980:14).

In 1982, Sarvodaya submitted a proposal for three years (1981-1983) of involvement in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters. The proposal specified the general objectives as follows:

- * building up people's participation support, in the realization of the Integrated Rural Development Program carried out by the government in the villages of Weliwewa and Mattala areas with NORAD help;
- * formation and strengthening of the psycho-social infrastructure, to enable the settler families to adjust to the new living circumstances and work as a cohesive community for improved standard of living and quality of life;
- * satisfaction of the 'Ten Basic Human Needs', identified by Sarvodaya; and
- * building up of self-reliance among the villagers after a three-year period, so that they can carry out, on their own initiative, activities for the betterment of the community (Lanka Jathika Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya [Inc.], 19824).

These objectives were accepted by NORAD and HIRDEP, and were also integrated in the follow-up proposals, including a three-year extension for the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters (1984-1986) and a three-year involvement for the Gonnoruwa cluster (1983-1986).

The activities to be initiated by Sarvodaya, under the 1982 proposal to HIRDEP, include the following: training in vocational skills (education and community development); village group meetings; shramadanas, audiovisual presentations; savings and credit schemes; construction (latrines, community wells, bio-gas plants, and two model farms); and development of village centers in each settlement. These services do not deviate from Sarvodaya's normal community-development activities (Ariyaratne, 1981:11), and Sarvodaya had the freedom to decide on the actual services to be delivered to the settlers.

However, based on the rather unsatisfactory experiences in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters, NORAD insisted that with respect to the Gonnoruwa proposal, a number of activities be dropped (i.e., training, housing, health, community shops, and model farms) and that greater emphasis be given to shramadana and the savings and credit scheme. The planned activities became more strictly defined (also financially). It took more than two years before Sarvodaya and NORAD came to an agreement about the involvement of Sarvodaya in the Gonnoruwa cluster. This started in 1985.

The Sarvodaya Approach

The intervention approach proposed by Sarvodaya for the HIRDEP settlements was basically the same as their normal approach. However, the context was new; Sarvodaya usually works in existing communities, where the organization is invited by persons from that community (a villager, a monk, or a village association) (Moore, 1981) or by persons from outside (e.g., a local Member of Parliament). Now a government development project (HIRDEP) was inviting Sarvodaya to work in villages being established under the project.

Sarvodaya's approach focused on the total community, rather than on project beneficiaries only. In response to concerns expressed by NORAD and HIRDEP, they noted that since the project settlements are formed around a renovated

tank, the question whether groups are formed tank-wise or village-wise would not arise. Activities were initiated from two central villages in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters, where a divisional center and a Gramadana Center were put up, and from there sought to extend these activities to other established villages outside the project area. In theory, success of the community development in these established villages would radiate to the new settlements as well. The concern for maintenance of the irrigation facilities and agricultural development would be taken care of through shramadanas and organizing group activities for land clearing and land preparation.

Yet, in their quarterly reports, Sarvodaya continuously stressed that achievements were made toward unification of the settlers within the entire area, and not toward the settlements specifically. Shramadanas were especially valued for the attendance of outsiders – settlers from other **tanks** (in and outside the project area), high officials, and NORAD representation – and not for the achievements of the water users of a particular tank. This resulted in NORAD's suggestion, regarding the Gonnoruwa proposal, that people should not be brought from distant places to participate in shramadanas.

A major modification to the normal Sarvodaya approach was that it would engage community workers in each settlement (except for the very small ones), instead of the usual practice of one community worker per five villages. But the role of the community worker, the way he is linked up to the organization and the way he should approach the community were not adjusted to the different circumstances.

Initially, the community worker has to assess the needs of the settlers, by means of a survey, and to organize shramadanas. In practice, surveys were not carried out and a package of facilities to meet the needs of the settlers was designed by Sarvodaya itself. Facilities like the construction of community centers, the vocational-training program, and the preschool program were introduced in nearly every settlement. Other programs (e.g., well construction, latrines, and savings and credit) were introduced in a few settlements where Sarvodaya had established the best contacts, on the basis of availability rather than of assessments of needs. In most of these programs the role of Sarvodaya's divisional and district-level officers has been more important than the involvement of the community worker. Partly due to this limited contribution in the programs, the number of community workers actually working in the communities has been very small; in each of the Weliwewa and Mattala

clusters only three community workers (at most) have stayed, and in the Gonnoruwa cluster only one community worker was working in one settlement at the end of 1988.

The community worker, however committed he may be, is not well-equipped due to his youth, inexperience, and limited training, to initiate a sustainable development program (Moore 1981:27). Staff members of the divisional and regional centers also have limited capacity to guide these programs. Yet, equally important is the way the movement operates: norms, approaches, and programs are predetermined, and assumed to be effective for bottom-up development,¹⁵ while the style of management is top-down, with limited decision-making room assigned to the lower levels of the organization (i.e., the field-level worker).

During the course of project implementation, HIRDEP and NORAD staff have frequently noted the limited capacity of the Sarvodaya community workers. Sarvodaya stated in response, that they valued their workers' commitment to the people more than their formal qualifications. At the end of the Weliwewa and Mattala program in 1986, Sarvodaya observed that the frequent transfers of community workers and the lack of follow-up may have constrained the formation of active village groups. Furthermore, they admitted that, before the implementation of the program, Sarvodaya failed to organize staff and means; field staff was unaware of project policies; and project management and accounting had been insufficient.

Impact of Sarvodaya in the Project Area

Although Sarvodaya frequently stated that the objective of 'psycho-socio infrastructure' has been built in all communities (i.e., they reached the first and second stage in the development process initiated by Sarvodaya), only

¹⁵Judith Tendler (1982) argues that top-down intervention of an NGO may be very effective, as long as it suits the needs of the target group. But this is very much apart from the possible efforts of the NGO to appraise the needs and to involve the beneficiaries in a decision-making process to enhance a sustainable 'self development.'

one village had reached the targeted stage of self-reliance (third stage). This level is defined as a village organization having been developed, with the village contributing enough money to its Sarvodaya community fund to become a registered NGO (and therefore to become qualified to obtain loans from banks and from Sarvodaya).

One reason to which Sarvodaya attributed this limited impact, is that party politics played an important role in the community and inhibited communal activity. In reaction to this view, a HIRDEP/NORAD review mission wrote that party politics would not have played such an important role if the psychosocio infrastructure (awareness creation) had been built up effectively in the first place.

Sarvodaya's project activities have stopped in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters, since the project funding has ended. However, the Sarvodaya district office has stated that the usual activities will still continue. The preschool is still operative in the divisional centers and in one of the Weliwewa settlements. A loan scheme under the SEEDS (Sarvodaya Economic Enterprises Development Services) program has been launched in the area, and a certain number of shramadanas are supposed to be organized annually.

Voluntary shramadanas were organized in a number of tanks, in and outside the project area, to conduct minor repairs and maintenance activities to the bund and canals or to raise the spill of the tank. Sarvodaya reported that in the Weliwewa and Mattala clusters and surrounding area, 43 shramadanas were held during the six project years, of which 11 concerned repairs to irrigation systems. However, maintenance activities were not followed up on a regular basis. The water users instead sought assistance from the Drought Relief Program, since labor payments could be obtained. The Department of Agrarian Services did not support the Sarvodaya involvement in tank rehabilitation or maintenance activities. Apart from shramadanas, Sarvodaya has not initiated any other activities related to irrigation management.

One indirect impact of Sarvodaya's involvement is the supply of information to HIRDEP about the situation in the settlements. Sarvodaya prepared quarterly reports about their progress and problems in the field. Although HIRDEP found that the information supplied was not always accurate, other sources of information were scarce. Being a planning agency, HIRDEP was for the most part dependent on the implementing agencies for regular information supply about particular activities. While Sarvodaya supplied some useful information, most line agencies refrained from doing so at all.

Finally, there has been little or no impact concerning the interaction between Sarvodaya and the line agencies. While Sarvodaya stressed that they try to mediate between officers of the line departments and the settlers, both groups denied such an attempt.

Conditioning the Process

Although the Sarvodaya approach appeared not very conducive to its planned targets in the project area, the practical difficulties experienced during the implementation of the project were partly outside its scope. There were no formal ties between the government line departments and Sarvodaya, and there were no reasons for these departments to cooperate with Sarvodaya. Communications between HIRDEP and Sarvodaya were problematic, since Sarvodaya was formally responsible to NORAD, monitoring was done by NORAD, and relations were initially maintained at the level of Sarvodaya Headquarters in Colombo only. Not until 1983, did Sarvodaya develop implementing capacity at district level.

The decision to engage Sarvodaya in the Tank Settlement Project involved little appraisal about the actual requirements of the organization that would initiate community participation. No definition was attempted of the concept of community participation, either by HIRDEP or by NORAD, and as a result, it has been impossible to translate the concept into clear objectives and concrete programs. This makes it very difficult for HIRDEP to condition the activities of Sarvodaya in a way that they meet the envisaged project results.

Since the beginning of the project in 1981, HIRDEP stressed that Sarvodaya should initiate activities that were not provided for by the implementing line agencies. Yet, during the intervention process new priorities appeared, which gave new directions to what was actually expected of Sarvodaya. But in most cases, no conditions were created to facilitate achievement of these priorities. This can be shown by the following examples.

In the first year, HIRDEP cited improved water management as one of the major means to increase production, and asked Sarvodaya to assist the settlers with this component. Otherwise, HIRDEP would have to design a separate program for water management. In practice, HIRDEP made no special

arrangements to link the Sarvodaya activities to the Department of Agrarian Services, which was formally responsible for water management.

In 1983, Sarvodaya was asked (by NORAD) to extend its credit program to the Gonnoruwa cluster, because the current Sarvodaya savings and credit scheme was viewed as very successful. However, in 1984, HIRDEP launched its own credit program, implemented by the Department of Agrarian Services. Since an agreement on the involvement of Sarvodaya in the Gonnoruwa cluster was not reached until 1985, the credit issue was dropped.

In 1983, Sarvodaya was asked (by NORAD) to provide extension services for upland farming, drawing on the experience of the long-established model farm in one of the clusters. Six months later, HIRDEP commented that Sarvodaya should not engage in home-gardening training because the Department of Agriculture would be more competent to do that.

A last priority concerned the marketing of non-rice crops. Since 1987-1988, the cultivation of non-rice crops has been promoted in the settlements. Farmers have problems marketing these crops, an area under the responsibility of the Department of Agrarian Services. However, many HIRDEP and NORAD officers suggested that the most important contribution of Sarvodaya at the moment, would be to engage in the marketing of these crops.

The concept of shramadana which is a key element of Sarvodaya's approach to enhance people's participation, was not debated by HIRDEP or NORAD; Sarvodaya was allowed to pursue shramadana activities, as long as they were directed to the target group (water users and/or settler families). Yet it can be questioned whether shramadana is an adequate means to enhance self-development of a specific target group in a production-based field, for example, irrigation management by the users of an irrigation system. Irrigation management involves an important cost aspect when resources have to be contributed by the water users themselves: labor for regular maintenance and contributions in-kind or cash to remunerate the duties of the ditchtenders and the water users' representative, as well as for repairs to physical structures. Water users themselves decide whether certain costs are worth the advantage of such a controlled irrigation management. The cost aspect of Water Users' Associations has been very much underestimated (Meinzen-Dick, 1983) and as far as I know there has been no research in Sri Lanka on this aspect in minor irrigation systems.

Shramadana denies the economic rationale of irrigation management, as its fundamental assumption is that people should selflessly share thought and

labor. The assumption that *shramadana* is a traditional institution and is therefore suitable as a means to enhance peoples' involvement in any situation, is not based on an understanding of why peoples' involvement might be useful in different **circumstances**¹⁶ (Bruinsma, 1987).

Sarvodaya was to guide the beneficiaries to make use of the facilities provided by the project. **To** that end, water management, maintenance of the irrigation system, and development of the plots were identified as key points. Sarvodaya was expected to organize the water users in such a way that they would be able, after some time, to initiate these activities on their own: the water users and their Water Users' Associations would become self-reliant.

Self-reliance is a very crucial, but contradictory point, in the decision-making process. In the project it implies that the water user, as a final decision taker in the decision-making process, would take decisions that would lead to the envisaged project results, in particular, agricultural production. The contradictory point is that the project tries to condition this final decision making, without any bargaining between the water users and the other actors involved (HIRDEP, implementing line agencies, and Sarvodaya). The project stipulates how activities should be implemented, rather than seeking the commitment of the beneficiaries. The water users are not involved in the decision-making processes and therefore do not feel committed to the facilities provided.

The project beneficiaries do use the facilities, but not as envisaged. For example, the settlers usually do not cultivate during the dry (*yala*) season, since they feel there is a risk this will affect the water supply for the next wet (*maha*) season. As a result **of** the disappointing way the facilities are used and due to the limited contribution of Sarvodaya in this respect, HIRDEP has designed follow-up projects which assign greater responsibility to the implementing agencies, particularly in agricultural production and water

¹⁶**While** functionalist-oriented social scientists argued in the 1950s and 1960s that traditional institutions obstructed development, in the 1970s it was very popular to argue that as much use as possible should be made of such institutions in enhancing development. The popularity of the argument continues in the 1980s. Both arguments often suffer from the misunderstanding of why people actually make or do not make use of traditional institutions, and that this may differ in any situation.

management (the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Agrarian Services).

HIRDEP is commonly praised for its follow-up programs, as many other minor irrigation projects have not received this concern after rehabilitation. In general, the program has brought about a more efficient use of water as was evident in the relatively good production during the 1987-1988 wet season. On the other hand, these programs bring minor irrigation further from the objectives of self-reliance and cost control. The issue of follow-up by the Department of Agrarian Services is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Government Intervention in Small-Scale Irrigation Management

THE FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM

THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY of the irrigated lands in the Tank Settlement Project lagged behind HIRDEP's expectations. This was attributed to the following reasons: poor maintenance of the canal system, lack of awareness among the water users about efficient water-management techniques, and the lack of formal credit and other agricultural inputs (Project **Proposal, 1984**). The Water Management and Credit Program was designed in 1984 to address these problems. The implementing agency for the program is the Department of Agrarian Services. Furthermore, the program met the growing concern of NORAD about the maintenance of the facilities provided under the Tank Settlement Program (Dale, 1985).

The envisaged components of the Water Management and Credit Program are as follows:

- * water-management training for Farmer Representatives and officers of the Department of Agrarian Services and the Department of Agriculture;
- * the provision of water-management facilities in the selected tanks;¹⁷
- * credit for water users under the selected tanks, provided through the Agrarian Services Centers;

"As far as the Tank Settlement Project is concerned these rehabilitation works comprised adjustments to and repairs of the works done by the Irrigation Department.

- * the provision of facilities to strengthen the capacity of the Department of Agrarian Services;¹⁸ and
- * project coordination and management by HIRDEP.

The proposals for the Program stated that effective water management is hampered by the lack of adequate farmer organization at system level and that participation of water users is limited to the cultivation (or *kanna*) meeting, where participation only comprises comments on the defective structures and incomplete rehabilitation works. Still, the program does not make any special provisions to establish Water Users' Organizations, or to promote water users' involvement in decision making regarding improved irrigation management. The Department of Agrarian Services became responsible for 'organization of water users' to facilitate the implementation of the program activities, following the standard regulations of the Agrarian Services Act No. 58 of 1979. These regulations are described in the following section.

Formal Concept of Irrigation Management in Small-Scale Irrigation Systems

The Agrarian Services Act No. 58 of 1979 is the fourth agrarian law passed since 1947. Each subsequent law assigned new responsibilities regarding minor irrigation management; responsibilities have been shifted from the Irrigation Department to the Department of Agrarian Services which was established in 1958, when the second agrarian law, the Paddy Lands Act, became operative.¹⁹ The Act of 1979 assigns, besides many other responsibilities, the duties regarding rehabilitation, and operation and maintenance of minor irrigation systems to the Department of Agrarian Services. In addition, in 1983, an official note was released which announced

¹⁸In addition to this component, four other HIRDEP programs aim to strengthen the Department of Agrarian Services as well.

¹⁹Special attention to minor irrigation systems was given when there was a national policy to increase food production. Responsibilities were transferred to the Department of Agrarian Services as the Irrigation Department considered major irrigation more important than minor irrigation (Abeyasinghe, 1980:12,15).

that the Department of Agrarian Services may engage in construction works on minor irrigation systems as long as the total amount of the investment does not exceed Rs 50,000. For investments that exceed this amount official approval has to be obtained.

The Act specifies regulations regarding the cultivation meeting, and the duties of the Farmer Representatives. At the cultivation meeting, a representative of the Commissioner calls together a quorum of (owner) cultivators in that area (at least one third to one fourth must be present), to make rules relating to:

- * rice cultivation;
- * enforcement of customs related to cultivation;
- * timing of agricultural operations;
- * efficient management of irrigation water;
- * conservation and protection of the soil; and
- * other collective responsibilities for efficient use of land and for improvement of productivity.

At the cultivation meeting, a Farmer Representative may be selected from among the (owner) cultivators to assist the Cultivation Officer in matters relating to the protection of irrigation works, conservation of water, and other matters. The Farmer Representative (in Hamhantota District known as the *Yayanayake*) is entitled to a prescribed remuneration in-kind (rough rice) of 26.5 kg/ha, and has the legal power to order the (owner) cultivators to take steps, as he considers necessary, to enhance the collective responsibilities regarding irrigation and cultivation practices.

The Cultivation Officer has, according to the Act, the responsibility to:

- * look after all matters related to the cultivation of agricultural lands, including lands irrigated through minor and major irrigation schemes, and rain-fed lands;
- * look after all matters related to minor irrigation works and their maintenance and "...to prevent as far as practicable any act or omission which is contrary to any rule in force relating to irrigation or cultivators' rights or to established customs relating thereto ..." (p.33); and
- * take action to ensure that no damage will occur due to trespass of animals on agricultural lands and irrigation works.

The Cultivation Officer has to report offenses of persons regarding minor irrigation schemes to the Assistant Commissioner, who in theory can, after

inquiry, impose a fine, or bring the case to court at a later stage. However, as far as the Tank Settlement Project is concerned, legal action has only been taken for persons who refused to repay the loans under the Water Management and Credit Scheme.

The Act does not specify the duties of the Divisional Officer or of the Technical Officer both of whom work at Agrarian Services Center level.²⁰ In practice, the Divisional Officer decides the date of the cultivation meeting, is responsible for input supply, and monitors the activities of the Cultivation Officers under his jurisdiction. He has no direct responsibilities in the management of minor irrigation systems.

The Technical Officer assists in the selection of schemes for rehabilitation, does the surveying and preparation of estimates for the schemes, prepares contract payments, and supervises the contract work. He is also responsible, in cooperation with other staff of the Agrarian Services Center, for preparing timetables for water issues in the minor irrigation systems that come under the Water Management and Credit Program. The 18 tanks of the Tank Settlement Project come under 3 different Agrarian Services Centers. For each season HIRDEP decided which tanks may participate in the Water Management and Credit Program, depending on previous repayment records and prospects for cultivation in the following cultivation season?²¹

²⁰In Hambantota District, each Technical Officer is attached to two Services Centers at the moment. Technical Officers are supervised by Senior Technical Officer and by the District Engineer.

²¹For the first season of the program (maha 1984-1985) five tanks were selected, all from the Mattala cluster. Partly due to water problems, repayment records have been low, and the tanks have not been considered for selection later on. In 1988, the program concentrated, as far as the tanks of the Tank Settlement Project are concerned, on five tanks in the Gonnoruwa and Weliwewa clusters.

Involvement of the cultivation Officer in Irrigation Management

The direct involvement of the Department of Agrarian Services in water management has been limited to the number of tanks that were participating in the Water Management and Credit Program each season. Here, timetables have been issued (including start- and end-dates of water issues and schedules for rotation of water among field outlets), water-management innovations (e.g., dry sowing and closing the sluice at night) introduced, and water users have received cultivation loans (partly in-kind and **partly in money**).²² These activities can be considered as the services supplied by the department. The Farmer Representative is responsible for looking after the water-management regulations as expounded in the Cultivation Meeting.

One major 'water-management service' that is provided **by** the Cultivation Officer concerns the maintenance of the **tank** (including the cleaning of the tank bund, channel cleaning, and repairing the fence around the command area). For clearing of the channels and the repairs to the fence, the Cultivation Officer prepares a 'share list' (pangu list), which assigns a share in the maintenance activities to each (officially recognized) water user, proportional to the area cultivated. This list is given to the Farmer Representative at the cultivation meeting, where also the final date upon which all maintenance activities should be finished is announced. This **final** date is related to the timing of the cultivation season as envisaged by the Department of Agrarian Services.

Officially, any water user who does not accomplish his share of the maintenance works can be fined, through the Cultivation Officer and the Assistant Commissioner. In practice, in the Tank Settlement Program area, none of the persons who did not do his share was fined.

For the cleaning of the bund, shramadanas are organized by the Cultivation Officer and the Technical Officer together. A date is fixed and the Farmer

*The Agrarian Services Centers are the bankers of this credit scheme and the loan agents are the Cultivation Officers. Both the Cultivation Officers and the Divisional Officers receive an incentive payment for every loan that is repaid by the cultivators. These payments are considerable.

Representative is required to notify the water users about this date and to ask them to be present for the work. This activity is not highly structured. In one settlement tank, one of the officers required to be present was unable to come on the fixed date. As a result, they decided to advance the date without adequate notice to the water users. Only a few water users came to the shramadana, which then had to be rescheduled for a later date. As discussed above, shramadanas are also organized by other organizations, for example, under the Drought Relief Program and by Sarvodaya.

Effects on Decision-Making Processes Pursued by Water Users

The water-management regulations promoted by the Department of Agrarian Services (e.g., the suggested timing of the cultivation and certain agricultural practices like dry sowing) may not reflect the interests of the water users in a particular tank, or of certain water users within such a command area. Although the actual application of the regulations is seldom strict (e.g., in the settlement tanks, the Department of Agrarian Services officers allowed water issues for land preparation), the Farmer Representative may have difficulty in representing interests of both the water users and the Department of Agrarian Services. Especially with respect to the timing of the cultivation, problems arise when water users prefer to start cultivation early in the maha season, if there is enough water in the tank for land preparation. According to the water-management regulations as proposed in the Water Management and Credit Program, this is not allowed, so that water in the tank could be saved for a possible second crop during the yala season. As such, the services provided by the Department of Agrarian Services may conflict with the interests of certain groups of water users.

In general, every formal regulation that is expounded in the cultivation meeting can be viewed as an obstacle to self-reliance on the part of the water users. A number of regulations may seriously influence the decision-making process of water users in a minor irrigation system, for example, the formal duties of the Farmer Representative and his fixed remuneration; water users being defined as registered (owner) cultivators only; and the way maintenance is organized through the share list and the shramadanas (provided there is a real

objective to support the development of self-reliant minor irrigation management). The comparative effects of these regulations are not equal for all systems, depending on the way these regulations are received (or incorporated in the decision-making processes) by the water users. This can be illustrated by the following cases:

In one of the settlement clusters, a Cultivation Officer had the responsibility for monitoring irrigation management in three minor systems. During maha season 1987-1988, the schemes were part of the Water Management and Credit Program and were, due to this program, intensively monitored by the Cultivation Officer. Yet, the reactions to these regulations were different in all three tanks.

In the first system, the Farmer Representative appeared to transmit the decisions of the Cultivation Officer with success to the water users of the tank. In general, the water users were very satisfied with the procedures. Here, the water users appeared to have found ways to discuss the decisions of the Cultivation Officer or the Technical Officer and to incorporate them in their own decision-making processes. There is no insoluble divergence of interests, at least, not with respect to water use. They have many informal meetings, which may have been enhanced by the fact that most of the water users come from a village close to the tank (only 5 out of the 52 water users come from other places), and that many of them are related to each other.

In the second system, there appeared to be a division of interests between the original and the new settlers, which found expression in the conflicting interests regarding the actual use of the system. The Farmer Representative was unable to represent the interests of all water users, and officers from HIRDEP and the Department of Agrarian Services often interceded (at the request of the group that feared their interests were at stake). Several Farmer Representatives have resigned, under pressure from the different groups.

In the third system, there is no obvious division in opposing interest groups, but the water users (including the Farmer Representative himself) do not follow the decisions of the Cultivation Officer or the Technical Officer. They take water when they like, operating the sluices and field-channel offtakes themselves. The Cultivation Officer has warned the Farmer Representative several times about these malpractices and has told him he would be dismissed from his job if the situation continued. Yet, the water users do not seem to put pressure upon the Farmer Representative, neither do they support the Cultivation

Officer. It appears that the Farmer Representative, a rather weak personality, has been forwarded by an important person in the village with strong political connections. This person is known for his success in obtaining government assistance (e.g., food aid), and appears to condition the 'weak' decision-making process prevailing in this *tank*.

The crop results were roughly similar in all three tanks and were satisfactory in the views of both water users and the Department of Agrarian Services. Whereas in the first tank water has been scarce during this season, only the second tank contained enough water for a yala cultivation (1988) on a small part of the command area.

These cases demonstrate that it is impossible to consider certain regulations as inadequate, just because they do not suit a preconceived management model. The critical factor is rather the way in which the regulations are perceived by the water users, or put another way: the decision-making processes of which the regulations become part. This makes issuing of formal regulations in minor irrigation systems an unpredictable and unprofitable affair.

Goodell (1985:251) makes a similar point when she stresses that "...in understanding paternalism's effects on corporate categories and groups we must determine the latter's horizontal relations, not just the vertical dynamic." Still, in general, 'horizontal relations' are influenced by government intervention (the 'vertical dynamic')? **An** eventual stress on autonomous decision-making processes pursued by the water users in minor irrigation systems will have, within the abovementioned context, only relative effects; it cannot be seen separately from the services and regulations provided by the government, and from the historical and political process of government intervention.

²³The process of government intervention is different in any system, depending on the interaction between officers of the Department of Agrarian Services and water users, political influences, and the actual interest the officers of the Department of Agrarian Services have in the system. In the case of the Water management and Credit Program in the three mentioned systems, the Cultivation Officer had an equal interest in all three systems: full repayment of the provided loans. Therefore, it can be assumed that in this case the services provided by the Cultivation Officer were about the same in the three systems.

Consequences and Options for the Government Intervention Program

Without drawing a conclusion about positive or negative effects brought about by the Agrarian Services Act on the interests of the water users, we can conclude that the issuing of regulations is:

- * unpredictable in its consequences;
- * unreplicable with respect to irrigation management (as this requires, at the moment in Hambantota District, that the Water Management and Credit Program be applied in every minor irrigation system, which is expensive in itself and which would demand too much implementation capacity; and
- * sustaining dependency of the water users on the Department of Agrarian Services (rather than sustaining self-reliant Water Users' Associations).

If these effects are recognized by the Department of Agrarian Services, it might have to reconsider the regulations and services it provides, and attempt to adjust them to the decision-making process in specific minor irrigation systems. Water Users' Associations may have a role in helping shape the service delivery of the Department of Agrarian Services: for example, in determining the fixed remuneration of the Fanner Representative, deciding timing of the cultivation and of the cultivation meeting, and drawing up the 'share list' for communal labor activities. A Water Users' Association might even request the Department of Agrarian Services to turn over the ownership of the tank and the physical structures to the association, the water users, or the landowners.

On the other hand, the water users could request the Department of Agrarian Services to provide technical services, such as advice on rotation schedules; optimal height of the spill; canal network; and in case of more extensive physical rehabilitation, the Department of Agrarian Services might provide assistance in the actual construction. In this way, the Department of Agrarian Services could provide a flexible service. The present organizational setup of the Department of Agrarian Services in the field, comprising the Agrarian Services Center, the Technical Officer, and the Cultivation Officer, may be a good condition for such a service delivery.

Yet, the question remains whether water users are willing (or able) to engage in such a time-consuming decision-making process, and to mobilize their own resources, instead of being provided with all the facilities as is presently done. Goodell (1985:252) argues that beneficiaries welcome paternalistic assistance because: "...it places the blame outside themselves, and ... acquiring concrete benefits gives them the illusion of power." Moreover, adequate resource mobilization is complicated by water users having different interests in the irrigation system. More costs may have to be borne by those who will have a longer benefit in the system. Only water users themselves can decide on the way to divide the costs in a reasonable and sustainable way.

This argument refers, to a certain extent, to the costs the government expects the beneficiaries to shoulder upon implementation of a physical rehabilitation and thereafter. Yoder, Pradhan, and Martin (1988:15) propose for 'farmer-managed irrigation systems' (FMIS) in Nepal that "assistance to FMIS should be in the form of loans, not grants. The loans could be subsidized by the government, but the principle that the farmer organizations pay for a significant proportion of the investment is important. If this is the case, the organizations will set priorities according to what will really benefit them in terms of improved performance or reduced maintenance cost or both."

There is no comparable policy in Sri Lanka in this respect. It is generally felt that since large public investments are made to establish and rehabilitate major irrigation systems, it is unfair not to provide minor irrigation systems with these resources. Moreover, as explained in chapter 3, minor irrigation systems are often viewed as 'public-productive facilities' and are therefore suitable for government subsidies.²⁴

In Hambantota District, HIRDEP has recently launched a policy requiring that the beneficiaries of tank rehabilitation projects provide labor without compensation for the construction of downstream works (canal cutting). The main problem of this program is the way to organize and to motivate the water users to do the work, within the current context of subsidy programs provided to the rural area.

²⁴The term 'public-productive facility' applies to systems which are generally called 'village-irrigation systems' and not to systems which are called 'privately owned.' 'Privately owned systems' refer to systems which are operated by one owner or a few of them (or leaseholders) only.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions: NGOs as Intermediaries

EMPHASIS ON DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES MAINTAINED BY WATER USERS

A NGO WORKING through the activities of skilled and committed field workers can play an important role in guiding water users toward an autonomous decision-making process. It is important that the worker has an eye for the relevance (i.e., the rationale and economic interest) of a Water Users' Association for a certain minor irrigation system, as this determines what interests water users will have in the association (or already have if such an association **exists**).²⁵ This relevance is very much dependent on the different interest groups that claim an interest in the system, and on the expectations and related costs that an association would bring about.

The approach of the NGO needs to be directed toward a certain interest group (as opposed to the Sarvodaya approach in the ~~Tark~~ Settlement Project or the shramadana approach, in general). But, the NGO should not be involved in the actual decision making, and particularly not in the final decision making (e.g., ensuring through direct action that the **offtakes** are properly managed or that the construction of structures is properly done).

As a consequence, a difficult point in this approach may be that the field worker has to come to the community without having anything concrete to offer (e.g., project funding). One example that counteracts this statement, is the action research program of the MARGA Institute (the Sri Lanka Center for

²⁵**Here** a Water Users' Association is understood in a **very** broad sense: as a common decision-making process that affects the irrigation management.

Development Studies) in a minor tank in Kurunegala District (Wimaladharna, 1986:58-59). According to Wimaladhanna, the main features of the program are: a village worker who is researcher, educator, and catalyst; mobilization of local resources (including 'existing networks and leadership'); and low external input (the MARGA Institute contributed only Rs 68 for a steel gate and no government contributions took place) (ibid.:58). The success of the program may be partly a result of the pilot nature of the case; the whole program was only confined to this community.

Yet other programs where **NGOs** have been involved in minor irrigation development did incorporate a physical rehabilitation component with an extensive external input. For example, the program of the National Development Foundation emphasizes the decision-making process that would enhance the development of a self-reliant Water Users' Association. They required that this process take place in a satisfactory manner, or else the physical rehabilitation does not take place; in some cases they abandoned the program because they felt that they could not stimulate sufficient commitment of the beneficiaries (Secretary of the Foundation, personal communication). One may question what happens with the association after the rehabilitation **is** finished and after the field worker of the NGO is removed. If physical rehabilitation is **an** objective of the program, the NGO should be aware of its consequences for the decision-making process later on. However, it is difficult for a NGO to promote a policy of resource mobilization when national policies regarding minor irrigation systems are not conducive to such a policy, that is, provision of subsidies and Water Users' Associations lacking formal authority.

Government or Nongovernment Organizations as Intermediates?

Why exactly is a NGO suitable for this task? As **is** clear from the Hambantota situation, none of the government-sponsored **NGOs** were involved directly in irrigation management, though their efforts influenced irrigation management in the **long** run (see chapter 3). The present NGOs in Hambantota District, are mostly government initiated (national NGOs), and operate in line with the

government strategy to supply the rural areas with welfare and subsidy programs, rather than to shape these programs.

The national NGOs involved in improving actual irrigation management (e.g., National Development Foundation) are clearly different: they maintain community workers in the field, and as an umbrella organization they function relatively independently of the government (at least with respect to finances). But in many other respects these NGOs are quite diverse, for example, in terms of objectives, their ways of operation, and their autonomies with respect to the donors and the government.

If the NGO is primarily an umbrella organization for the field-level workers, this role might also be carried out by a government department. For example, HIRDEP is the umbrella organization for an extensive number of 'social mobilizers' who work with certain target groups in the district. These target groups are identified economically; water users are not included in the target groups, because they had been identified **as** being relatively well-off and receiving considerable government attention in comparison with other groups. However, it has been suggested that social mobilizers be engaged to establish self-reliant Water Users' Associations in the irrigation systems under the Tank Settlement Project. This idea has not been implemented since, being a planning agency, HIRDEP does not want to increase its implementing capacity further.

There **are** many examples of government organizations that have been directly or indirectly involved in **the** organization of water users (see Uphoff, 1986 for a review), but this issue lies beyond the scope of this paper.

A further issue which is beyond the present scope of discussion is the question of what sort of NGO is suitable to enhance decision-making processes that would contribute to self-reliant Water Users' Associations. The answer will differ in each case, depending on: the actual objectives of the NGO (or government organization); the decision-making process a NGO is able to bring about; and the field of decision making in which the NGO is asked to participate, depending on the way the intervention process is conditioned.

Emphasis on Process Management

A last issue concerns the relation between the NGO and the technical line departments (e.g., the Department of Agrarian Services). The National Development Foundation appears to have a constructive relationship with the Department of Agrarian Services (Perera, 1988), while in other cases (e.g., the Sri Lanka Freedom from Hunger Campaign Board, the MARGA, and the Sarvodaya involvement in the Tank Settlement Project) there have been no direct relations between the NGO and the Department of Agrarian Services. This may have been a deliberate strategy of the organization, but may also result from an unsuccessful conditioning of the intervention process. If the program has an objective to incorporate technical line departments in service delivery to water users, a 'process manager' may be necessary. A process manager might be able to discuss, and to some extent negotiate, the objectives of the program with the technical department, initiate ways to condition the process, and mediate among the water users, the NGO, and the department, during the intervention process.

Currently, the role of process manager is often assumed by the agency through which funds are channeled (e.g., HIRDEP in the Tank Settlement Project) as the services of the line departments can usually be expected only if additional funds are granted. One can consider what effects this has on the duration and sustainability of the program: what organizational changes can be expected from a department if the financial provisions are only temporary? Again, this question points to the need to reconsider the kind of services that can be provided to water users of minor irrigation systems in a sustainable way.

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Annex I. NGOs Involved in Irrigation Development, Sri Lanka.'

Name of NGO	Place	Minor/major
Nation Builders' Association	1) Nagadeepa Mahawewa scheme 2) Pimburettewa scheme	major major
(both projects started in 1987 and are ongoing)		
National Development Foundation	1) Kurunegala District (phase I) 2) Puttalam Dismct (phase II)	minor minor
(phase I started in 1984, and phase II will start in 1988)		
Sri Lanka Freedom from Hunger Campaign Board ²	various districts (Anuradhapura, Matale, Monaragala, Puttalam and Trincomalee)	minor
(program started in 1978 and is ongoing)		
National Heritage Foundation	various programs, 1) Minipe scheme 2) Kurunegala District	major major minor
(program in Minipe scheme is ongoing and program started at Kurunegala District in 1976 has ended)		

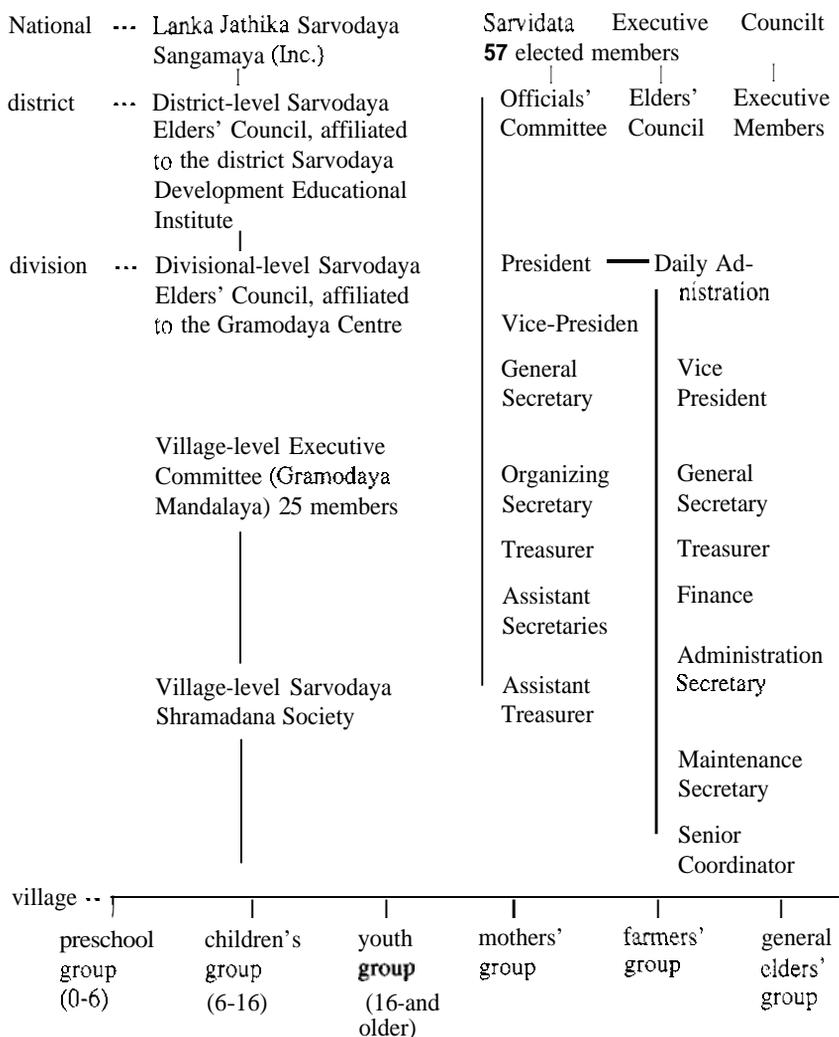
'This annex does not pretend to give a complete picture of all NGOs involved in irrigation development in Sri Lanka.

'Officially, the Board is not a NGO, **but** is attached to the Deapanment of Agriculture. Since finances come from foreign NGOs and the Board works less with line departments than many other NGOs it is viewed upon as an NGO.

Name of NGO	Place	Minor/major
International Human Assistance Program (program is ongoing)	Kimbulwana Oya scheme	minor
Community Aid Abroad (program is ongoing)	Monaragala District	minor
Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement (started in 1981 and is ongoing)	Hambantota District	minor and major

Both the Sri Lanka Centre for Development Studies (MARGA) and the Agrarian Research and Training Institute (ARTI) have been involved in irrigation development in Kurunegala District (Wimaladharmasiri, 1986), but these institutes are not regarded as NGOs.

Annex II. Organization Chart of the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement?



'Source: A.T. Ariyaratne, 1981:12.