

Excluding the Worthy: The Need of Marginalized Groups in the Decision Making Process”¹

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Abstract

Governance is meaning to the process of decision making and the process of implementing or not implementing those decisions. Generally, both making and implementing decisions are relying with the social, economic and political power groups prevailing in the society. As results, a large number of groups and individuals have been excluded both from the decision making and implementation process of development interventions. They could be marginalized socially, economically or culturally. This process has led to examine socio-economic and cultural factors that cause exclusion of marginalized groups from the mainstream decision making process in order to explore possibilities and ways and means of including those marginalized in the decision making process. The present study has clarified the conceptual framework on the governance and social exclusion from a sociological point of view by reviewing the relevant literature. Then, the paper has discussed possible ways and means of including the marginalized in the decision making process with particular focus in to the scenario in Sri Lanka. The paper has concluded with its findings that there are no adequate mechanisms for marginalized to participate in the decision making process in Sri Lanka. Hence, it suggest need for regularizing participatory systems where marginalized are included in both decision making and implementation process.

Key Words: Decision Making Process, Governance, Marginalised Groups, Social Exclusion

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1) Introduction

Governance can be defined in various ways depending on the context in which it applies. It generally implies involvement of a significant number of persons in determining steps to be taken by the concerned people themselves in their effort at their development and other essential needs. Many have revealed that in most of the cases, communities do not have proper representation structures or processes that create a space for them to engage in the decision making systems. Some development anthropologists have pointed out that the traditional system existed in certain parts of the world has provided means of representing needs of all the community members and to make collective decisions and they have been either eliminated by the new governance systems or faced a natural death due to increasing complexities of the societies. This elimination or natural death has resulted in a situation that the real needs and aspirations of the communities are not represented in the decision making processes that needs to be taken into account in local development efforts. The very same process has resulted in most of the development interventions becoming ineffective and unsustainable.

The above scene is not an exception in the case of Sri Lanka. There are recorded historical evidences of the existence of traditional participatory governance systems in the pre-colonial era. However, presently, the country is challenged by nonexistence and lack of more participatory and inclusive governance system that allow for local communities to take part in the decision making processes that affect their own development. Lack of participatory and inclusive governance system largely contributes to increasing poverty levels and social injustice as well.

The present study has got twin objectives. The first is to clarify the conceptual framework on the governance and social exclusion. The second is to look into possible ways of including the marginalized in the decision making process.

This paper is mainly based on literary sources and over two decades of experiences of the researcher in the field of development both locally and internationally. The study has focused the context relevant to the Sri Lanka while drawing examples from other countries. The paper has discussed and defined the concepts of governance, social exclusion and poverty as an entry points and then explained the construction of key related concepts e.g social exclusion and marginalised and social exclusion and social stratification. Once these basic concepts

were clarified, the present scenario of Sri Lanka with regards to the decision making process has been explained. The final part of the paper has been devoted to made conclusions and highlights policy implications as per the findings of the study.

It is pertinent here to briefly clarify governance and social exclusion before venturing into examine the nexus between social exclusion and social stratification.

2) Governance, Social exclusion and Poverty

Governance is a multi-dimensional concept. It has social, political and economic dimensions. “Governance can be seen as the pattern of structure that emerges in a socio-political system as a common result or outcome of the interacting intervention efforts of all involved actors. This pattern cannot be reduced to one actor or group of actors in particular” (Rhodes, 2003).

This definition highlights the involvement of varies kinds of actors in the governance structures. It is also emerge within the socio-political system where the all involved actors are interacting in the process of governance.

The idea of social exclusion has conceptual connections with well-established notions in the literature on poverty and deprivation, and has antecedents that are far older than the specific history of the terminology might suggest (Sen, 2000). Accordingly, social exclusion has close links with the concepts of poverty and deprivation. People in the society is excluded on the basis of their level of wealth either economically or socially e.g the knowledge and power relations.

Although, the social exclusion has some poverty related dimensions, it does not only limit to poverty. “Social exclusion is a broader concept than poverty, encompassing not only low material means but the inability to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characterizations alienation and distance from mainstream society (Duffy, 1995).

As per this definition, it is clear that poverty is only one dimension of social exclusion; it is also about inability to participate effectively in socio-economic and political life due to various factors including poverty. This definition also suggest the need of defining poverty in relative terms.

On the other hand, the concept of social exclusion has been explained in contrast to the poverty. "Social exclusion is first and foremost a multidimensional conception of disadvantage. It transcends the narrow conception of material poverty, whether conceived in terms of income or the fulfillment of basic needs. Social exclusion is less concerned with the distribution of material or monetary resources than with other forms of social disadvantage or group memberships that are related to poverty. Indeed, social exclusion is most frequently defined in contrast to poverty (Silver, 2007).

Some Authorities retained the distinction regarding poverty as a lack of material resources, especially income necessary to participate in the society and social exclusion as a more comprehensive formulation which refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be seen as the denial (or non-realization) of the civil and political rights of citizenship (Walker and Walker, 1997).

In the late 1950s, the anthropologist David Pocock reflected that processes of inclusion and exclusion were features of all hierarchies. He explained that in general terms, the discussion of inclusion and exclusion fed into efforts to define what might be called a social ontology, or the way that the existence and social positioning of groups in a hierarchically structured society would be explained. In this vein, social exclusion reflects in the hierarchies of the society. As in the past, the contemporary society too experiences a hierarchical order. This social order has been built upon various socio economic and political factors (David Pocock (1957).

The above explanation highlights the linkages between the social exclusion and hierarchical structure of the society. The hierarchical order of the society although it is through social, economic, cultural or political factors considerably contributes to the exclusion as well as marginalization of some members of the society.

Social exclusion is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole (Ruth at all, 2007).

Further to the key factors we discussed so far, this definition of Ruth suggests that social exclusion affects many other aspects of the society, e.g. its impacts goes in to the area of quality of life and as well as to the cohesion of the society. The discussion so far helps to identify three contributory factors for social exclusion, namely that of economic, social and political factors.

3) Social Exclusion and Marginalisation

The literature has not provided a uniform definitions to explain and characterizations of people who are marginalized in the society. Nevertheless, there are various attempts to understand and explain marginalized in the society from different points of views. Although, the term marginalization has a separate meaning, in general term marginalization and social exclusion has some kind of interrelation as well.

Peace has explained 15 kinds of exclusion that are named in the European social policy texts. These include: social marginalization, new poverty, democratic legal/political exclusion, nonmaterial disadvantage, exclusion from the “minimal acceptable way of life”, cultural, exclusion (including race and gender), exclusion from family and the community, exclusion from the welfare state, long-term poverty, exclusion from mainstream political and economic life, poverty, state of deprivation, detachment from work relations, economic exclusion, and exclusion from the labour market(Peace 1999) .

These explanations are based on the European societal contexts. However, similar factors can be identified in the other societies as well. In broader term, each society has identified some groups of people as marginalized in the mainstream society. Such groups could be the poor, children, youth, women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, low caste groups etc. However, it is well understood that most of these people are not always marginalized.

For example it is not right to say that women are always marginalized in the society, but in general term they are marginalized as they have not been recognized as equal to men in most of the societies. In general, low caste people could identify as marginalized especially in the South Asian society due to the influence of Indian caste structure. However, when such low caste person gets political power for example can eliminate the marginalization due to the power vested to him/her by the political structure of the society. In same way most of other marginalized groups too can get rid of their marginalization when they associated with other power factors.

4) Social Exclusion and Social Stratification

There is another dimension of social exclusion which could be understood from the explanations on social stratification. Social stratification define any structure of inequality that persists in a society across generations. Social strata are groups of people such as who belong to the same social class or have the same education level. Social strata are organized in a vertical hierarchy. Social stratification can be organized in terms of class, gender, race and ethnicity, age or disability. Social class is based on the economic differences between groups in terms of income and wealth, possession of material goods, occupation and status².

The most common analysis of social stratification is links with economic factors. Karl Marx³ in his analysis on social structure clearly highlight that class is the main factor that create hierarchies in the society. The social class is generally a group of individuals with identical or comparable characteristics as regards relationships of production, ownership and consumption; their legal status; acculturation including education; and family structures. According to Karl Marx's analysis in his historical materialism, the history of society is based on the class system from the beginning of slavery society. Since then, Marx analyse the classes as defined by people's relationship to the means of productions in two basic ways: either they own productive property or labour for others.

The functionalist theory was created in the 20th century by the American sociologists Kingsley Davis (1908 to 1997) and Wilbert Moore (1914 to 1987). The functionalists believe that the classes are necessary to make society effective. Max Weber learning from Marx but in contrast to Marx explains that there are three main factors which contribute to the social stratification. They are **Class**: A person's economic position in a society, based on birth and individual achievement, **Status**: A person's prestige, social honor, or popularity in a society and **Power**: A person's ability to get their way despite the resistance of others.

5) The Decision Making Process: The present scenario in Sri Lanka

The decision making in the society is largely links with governance. Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis

² See for more detail- <http://www.questia.com/library/sociology-and-anthropology/social-organization-and-community/social-classes/social-stratification>

³ See for more details- [MARX, KARL](#) (1849). *Wage Labour and Capital*. Germany: Neue Rheinische Zeitung.

of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision. Since the decisions are taken to the effect of the society, it is necessary to have equal rights for every citizen in that particular society to participate in such decision making process.

“An inclusive parliament is one which demonstrates a social diversity which is appropriate to the nation and reassures minorities and indigenous peoples, women and other oppressed communities that they have a substantive role in decision making. It is a parliament which celebrates difference and sees the benefits of utilizing the talents of all the members and groups within its society. It is a legislative body which looks beyond mere quotas to draw minority communities into committees, leadership roles, and the secretariat of parliament. The minority members of an inclusive parliament may represent defined ‘ethnic parties’ or they may be members of multi-ethnic parties but in either regard they can be legitimate representatives of the minority community from which they are drawn. They draw their legitimacy from having significant popular support in such communities” (Reynolds,2008).

Although this paper is not limited to parliament system or minorities and indigenous people, Reynolds’s argument is valid as it discussed about key points on inclusion of marginalized in decision making process. Accordingly, the inclusive decision making process demonstrate the social diversity and as well as it provide space for marginalized to actively take part in the decision making process as legitimate partners.

Unlike the development literature, advocates of participatory design rarely acknowledge

The limitations and intricacies of these methods, and therefore miss opportunities to effectively engage in their improvement. In most cases, the literature asserts that participation in design will create outcomes which better meet the needs of society (Sanders & Stappers 2013).

When analyzing Sanders and Stappers above explanation, it is revealed that while acknowledging the difficulties and limitations when compare with the top down approaches which are widely used in the decision making processes, participatory approaches have considerable advantages of meeting the actual needs of all actors of the society including those who are marginalized.

Exclusionary societies can be found at different places in time, space, and geography. Such societies tend to be associated with differential access to social and economic well-being, and differential proximity to illness and disease. Inclusion societies, however, evolve from within such contexts. They are characterized by movements toward greater social justice, equality, and collectivism in response to the kinds of global oppressions exclusion societies embody and perpetuate (Allman, 2013).

In this context, it is worth to review current scenario of the including excluded (marginalised) people in the decision making process of Sri Lanka. At present the political system of the country has three hierarchical layers in addition to the Executive Presidency. The governing mechanisms of the country include the Parliamentary system at the highest level which takes decisions at national level. The next political mechanism is the Provincial Council system which was established in 1987 under the 13th amendment to the constitution. The local government system of the country has three types of institutions i.e. as the Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and *Pradeshiya Sabhas*. On top of these mechanisms, the Executive President and the Cabinet prevail supreme in the decision making process at national level.

In analyzing the most common factors that contribute to the social exclusion and social marginalization eg: social and economic factors, it is important to understand the composition of representatives in those decision making mechanisms.

Although, the country has more than 51% of female population, as in the past the present parliament too has only 13 women out of 225 members which accounts only about 5%. The percentage of women in the first parliament of 1947 was 3%. After more than 50 years the percentage of women in the 2004-2010 Parliament was 6%⁴. The Cabinet of the present government in 2010 had 58 ministers (with 09 senior ministers) out of which only two were women members. The composition of women members in 2009 is 17 out of 417 (4%) in provincial councils⁵ and 78 out of 4327 (2%) women representatives in Local Government agencies (Kodikara, 2009).

⁴ See for details- <http://www.thesundayleader.lk/2010/03/21/women-in-sri-lanka-need-allies-in-the-new-parliament/>

⁵ Excluding Northern PC where the elections have not been held yet

According to the official data of the Government for 2001, there were around 1.6% people with disabilities in Sri Lanka⁶. However, there was any representative in Parliament which identifies as Disabled. Although reliable data is not available, the situations at provincial councils are similar as there are less than 15 disabled in all provincial councils. There is no mechanism to find out number of poor people in the governance mechanism of the country, though it is well understood that any poor can't survive in the present proportionate preferential election system as it required a large amount of money to be spent on the propaganda campaigns of elections.

On the other hand, since the whole governance system in the country including the local governance system is struggling on its own survivals than serving for the people integration of marginalized in to the process is remained as a challenge which require a system change. The current focus on local governance in Sri Lanka is located in the context of an

admitted crisis in local governance systems for myriad reasons including, inefficiency, corruption, lack of capacity and access to resources. Following the end of the war in May 2009, attention has also shifted to the 'local' for its transformative potential where the 'center' has proved resistant to democratization and reform (Uyangoda, de Mel, 2012).

6) Including the excluded: Policy Implications

In this scenario, it is necessary to find out ways and means to include the marginalized people in the decision making processes. In doing so, international experiences can also be taken.

As per the findings of the discussions of this paper, the foremost necessary is to recognize the importance of including marginalized in the decision making process of the governance mechanism. In this regards, it is essential to have positive attitude towards marginalized from top to bottom. Since the people has given powers to the government to look after administrative and regulatory matters, the government should be responsible for working towards building positive attitude among its citizens.

Policy level decisions are required to provide and accept rights and needs of marginalized in the decision making process. Although, having marginalized representatives are not the one

⁶The UNESCAP (2003) says there are 7% of disabled in Sri Lanka, According to WHO this figure is 5%.

and only solution to include marginalized in the decision making process, a fair representation too could contribute in the recognition process.

For example in Indian *Loksabha* they have reserved few numbers of seats for marginalized (eg scheduled caste and tribes). In Indian *Panchayat* system which is quite similar to the Sri Lankan local government system, have regulated that women representatives should not be less than one third of the total representation. Some state governments like Odisha has gone beyond these regulations and has regulations to include 50% of women in their three-tier local governance system (*Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samiti* (Block level) and *Zilla Parishad*(District level)).

Sri Lanka could also learn from these systems and consider policy regulations to include a considerable percentage of marginalized in the decision making structures. Introduction of quota system from the nomination list to the active representative level of governance mechanisms of local government to the national level would be one such positive initiative.

The current election system that are been implemented in the country does not provide space for economically marginalized (poor) people to be elected as the selection process is largely depend on the propaganda campaign of the candidates. Poor people will not be able to spend such huge amounts of money for their election campaign and the same will be a disadvantage for them to be selected. While recognizing the advantages for minority and small party representatives of the current proportionate and preferential election system, there is a need to change the current preferential voting election system allowing poor and other marginalized to be elected as per the wish of people.

The discussions of the present study revealed that there is no adequate community level initiatives to bring the voices of the marginalized that are worthy in the governance process. Hence, it can be introduce community level initiatives to bring the voices of voiceless at the local level developments. Since, most of development programmes are adopting top to bottom approach, the marginalized have become mere recipients of development. Hence, it could establish village level systems (similar to *Gram Sabhas*) for local communities including marginalised to actively engage in decision making and implementing process of local development.

There need to regularize and implement participatory mechanisms for local community representatives to participate in the decision making and implementing processes of the local development. Here, the government could learn from national and international experiences of community governance mechanisms to get active participation of marginalised in to the development processes.

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