

# Rural Development, Resettlement and Social Exclusion: A Case Study of *Nelugama* Village, Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

*Nelugama*, is a village located in *Anuradhapura* district. The inhabitants of the village experienced an influx of new inhabitants due to a mega irrigation project, the *Yan Oya* project launched in 2016. The main purpose of this study is to understand rural dynamics, social processes, and social relations that impact on social, and economic changes of *Nelugama* as a result of the resettlement process. The research followed the qualitative approach, and it is a single case study considering the village as the unit of analysis. The research is a descriptive type of case study and multiple methods are used for the data collection. Data collection tools used for the study are field notes, interviews, Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) tools. The influx of resettled families from *Yan Oya*, influenced the village economy and social structure. The favorable conditions and facilities provided for the resettled families for better housing, income generation, and land ownership made the situation more complicated and created tension among original and resettled families. Social and economic separation experienced by original families through the project made original families socially excluded with the sense of deprivation.

**Keywords:** *Social Exclusion, Poverty, Socio-Economic Changes, Original Families, Resettled Families*

## I. INTRODUCTION

*Nelugama* is a village located along the *Colombo Pulmude* road in the *Anuradhapura* district. It is a hot, dry village consisting of 202 families. *Nelugama* consists of 3 sub-villages named *Nelugama*, *Olukada*, and *Nawawewa*. Original inhabitants of the village claim, they arrived in 1950. This village, bordering the Trincomalee district, went through several upheavals during the war, LTTE attacks, and being displaced. The village remained somewhat isolated and cut off from the rest of the district. The families who lived in *Yan Oya* were resettled in *Nelugama* in 2016, consequently, the village was expanded due to the influx of resettled families.

New families have received certain direct benefits from the project such as 1 ½ acre of paddy land, 40 perches of land for housing, compensation for their lost lands which were overvalued by the government and necessary village infrastructures such as concrete byroads, pipe-borne water supply project, preschool, community centre, and elephant fence. Through these changes, the *Yan Oya* project has influenced the village economy, social life, livelihoods, and natural environment in different ways. The main purpose of the study is to understand social and economic changes in *Nelugama* due to rural development initiatives and resettlement process. Further, this research aimed to examine how 'development' initiatives created inequalities and social exclusion among original and resettled families.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research followed the qualitative approach, and it is a single case study considering the village as the unit of analysis. The research is a descriptive type of case study and multiple methods are used for the data collection. Data collection tools used for the study are field notes, interviews, PRA tools (mapping, FGD, Observation, transact walk), and data recording was done through field notes, interview transcriptions, computer files, and audio recordings.

Village heads, older people living in the village, grass-root level government officers and members and office bearers of the village institutes were interviewed other than villagers that belong to a wider scope. Participatory tools were selected (focus group discussions, community mapping), which come in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), since PRA tools have been mostly used with rural communities that have a lower literacy level. Further, local people can easily understand them, interactive, stimulate the active participation of local people and origin of PRA tools have historically linked to the activist participatory research one of the sources and parallels to the PRA (Mukherjee, 1995). Community mapping is selected since maps can reflect relationships, losses and discoveries, the changes of the physical and political landscape, history and geographies of individuals and communities.

Social exclusion theoretically relates to four different dimensions (Jehoel-Gijsbers (2004) and Vrooman and Hoff (2013), and they have been identified as limited social participation, lack of normative integration, material deprivation and inadequate access to social rights by Vrooman *et al* (2013). Out of these four theoretical constructs two of these are forms of socio-cultural exclusion and two of these are forms of structure-economic. The scope of this study limited to the forms of socio-cultural exclusion. The main assumptions of this study are that an PRA instrument has validity to use for academic research and respondents answer questions truthfully. Implementation of data collection tools was challenged by the level of knowledge and literacy of the selected respondents and their level of understanding. Some data collection tools were taken from PRA methodology and validity of using those participatory tools that were designed for the use of the development sector, for the academic studies could have been challenged even though they are used to gather detailed information from the average level illiterate community.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The original villagers of the village experienced economic changes along with the village expansion due to the resettling of families from *Yan Oya* and new development initiatives introduced by the project. The effects of development efforts impact the village irrigation system, paddy cultivation, water management, livelihoods, living patterns, culture, religious practices, traditions, natural environment, and social integration which directly impact the village economy.

### A. Economic Changes

The main livelihood of the original villagers of the village is paddy cultivation, while simultaneously they were involved in fishing, animal husbandry and crop cultivation. Nevertheless, during the internal war period, the income level of the original villagers had gone down mainly because they abandoned the cultivation lands and lived in refugee camps for 30 years. Informal labor was the main source of income for them during the off-cultivation period and the civil war period. The trend of joining military service increased during the war period and this was evident mainly among youth population of the village. After original villager returned from the refugee camps, rain-fed paddy cultivation resumed. Some families that previously lived in urban areas or migrated temporarily to other villages during the paddy cultivation period and returned to their living places after the harvesting period. Even though paddy cultivation was expanded in

*Nelugama* before and after the resettlement process, the proportion of the population involved in non-agricultural jobs has increased along with rural-urban migration.

The impact of the government-aided poverty alleviation program on the village economy remained insignificant and shifting to informal work, service supply sector and off-cultivation income generation methods has contributed to increasing their income. But the *Yan Oya* project enabled access to those economic opportunities through improved road infrastructure and irrigation systems.

The direct benefits received by the original farmers through the *Yan Oya* mega irrigation project were the development of the village irrigation system and the internal road network. However, though the *Ohukada* tank was renovated, the village irrigation system and paddy cultivation were threatened by other challenges such as the invasion of invasive plants in the tank, lower level of groundwater, long spells of the dry period, elephant intrusion and extreme climatic events. Therefore, rain-fed irrigation systems and rainfall patterns impact considerably on the village economy and are linked to irregularities in paddy cultivation, livelihood patterns and mobility of farmer families.

Village irrigation system, paddy cultivation and other emerging economic opportunities such as civil defense services, informal labour and unskilled labor for development projects play a significant role in changing the village economy and social life of the people. Although more favorable conditions for paddy cultivation exist in the village, new generations show trends of moving away from paddy cultivation and are keener on getting informal work in urban areas, government jobs, and other non-agricultural work.

#### B. Social changes

The influx of resettled families from *Yan Oya*, influenced the village social structure, in a way that the whole village is physically and socially divided as *Parana Gammanaya* (Old village consisted of original families) and *Nawa Gammanaya* (New Village consisted resettled families). The favourable conditions and facilities provided for the resettled families for better housing, income generation, and land ownerships made the situation more complicated and created tension among original and resettled families. Geographical, social and economic separation experienced by original families under different circumstances, created space for comparison, self-exclusion and a sense of deprivation.

But the project impact empowerment of women in original families. Women of the village actively engaged in the village economy and social life through their contributions to paddy cultivation, seasonal crop cultivations, domestic work, social welfare, and community development work. Even though the women in original villages spend the whole day in paddy fields during paddy cultivation and harvesting periods supporting their husbands and sons, their participation in farmer committee meetings and decision-making processes was almost insignificant. But during the off-cultivation period and tank rehabilitation period women were given the opportunities to participate in village development activities and they were paid by the project. Further micro-credit schemes introduced to the village from a local microcredit institute provided small loans to women to initiate household-level income generation activities. The women's participation in the village economy was strengthened through the establishment of the women's society, trainings provided by the non-government organization on savings and income generation and initiating the revolving fund for the women's society. The project has contributed to improving the economic status of women even though they were not empowered through capacity building.

Within the deprivation of economic benefits to the resettled families, the project provided more space for distancing from communication, interaction, sharing, and cohesion between original and resettled families. At the same time project design has not provided any room for social and cultural interaction, social cohesion, equitable sharing of resources and economic benefits. The cumulative effect of this situation led to social tension among original families and induced by comparisons, conflicts and mistrust.

The project showcased how other factors such as development inabilities, the inclusion of certain groups for the development process, and policy imperatives caused exclusion in certain circumstances, resulting in discrimination and disadvantages. According to Clert, while discrimination makes access more difficult, exclusion prevents access (1999: 184). It was hard for original families to access new social and physical structures build-up by the project for the resettled families, since they were excluded from the access to resources and opportunities at the very beginning.

There are some broad areas of agreement in the welfare, liberal democratic and postcolonial perspectives about how social exclusion has affected group inequalities. Kabeer (Kabeer 2008: 20), has captured an important dimension of the experience of certain groups of being somehow "set apart" or "locked out" of participation. He mentioned that the concept of social exclusion focuses on the production of disadvantage through active dynamics of social interaction, rather than the anonymous processes of impoverishment and marginalization (Kabeer 2008: 20).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The rural developmental initiatives of the government have ignored development approaches such as integrated community development and participatory approaches that built up social integration, inclusion and participation. This situation was further accelerated by the absence of social mechanisms and interventions that encourage social interactions and integration among original and resettled families. This resulted in the social exclusion of original families from accessing assets and opportunities created through rural development initiatives contravening to the rural development concepts. Within this context, social changes experienced by original families and resettled families are contextual and complicated and the impact on the village economy, social life, political and social structure, and local institutions is unclear.

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