



A sociological perspective on the laksanda sevana (third stage) housing scheme project

Thilakarathna, K.A.A.N
Attorney-at-Law

Abstract

The concept of development in sociology has evolved throughout the time and many development projects that are implemented sometimes lack a clear understanding of these sociological perceptions. Development goals of a particular country will be unique to its available resources and needs. As a developing country Sri Lanka is no exception to the above situation and in particular when one considers the development goals of the country housing is a very important part of its development process. Many government give priority to housing schemes especially in urban areas as sustaining a large number of people in a relatively small amount of space. The number of housing projects that are implemented in the urban areas themselves have significant sociological impacts on a given society both internally and externally. It becomes important to evaluate such development projects from a sociological view point in order to comprehend its sociological impact and to help eradicate any adverse effects created by such projects.

Keywords: *Development Sociology, Sociology of Development, Housing Schemes, Government Policy, Economic Development*

Introduction

“The beauty we can see in new roads and the stunning high storied buildings should also be seen in the lives of the people living in Colombo. Though physical development entertains the eyes, that is useless if it is unable to beautify the lives of the people”

-President Maithripala Sirisena-

As a developing country, Sri Lanka faces many challenges in its quest for development. The development itself has developed as a concept and it means much more than the economic development of a country and includes both the environmental and social development as well. Among the many challenges faced by the Sri Lankans as a whole, housing is a major challenge for all as it is considered as an essential commodity. This is even more complex in the urban areas compared with rural areas due to the lack of space available for housing in the urban areas and especially in the sub-urban areas of Colombo where the population density is quite high. Colombo as a district holds up to 11.5% of the country's population and its population density for a one square kilometer is 3438 which is nearly twice as much as its closest rival, the Gampaha district which has 1719 according to the statistics released by the census department for the year 2012.

Housing has been at the center of attraction for all the governments that have ruled the country. It has been a pinnacle in their election manifestos. Every government have had a housing plan of their own. One of the most famous of those projects is the ‘Gam Udawa’ project that was launched in 1980s to provide shelter to low income people. In the ‘Mahinda Chinthana’ manifesto of the previous president, Mr. Rajapaksha also put emphasis on several housing projects, where the policy was that every family in Sri Lanka must own a home (Mahinda Chinthana). The current government which is headed by the current president, Mr. Sirisena, has also put emphasis on the importance of housing and in his 2014 election manifesto he declared that, he will bring up ‘an urgent programme will be immediately started to provide houses to people without a shelter’ (Manifesto P21).

In the above back drop, this paper will discuss on the socio-economic and environmental aspects related to the 'Laksanda Sevana (Third Stage)' housing scheme project from a sociological point of view with emphasizing the advantages and disadvantages of the project from a sociology of development perspective. The reason for selecting the above project is the geographical location of the project which is situated near 'Kolonnawa' where I have been living whole my life.

Methodology

This study is conducted using both basic qualitative and quantitative methods. The study itself uses an extensive set of existing data and literature which are gathered from the relevant reports, documents, circulars, newspaper articles and online articles that have been released and written on the subject. Since the particular development project that has been selected in this study has stemmed from a one huge major development project that was initiated nearly six-seven years ago, most of the literature that was released between the time periods has been studied in the findings of the study.

As a means of finding the reality or the truth from the people themselves a total number of five households were selected where five separate interviews were conducted to get the real hand experience and exposure regarding the development project. Though the sample number may not be adequate but the number had to be restricted due to the time constraint that I had with regard to the study. Each interview was conducted in person and for ethical reasons and as for the requests made by the persons whom I have interviewed, their identities are kept unanimous in the study.

The study uses primary or very basic statistical methodologies in analysing the primary and secondary data that has been gathered. The main reason for this lies in the convenience for an ordinary reader understanding about the study in simple language. Therefore, software's such as SPSS are not in analysing the data. The study is limited in its use of primary data as most of the secondary data that is available has been found adequate for use regarding the study. Most of the primary data that has been gathered is also limited in numbers as mentioned earlier due to the time constraints.

Results

The low-income population of Colombo has been identified under different categories in a city - wide survey carried out in 1997/1998, the results of which are shown below: The 2001 survey carried out by the Colombo Municipal Council and SEVANATHA has identified a total of 77,612 families living in 1,614 low-income settlements in the city. It was estimated by many people and organizations that the total population of these settlements was nearly a half of the city population but many communities enjoy the comfort of improved housing conditions and services. Therefore, it was difficult to categorize all the identified low-income settlements as being slums. Slums including tenement gardens came into existence in Colombo with the expansion of export trade associated with the rubber boom (during the Korean War in 1953) after the Second World War.

The character of Colombo changed in keeping with the new economic demands for warehousing, workers accommodation and the road network improvement. The city core became more congested and the city elite moved out into more spacious residential areas in the suburbs. The central part of Colombo became a predominantly low-income residential area with many slums, and the northern and eastern parts of the city were occupied by shanties. The Laksada Sevana housing scheme comprising of housing units built at a cost of rupees 1,584 million in which each house comprises of a living room, two bedrooms, kitchen, balcony and sanitary facilities and where each unit is valued 04 million rupees was handed over to the occupants who were living in either shunts or slums. From a development perspective it is directly related to developing the infrastructure of a country and Sri Lanka being a developing country its infrastructure will have to be developed for it to become a developed country. One characteristic of a developing country is that it has to spend a lot of money in order to develop its infrastructure where Sri Lanka is no exception.

One has to wonder then, what are the benefits of a housing scheme where the total spent is nearly 16 billion rupees for providing 294 families a place to live in and how does this bring about development. As disused earlier, development cannot be measured by traditional economic measurements such as gross domestic product and per capita. In the final analysis it has to be the end result of raising the quality or the standards of living among the people that matters. These houses certainly provide a place for these people to upgrade their living standards. When I interviewed some of the families who have made shelter here, five families to be precise, they were very happy with the

status of their new home, where some of them, four families exact, have lived in either shanty's or slumps'. For them this was like a heaven with running water and electricity with a roof that did not leak. They were very satisfied with the space they have got with two bed rooms and a living room when all they had earlier was just one room where all the family members slept, ate and dwelled. The sanitation facilities was far better than what they had earlier where their use of hygiene was almost non-existent. These houses are provided for these people without charging any amount from them. However, a cost recovery mechanisms for infrastructure services are necessary to achieve sustainable interventions. But due to the poor, as they cannot afford even the minimum level of charges, the participants generally advocated alternatives such as projects that incorporate targeted cross-subsidization, innovative program designs, or income-generating activities. And this project was one such, where in order to uplift the living standards of these people all the associated cost of the project was born by the government itself without charging a penny from these people. The housing complex is also equipped with recreational centers such as an open garden, children's playing area and a library. All of these helps the individuals who dwell in these residents.

The people who came into these houses had great trouble with mosquitos and of the bad smell coming from their surrounding environment. In these houses though the mosquito problem was still bothering them, the unpleasant smell has gone away. For the first time in their lives now they have permanent addresses, and all of the families that I have interviewed had applied for new identity cards with the current address. As for the most living in these households their lives have been changed for the better.

However, not all of the people that got houses in this development project were that happy. The main issue they raised was the fact that they have lost their way of life as they have to move to place where they have to live in a five to six store building with no earth touching their feet. The concept of condominium property was something totally alien for them. They were mostly complaining about the businesses that they had to give up as they had to move. Though these businesses were informal in nature, it was something that they were very much use to and have being doing for some time and therefor they have become very good at them. The businesses they were talking about though they were small it was able to bring foods into their tables.

On the other hand several other concerns were raised by these people. Including the fact that these houses were given not to families that were living in shanty's or slumps but was given on the basis of households that were located there. In many cases there is more than one family living in a house, which may either have more than one floor or may have been expanded over time. The policy is not one apartment for each family but one apartment for one house – therefore households with multiple families only have the option of living together in a 450 sq. ft. apartment or seek alternate housing. Another complaint was that in order to get a house in the complex, one had to prove their title to the dwelling that they had in the suburban areas where they were brought from and this could not be done by most of the people who lived in those places. Those who do not have full title also have a number of rights that accrue to them under the law of the land. However, this development project has totally neglected those rights. Another major issue not only related to this development project, but with regard to most of the development projects involving housing is the lack of communication between the people to whom the houses are given and the government agencies that implement these programmes. None of the communities have been consulted on the design or their own needs. Relocation in such high-rises has adversely affected many kinds of informal home-based businesses. Residents further stated that while they were agreeable to giving up their homes to beautify Colombo, they wanted a fair solution by the urban development authority which compensated them adequately in kind or cash for their homes as well as their business premises, instead of the small apartments that they have gotten under the housing project.

The 'Ida denna' promotional video of the urban development authority shows a young child rudely awaking in her flooded shanty from a dream in which she is playing happily among flowers and butterflies in Colombo's newly beautified landmarks such as the Racecourse and Waters Edge and flitting into in her beautiful new home in an apartment complex. The video ends with the children coming out of tiny huts made of wooden boards, jumping over puddles and broken bricks, making their way to school accompanied by a Sinhalese song that likens the journey from shanty to shiny new apartment to a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis. The reality is that the Racecourse or Waters Edge are not spaces made for Colombo's poor. And the shiny new apartments are a façade that mask the

burden of debt, economic dispossession and other hardships suffered by those forcibly moved. Contrary to the urban development authority's propaganda, for thousands of the poor residents of Colombo the Urban Regeneration Project is actually a nightmare they can't wake up from.

Discussion

Article 1 of the United Nations' Declaration states that the right to development "is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. The human right to development also implies the full realization of the right of peoples to self-determination, which includes, subject to the relevant provisions of both International Covenants on Human Rights, the exercise of their inalienable right to full sovereignty over all their natural wealth and resources." (Frequently Asked Questions on the Right to Development Fact Sheet No. 37 UNITED NATIONS, 2016). The great West Indian economist and Nobel Prize winner Arthur Lewis defined development as the enlargement of the range of people's choices. However, a discussion on development has to be compared with underdevelopment and under development. Why do some people have so little food, shelter and no running water, and why is this deprivation so widespread among some parts of the universe compared to others (Webster, 1990). We can ask or even envisage whether the advantages and disadvantages that people experience are not only a reflection of processes at work within their own countries but also a result of the relationship between different countries. Most of the colonial countries, that is to say most of the countries that were colonies of the European countries before the turn of the 20th century are still considered countries that are in the 'developing' stage and this assumption is made on a comparison with the standards that have been introduced by the western countries themselves who ruled these countries for the most part during the last few centuries. Most of these countries which were colonies were deemed undeveloped upon an evaluation of its economical strength and prosperity in the earlier times. Where such factors as gross domestic product and per capita was used as standards of measuring development. However, in the modern discourse on development it is understood as 'making a better life for everyone. In the present context of a highly uneven world in terms of income, a better life for most people still means, essentially, meeting basic needs: sufficient food to maintain good health; a safe, healthy place in which to live; affordable services available to everyone; and being treated with dignity and respect. These needs are basic to human survival. After meeting them, the course taken by development is subject to the material and cultural visions of different societies (Peet & Hartwick, 2015).

Development occupies the center of an incredibly powerful semantic constellation...at the same time, very few words are as feeble, as fragile and as incapable of giving substance and meaning to thought and behavior (Esteva 1992). The concept of development in modern times used or deployed more and more unthinkingly in public discourse, often being put up as a slogan, (and specially used by governments to thrive in power as one of their main objectives to do) or as a signifier of support for something conceived or straightforwardly thought of as being good (Payne & Phillips, 2010). The world has become accustomed to thinking of itself as divided into developed and developing countries. That the developing countries should develop further is almost universally desired by their own peoples and considered desirable by all most everybody else. But anyone who ask articulate citizens in developed or developing countries what they mean by this desirable objective "development" would get a great variety of answers. Higher living standards, a rise in per-capita income, increase in productive capacity, mastery over nature, freedom through control of man's environment, economic growth but mere growth, growth with equity, elimination of poverty, basic needs satisfaction, catching up with the developed countries in technology, wealth, power and status, economic independence, self-reliance, scope for self, fulfilment for all, liberation, the means to human ascent, development in the vast literature on the subject, appears to have come to encompass all most all facets of the good society, every man's road to utopia (Arndt, 1987).

Arndt further observes that, 'the meaning of development, it was said, had been misconceived. Economic growth was not enough. More important criteria were what happened to poverty, to unemployment, to equality. Better still, in the view of some, priority should be accorded to the satisfaction of basic needs. This calls for much greater attention to distributional equality and other

social objectives evoked little response in third world countries, where political and social elites were understandably apt to view it as a threat to their own positions, or at any rate as unwarranted interference to their internal affairs, a new sort of cultural imperialism. Urbanization, i.e. the process whereby large number of people congregate and reside in big cities or in urban areas, gradually increases. Urban areas are generally characterized as relatively dense settlements of people and they are expanding as never before.

Nowadays, more than 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas and demographic projections show that by 2025 the population growth of urban areas will constitute about 90% of all world population growth (Polyzos, 2012). Large cities, towns and even small neighborhoods do not spring up overnight. They are the result of careful planning by civil and design engineers, project managers, architects, environmental planners and surveyors. The integration of these disciplines is known as urban development. Urban development is a system of residential expansion that creates cities. Residential areas are the primary focus of urban development. Urban development occurs by expansion into unpopulated areas and/or the renovation of decaying regions. Population growth in major cities requires expansion. Urban developers look to neighboring natural territories to build needed housing and recreational areas. Natural expansion is the creation of residential areas in undeveloped or underdeveloped regions. Natural expansion requires the destruction of the wilderness. However, urban planners must work closely with environmental protection agencies to ensure that protected wildlife and plant life are not destroyed. Urban areas are geographical points of problems and potentials. New economic dynamics, technological, social and cultural innovations occur and new opportunities appear. Additionally, social inequalities and environmental problems get worse in urban areas. In general, the increased urbanization creates both new opportunities or challenges and simultaneously new problems for human life. The issue of the urban poor is intellectually linked with early sociological works on the conditions of the emerging working class. The nineteenth-century analysis by Marx and Engels set in motion debates and controversies in both academic and political spheres that continue unabated over a hundred years later. Society was increasingly polarized into contending classes – on the one hand the capitalists, and on the other, the productive workers. The industrial based capitalists, the bourgeoisie, became the new ruling class. During the 1970s studies of less developed world generally shifted their attention towards what is commonly known as a 'political economy' approach. Poverty was no longer perceived as something attributed to an individual person, city or country and not remediable by national governments using technical planning processes. Rather poverty was seen to be a consequence of a historical process of incorporation into the world capitalist system (Hossain, 2011).

Urbanization is a problem or an issue for both the developed and the developing world. Urban centres are increasing in size and number. At the beginning of the last century, there were only 11 megacities in the world with populations of more than 1 million each. By 2030, UN predicts that there will be more than 500 cities in the world with populations of more than 1 million each; more than half of these cities will be in Asia. The gravity of urbanization and its impact on human habitat in the Third World had been anticipated even in the 1960s by a few eminent scholars and a landmark book was published on the subject like Abrams. On a call from then South Asian Prime Minister Premadasa in 1980 the UN declared 1986 as the 'Year of Shelter' and then went further to launch a global campaign under the slogan 'Shelter for all by the year 2000'. A UN agency subsequently predicted that during the period 1990-2020 the bulk of the world's population will be urbanized; that Asian cities alone will contain more than half that population; and this will mean that 1.5 billion people will be added to the urban centers of Asia. In addition, the peri-urban areas in many big cities are rapidly expanding. In extremely populated areas natural expansion is not always possible. If a large city is surrounded by other cities, there is no place for the larger city to expand into. In this case urban planners look to renovate decaying neighborhoods, obsolete industrial districts, and other unused spaces. On a much larger scale than natural expansion, urban renovation requires the compliance of citydwellers. City planners and urban developers carefully consider the needs of the population in renovating urban areas.

The city of Colombo and its suburbs are the most populated in the country and the effects or the negative effects of urbanization are felt within the area. The average population density of the city according to the first available records in 1871 was 40 people per hectare. This has reached up to 105 people per hectare in 1940. The current density is 172 people per hectare (2001 census). (Department

of Cen-sus and Statistics, 2001) This figure indicates only the city-wide average population density. However, there are some Municipal Wards, which represent higher densities such as 974 people per hectare. According to the first census of population in 1871, Colombo had a population of 98,847 people. This figure became slightly more than doubled by the 1911. The current city population according to the 2001 population census was 642,163 people. The last census carried out in 2011 has revealed that the population of Colombo is 752,993. The unique feature of population growth in Colombo has been its slow growth. The annual population growth rate has been varying between 0.5 and 3.7 in the recent past (Department of Census and Statistics, 2001). The following table depicts the area, population density and growth rate in Colombo from 1871-2001.

| Census | Extent (Ha) | Population | Density (P/Ha) | Growth Rate |
|--------|-------------|------------|----------------|-------------|
| 1871 | 2448.6 | 98,847 | 40 | . |
| 1881 | 2448.6 | 110,509 | 45 | 1.18 |
| 1891 | 2448.6 | 126,825 | 52 | .8 |
| 1901 | 2720.6 | 154,691 | 56 | 2.201 |
| 1911 | 3091.1 | 211,274 | 68 | 3.66 |
| 1921 | 3350.3 | 224,163 | 73 | 0.61 |
| 1931 | 3368.4 | 284,155 | 84 | 2.67 |
| 1946 | 3438.4 | 362,074 | 105 | 1.83 |
| 1953 | 3593.9 | 425,081 | 118 | 2.48 |
| 1963 | 3710.4 | 511,639 | 138 | 2.04 |
| 1971 | 3711.0 | 562,430 | 152 | 1.24 |
| 1981 | 3711.0 | 587,647 | 158 | 0.45 |
| 2001 | 3729.0 | 642,163 | 172 | 0.45 |

Source: Centenary Volume, CMC, 1963 and Urban Development Authority, 1996

Four main types of slums have been identified in Colombo (Upgrading Steps – Ministry of Local Government Housing and Construction, 1984) Slums: Old deteriorating tenements or subdivided derelict houses. The slum tenements, built mostly of permanent materials, are very often singled roomed and compactly arranged, in back to back rows. The occupants have a definite legal status of occupancy. Shanties: Improvised and unauthorized shelters, constructed by the urban squatters on state or privately-owned land, without any legal rights of occupancy. The areas are badly serviced and very often unsanitary. Unserviced Semi-urban Neighborhoods: Badly serviced residential areas in the suburban areas of Colombo and secondary towns. One difference from the squatter areas is that residents of these settlements have definite legal titles and the plot sizes are relatively larger than the shanties.

Labour Lines or Derelict Living Quarters: These are derelict housing areas belonging to the local authority or government agencies occupied by temporary or casual labourers. These settlements are in unsanitary and derelict conditions due to lack of maintenance over a period of long time. The following table depicts distribution of law income populations by types.

The most common slums in Colombo are the inner-city slums and the shanties. Slums are located on high-lands in the old parts of the inner-city areas. Shanties are mostly located in the periphery of city on road and canal reservation lands that are mostly low-lying areas liable to frequent floods. Other types of slums are scattered throughout the city. In combating urbanization and over population in the suburbs of Colombo the government under the Metro Colombo urban development

project which aims to complement the ongoing urban regeneration programs of the Government of Sri Lanka by reducing the physical and socioeconomic impacts of flooding in the Metro Colombo Region and improving priority local infrastructure and services. The Project area will comprise four urban local authorities: the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC), Dehiwela-Mount Lavinia Municipal Council (DMLMC), Sri Jayawardenapura-Kotte Municipal Council (SJ-KMC), and Kolonnawa Urban Council (KUC). Under the above Laksanda Sevana housing scheme was introduced by the government to combat and tackle some of the issues related to the above situation.

| Low-income Settlement Type | No of Settlements | No of Housing Units |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Slums | 1,071 | 25,500 |
| Shanties | 183 | 13,313 |
| Low-cost Flats | 103 | 8,950 |
| Relocated Housing | 97 | 14,814 |
| Old Deteriorated Quarters | 31 | 2,575 |
| Unplanned Permanent Dwellings | 21 | 870 |
| Total | 1,506 | 66,022 |

Source: Survey Report of Urban Low-income Settlements of Colombo, STP, 1997/98

Conclusion

Though the discourse on development has changed over the course of time, the attitudes of the people, especially with the ones who wheels the political power and agenda has not changed in Sri Lanka. Development from a Sri Lankan perspective has still remained mostly restricted to buildings and roads hence showing the fact that we are still a developing country which we have been for a long time and which most likely be what we would be for a long time to come if the situation remains the same. The Laksanda Sevana housing project looks like a great development project from the outside where it purports to enlighten and enhance the living standards of its residents. From a development point of view from the surface of it it looks great. But only a few people get the opportunity of enjoying the fruits of the project. Especially due to legal implications and requirements the people who are the most-needly are left for stranded, they are worst of from their previous situations, not only are they deprived of an opportunity of coming to the housing complex, they have also lost the very place they used to live in. It is like a double jeopardy punishment for them. When implementing any development project, listening to the people who are going to be affected both positively and adversely needs to be consulted in order to achieve the developmental goals of a given development project. However, from a Sri Lankan context this is non-existent. Development should be made on the people according to their needs and it should not be done upon conceived or perceived ambitions of the ruling government as a means of endeavouring their political agenda.

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