

Analyzing Women's Participation in Local Government:
Examining the Role of Brokers in
Post-War Eastern Sri Lanka

Erica R. Oakley

3560341

Utrecht University

12 August 2011

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ir. Georg Frerks

A Thesis submitted to
the Board of Examiners
in partial fulfillment of the Requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies and Human Rights

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Ir. Georg Frerks

12 August 2011

Research and Thesis writing (30 ECTS)

Word Count: 20,116

Abstract:

The patriarchal and egalitarian political discourse of Sri Lanka has prohibited the full participation of women at decision-making levels in government institutions. This thesis focuses on the causes of this low representation of women and obstacles which hinder it. To increase the participation of women and women's societies, it is essential that their capacity to handle these issues also be increased. Through an examination of theoretical discourses on participation and brokerage, this thesis points to local societal actors which can facilitate women in this endeavor. This thesis examines how capacity building and a participatory approach to incorporate views of civil society, specifically women's, can be used to create social cohesion and consequently facilitate peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts.

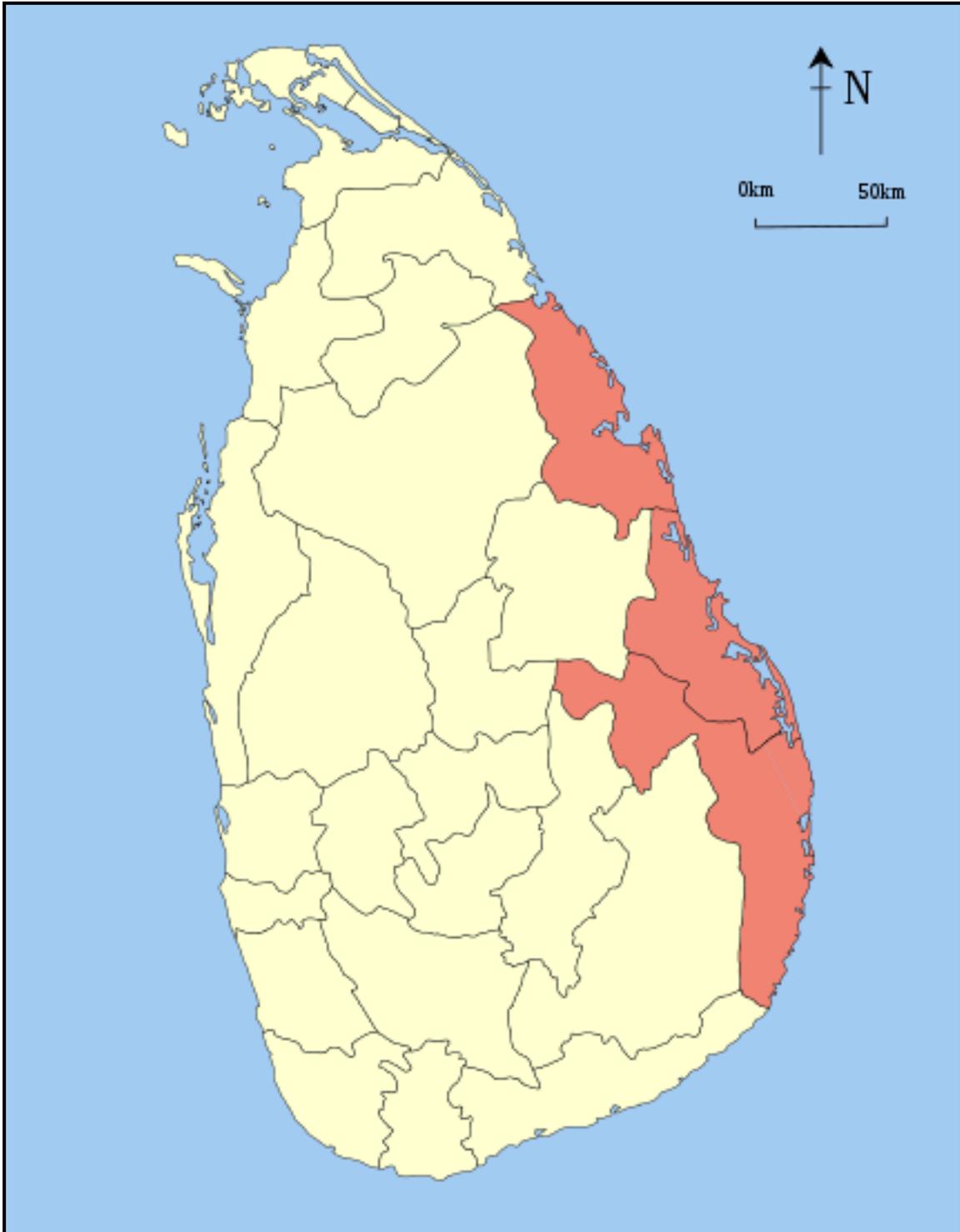
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Map of Sri Lanka

Eastern Province highlighted



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sri_Lanka_Eastern_Province_locator_map.svg

Year. 2005

Acronyms

AC	Advisory Committee
ADB	Asian Development Bank
BPFA	Beijing Platform for Action
CaFEE	Campaign for Free and Fair Elections
CBO	Community-based organization
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CSO	civil society organization
DO	Divisional Officer
DS	Divisional Secretary
FPTP	First Past the Post
GA	Government Agent
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i>
GN	<i>Grama Niladhari</i>
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GS	<i>Grama Seveka</i>
ICES	International Centre for Ethnic Studies
IDP	internally displaced person
IPKF	Indian Peace Keeping Force
ITAK	<i>Illankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi</i>
JS	<i>Jana Saba</i>
JVP	<i>Janata Vimukti Peramuna</i>
LA	Local Authority
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MC	Municipal Council
MCDWA	Ministry for Child Development and Women's Affairs
MDL	Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka
MP	Member of Parliament
NCW	National Committee for Women
NEP	Northern and Eastern Province

NEPC	Northern and Eastern Provincial Council
NGO	non governmental organization
PGF	Participatory Governance Forum
PIP	Performance Improvement Project
PR	Proportional Representation
PS	<i>Pradeshiya Sabha</i>
RDD	Rural Development Department
RDO	Rural Development Officer
RDS	Rural Development Society
SGI	Sub-Committee for Gender Issues
SLAF	Sri Lankan Armed Forces
SLFP	Sri Lanka Freedom Party
SLILG	Sri Lanka Institute for Local Governance
SLMC	Sri Lankan Muslim Congress
SLWPD	Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy
SSD	Social Services Department
SSO	Social Services Officer
SuRG	Supporting Regional Governance
TNA	Tamil National Alliance
UC	Urban Council
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asian and the Pacific
UNF	United National Front
UNP	United National Party
UNSC	UN Security Council
UPFA	United People's Freedom Alliance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WMC	Women and Media Collective
WRDS	Women's Rural Development Society

Boxes, Figures and Tables

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Box 2. Human Development Index

Box 3. Obstacles faced by women

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Introduction

‘Local government is the best way to give people power.’¹

The quote above, stated by an interviewee, accurately states why it is important to encourage and facilitate women’s involvement in local government—it is the best way to give women power. Unfortunately women, who constitute more than 50 percent of the electorate in Sri Lanka are largely absent from decision-making positions within local government and thus, lack power. As a result of this underrepresentation, women do not have a strong voice within the institutions that are supposed to represent them, mitigating their influence over policies and programs that affect their wellbeing. In Sri Lanka’s post-war context, women have the potential to play an important role in rebuilding society through a multitude of ways, however, their lack of representation at decision-making levels implies that over half the country’s population is not fully represented.

More than 30 years of war—first with the People’s Liberation Front or *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) uprising in the South and then protracted civil war in the North and East lead by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)—has affected the social, political, and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka.² War and the continued post-war atmosphere has influenced the discourse of local government in Eastern Sri Lanka. The results of which have been a lack of women’s participation, a general lack of citizen knowledge as to the functions of local government and a patriarchal consciousness. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to explore the intricacies of local government in Sri Lanka, discussing the status quo of women’s participation at the institutional level of local government and the obstacles which hinder their participation. I theorize how women’s participation may lead to empowerment and examine the avenues through which women may increase their visibility and participation in local government. This thesis will introduce the concept of brokerage and unveil brokers within governance structures in addition to exploring the ways in which these brokers can facilitate and encourage women’s increased participation in local government.

¹ Jayantha Wickramanayake, interview by author, Colombo, Sri Lanka, May 24, 2011.

² The JVP insurrection occurred in 1971, resulting in the deaths of approximately 15,000 youths. There was a second JVP insurrection, in 1987-1989, with approximately 50,000 lives lost. There were four phases to Sri Lanka’s civil war: Eelam I (1983-1987), Eelam II (1990-1995), Eelam III (1995-2002), Eelam IV (2006-2009).

The introduction is structured as follows. The first section introduces key terms and concepts relevant for this thesis. The second section discusses the research questions from which this paper derives, followed by, an explanation of the methodology undertaken to conduct the research including: site selection, field research description, and observations noted. The last section will describe the limitations felt during the research conduction period. Finally, the introduction will conclude with a brief summary of how the following three chapters will be set up and a brief summary of each chapter.

Terminology and Concepts

The purpose of this section is to define key terms, and where applicable, to distinguish differences between them. The terms defined in this section are government and governance as well as derivatives of those overarching concepts including local government, good governance and local governance.

Government

Government is ‘the means by which state policy is enforced, as well as the mechanism for determining the policy of the state’ (Wikipedia). In an article by academic R.A.W. Rhodes, he uses government as defined by Sammy Finer:

- the activity or process of governing or governance,
- a condition of ordered rule,
- those people charged with duty of governing or governors, and
- the manner, method or system by which a particular society is governed (Finer 1970 in Rhodes 3).

Local Government

For the purposes of this paper, I chose to narrowly define the term government to the local level. As defined by Klem and Frerks in the book *City Diplomacy*, local governments are: ‘the legitimate and accountable local layer of government – both the elected politicians and the administration – that represents the local community and provides public services to this local community’ (2008, 58). Local governments have a ‘bipolar nature’ and are increasingly regarded as a part of civil society, ‘representing the voice of local constituencies’ (Blank 2006, Klem and Frerks 2008, 58-59). Local governments theoretically have a unique position in that they are able to mediate between their constituents and the first and second tiers of government.

Governance

Since the end of the twentieth century, the term governance has grown in popularity, with the consequence of a high availability of extensive literature on its meaning and interpretation (UNESCAP). The term is immensely popular with donor agencies, governments, development practitioners and social scientists because, as a very broad term, it is easily adaptable to varying contexts and issues. Because of this broadness, there are a multitude of definitions for governance according to the interests of those defining it (see Box 1).

Box 1: Governance is...

UNDP: "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affairs. It is the complex mechanisms, processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights and obligations, and mediate their differences."

Asian Development Bank: "the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's social and economic resources for development. Governance means the way those with power use that power."

World Bank: "... the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good. This includes (i) the process by which those in authority are selected, monitored and replaced, (ii) the capacity of the government to effectively manage its resources and implement sound policies, and (iii) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them."

Source: <http://www.adbi.org/discussion-paper/2005/09/26/1379.governance.indonesia.comments/definition.of.governance/>

To allow for a comparison to the definitions provided in Box 1, I provide in its entirety the characteristics of governance according Rhodes:

1. Interdependence between organizations. Governance is broader than government, covering non-state actors. Changing the boundaries of the state meant the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors became shifting and opaque.
2. Continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes.
3. Game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.
4. A significant degree of autonomy from the state. Networks are not accountable to the state; they are self-organizing. Although the state does not occupy a privileged, sovereign position, it can indirectly and imperfectly steer networks (1996, 11).

Governance is not a synonym for government. Rather, as stated by Rhodes: governance signifies a change in the meaning of government, referring to a *new* process of governing; or a *changed* condition of ordered rule; or the *new* method by which society, is governed' (Ibid, 4). Governance is arguably more difficult to define and to analyze because the term refers to a concept or practice instead of an institution (e.g. government). However, it should be remembered that government is one of the actors in governance (UNESCAP).

Good Governance

UNESCAP differentiates between governance and good governance. Good governance, as defined by UNESCAP, has eight major elements (see Figure 1). Actors of good governance work to ensure that: 'corruption is minimized, the views of the minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making' (Ibid). For purposes of this paper, I will specifically draw on the element of participation, though it should be noted that no one element has more importance than another. The explanation of participation as used by UNESCAP will be discussed in chapter two.

Figure 1: Characteristics of good governance



Source: <http://www.unescap.org/huset/gg/governance.htm>

Local Governance

For the purposes of this paper, I will use a definition of *local* governance as defined by Anwar Shah and Sana Shah in the article *The New Vision of Local Governance and the Evolving Roles of Local Governments*. According to Shah and Shah, local governance is:

‘a broader concept and is defined as the formulation and execution of collective action at the local level. Thus, it encompasses the direct and indirect roles of formal institutions of local government and government hierarchies, as well as the roles of informal norms, networks, community organizations, and neighborhood associations’ (2006, 1-2).

The relevance of this definition is shown through its inclusion of both formal and informal participatory roles in local governance structures. This inclusion of both the formal and informal factors that affect local governance provides multiple avenues through which to address women’s participation, thus enabling a multifaceted approach.

Research Questions

The empirical core of this paper is to investigate the relationship between local government and their constituency in a post-war setting, with a specific focus on women’s roles in village society and local politics. My intention is not argue for an increase in women’s elected representation, *per se*, but to present the obstacles which hinder it and the avenues available to facilitate an increase in their representation and decision-making within local government spheres. This aim is accomplished through identifying evidence-based mechanisms that multinational agencies, national government, and development practitioners can support to increase women’s participation in local government. Because the avenues of increased participation discussed in this thesis are in the preliminary and early implementation stages, there is no concrete or evidence-based literature on how they will increase women’s participation in Eastern Sri Lanka. Therefore, my analysis will be solely to examine these mechanisms and dissect them via theoretical frameworks. The question which has guided this research is:

How is women’s participation in local government shaped in the context of post-war Eastern Sri Lankan and what is their position in society vis-à-vis local governance structures?

In addition to my main research questions, the sub-questions that guided my research were:

- *How is the public role of women shaped by cultural and societal norms?*
- *What is the role of women within local government?*

- *What does participatory governance look like in the context of Eastern Sri Lanka?*
- *Through which avenues are women able to participate in local government?*
- *What are the enabling and disabling factors for women's participation in local government?*
- *How would an increase in women's participation within government structures facilitate a post-war society?*

To answer the above questions, the study will address the following issues:

- *The potential capacity of women at the local level;*
- *How their gender affects the ability for women to participate in political processes;*
- *Factors that influence and/or hinder women's participation in local government;*
- *The role of Women's Rural Development Societies (WRDS);*
- *Ways through which women's participation can be increased.*

Methodology

The importance of local government revolves around their ability to theoretically foster closer connections to their constituency. Thus, local government provides a platform for citizen's concerns, is more responsive to those concerns and offers a mediating position between national governments and citizens. Given that women are noticeably absent from participation in local government in Eastern Sri Lanka, this thesis builds on an analytical study of the actors in society that hinder and facilitate women's advancement in the political realm. In doing this, gaining a holistic understanding of how an increase in women's participation is attainable. The aim of the theories used is to explicate how the lack of political representation of women in Sri Lanka can be challenged and rectified. The research methodology was designed to examine mechanisms through which women are able to increase their participation in local government using a feminist perspective. As noted in Ritchie and Lewis (2003), feminist research acknowledges that:

‘material conditions, social, political, gender, and cultural factors have a major influence on people's lives. Within these approaches, research findings are analysed primarily according to the concepts of race, class or gender, rather than the analysis being open to concepts which emerge from the data. The value of the findings is judged in terms of their political and emancipatory effects, rather than simply the extent to which they portray and explain the social world of participants’ (9).

The use of a feminist analysis was pertinent due to the nature of the research. I would argue that one must look through a gender or perhaps feminist lens to gain a more deeper

understanding of the social and political context for women in Eastern Sri Lanka. The theories used in this thesis were obtained through inductive analysis.

Site Selection

The Eastern Province of Sri Lanka was chosen as the site of my research for several reasons: it is in a post-war context; it has an ethnically diverse population in proportional numbers; and women's roles within this area are highly representative of their roles in society. It should be noted that the insights drawn from this case study are not applicable in all scenarios, but rather aim to draw a general portrait of women's political activity in Eastern Sri Lanka.

Field Research

Field research was undertaken from the March 6 through June 3, 2011 in Colombo and Trincomalee, Sri Lanka. For data collection, I employed multiple qualitative research methods. As defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) in Ritchie and Lewis (2003) qualitative research: 'is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices...turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self' (3). The qualitative research undertaken for this thesis incorporated a mesh of interviews, conversations, and observations intertwined with a literature analysis. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the social context in which the research was undertaken.

Key-informant interviews

The main method of research for this thesis was conducted through in-depth interviewing. As stated by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (1932) in Ritchie and Lewis (2003), interviewing is essentially a: 'conversation with a purpose' (138). Approximately 35 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from international and local NGOs, community-based organizations, government workers, academics and activists.³ Within the realm of qualitative research, the interview subjects were chosen based on a method called non-probability sampling. Interviewees were chosen for a specific purpose—their connection to and knowledge of women's role in Eastern Sri Lankan society and within local government. Purposive sampling has two aims, 'the first is to ensure that all the key constituencies of

³ All Interviews were recorded unless requested not to be by the interviewee. For a list of interviews conducted, see Annex 1.

relevance to the subject matter are covered. The second is to ensure that, within each of the key criteria, some diversity is included so that the impact of the characteristic concerned can be explored' (Mason 2002; Patton, 2002; Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 79). Through purposive sampling in conjunction with chain sampling or snowballing, a wide range of interview subjects were chosen to offer a deeper understanding and broader overview of the contextual situation in Eastern Sri Lanka.

Observational Research

Another method of qualitative research was obtained through informal observations, or 'interpretivism' (Ritchie and Lewis 2003, 7). This school of thought in qualitative research is important as 'the interrelatedness of different aspects of people's lives is a very important focus of qualitative research and psychological, social, historical and cultural factors are all recognized as playing an important part in shaping people's understanding of their world' (Ibid). As observational interviews are opportune times to study cultural habits and social norms in addition to gaining initial insights into the social structure of the research area, it was an important aspect of my data collection. Through these informal observations, I was able to greatly increase my understanding of the local culture and thus added more depth to my research. A review of the literature—journal articles, academic books, newspaper articles and project reports—contextualized the research methods undertaken as described above.

Limitations of Study

The purpose of this section is to outline the study limitations, which are divided into five categories:

1. Cultural awareness and understanding
2. Insufficient time spent in research area
3. Lack of language skills
4. Limited access
5. Militarization of the region

One of the first limitations experienced when setting foot in a new country and a new culture, is adaptation to societal awareness and cultural understanding. It takes time to acclimate to social contexts and cultural norms. It also takes time to earn the trust of locals citizens—if it is even possible. The cultural disconnect manifested itself in multiple ways throughout the research period. A second limitation was discerned through the limited time spent in the

main subject area, Trincomalee. This perhaps resulted in a more broader thesis than originally sought, thus resulting in less raw data from the village perspective.⁴ A third limitation was felt in the lack of knowledge in the local languages. This proved to be a challenge, as it was difficult to find a reliable translator in Trincomalee, where much of the population has limited understanding or conversing skills in English. Thus, my interviews focused on those that did speak English. Consequently, this resulted in an over-representation of non-community members.

A fourth limitation was recognized through limited resources to conduct field research and the limited access to rural areas and communities. The inability to hire a translator and to secure private transport restricted data collection to most accessible communities. As a consequence, the data lacked more in-depth information into the actual workings of the WRDS or interviews with many members of WRDSs, resulting in the loss of an interesting and original perspective to my research.⁵ Finally, the militarization was discerned as a limitation. Because Sri Lanka has suffered decades of civil strife and war, the regions of the North and East are highly militarized. The government is very suspicious of researchers and journalists, thus it was difficult to speak with those at a higher level of local government which would have given different insight into my research focus area. There is also still a culture of fear with respect to whom people speak and many times interviewees requested that interviews not be recorded or if done so to withhold their name.⁶

General Chapter Outline

In the chapters to follow, I aim to explore and examine the intricacies of local governance structures which both hinder and facilitate women's increased participation in decision-making positions. In each chapter I will begin by providing a framework or theoretical concept from which I will ground the local analysis of the Sri Lankan context. The local-level analysis relies on secondary and primary data, to include literature reviews and key-informant interviews. The third section outlines a chapter-specific conclusion. The last section of each chapter is a personal reflection on the research experience and the data.

⁴ My first instinct when deciding to go to Sri Lanka was to spend the duration of the trip in Trincomalee. However, after speaking with local Sri Lankans, I was advised to spend most of my time in Colombo because of recent flooding.

⁵ There were promises by local NGOs to allow me to accompany them on visits to some rural villages and meet WRDSs, however they all fell through for varying reasons.

⁶ From my experience, it seemed that being a foreigner resulted in locals being less suspicious of me and thus more willing to speak frank and open about their opinions.

Chapter one, provides an in-depth look at local government in Eastern Sri Lanka. The chapter analyzes the discourse of patriarchal politics and political parties. An examination of the March 2011 local government elections is also provided. The latter half of the chapter focuses on the discourse of women in politics, examining what it means to be a woman in Sri Lankan politics. To provide local context, the personal reflections of two women who contested elections will be presented. The last section will explore the obstacles which hinder women's participation. Chapter two provides an overview of the legal framework relevant to this research study, specifically three international declarations calling for women's increased participation in politics. This chapter explores the first of two theoretical frameworks for this thesis: participation. It offers an overview of approaches to facilitate civil engagement in politics and its role as a new paradigm in participatory development discourse. This chapter also introduced Women's Rural Development Societies, a village level community based organization (CBO). Chapter three tackles the concept of brokerage as a theoretical framework, introducing brokers within the Eastern Sri Lanka society. Furthermore, this chapter outlines locally-relevant mechanisms through which it may be possible for women's representation to be increased.

Chapter 1: Local Government & the Patriarchal Conscious

*“Male and female citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law,
must be equally admitted to all honors, positions, and public
employment according to their capacity and without other
distinctions besides those of their virtues and talents,”
~ Olympe de Gouges*

The ideal in the quote above has been in an influx in the political culture of Sri Lanka. While politics and government have always overwhelming been an arena for men, the androcentric realm of politics in Sri Lanka was penetrated in 1960 when the tear drop island received the first female Prime Minister in the world, Sirimavo Bandaranaike.⁷ Her daughter, Chandrika Kumaratunga, was elected President in 1994.⁸ However, as stated by social anthropologist, Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, ‘the phenomenon of women from powerful political dynasties becoming president or prime minister literally over the dead bodies of their husbands and fathers is also a telling reflection and indictment of the gendered realities of political power and violence in the subcontinent’ (2004, 143). The inclusion of women in the patriarchal realm of politics and obtaining positions at the highest level of decision making—President and Prime Minister—has not resulted in Sri Lanka moving toward a more egalitarian political system.

The presence of war for nearly three decades made the political situation all the more precarious and exacerbated the patriarchal culture. While the echoes of bombs and gunfire are no longer heard, the functionality of government in the North and East is variant and dependent upon the winning political party in elections. Local government structures in Sri Lanka theoretically enjoy autonomous powers on paper; however, they are heavily reliant on the Central Government for funding which weakens their autonomy. Local government is an under-resourced institution that is capacity-hindered and lacks the trust and engagement of its citizens—not exactly the qualities of an ideal local government, as defined earlier. Various methods may be implemented to rebuild a post-war society, one of which is incorporating all

⁷ Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Bandaranaike, world’s first female head of state. She served as Prime Minister of Ceylon and Sri Lanka three times, 1960-65, 1970-77 and 1994-2000 (Wikipedia, Sirimavo Bandaranaike).

⁸ Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, 4th President of Sri Lanka and only female president to date. She served from November 12, 1994 to November 19, 2005. She is the daughter of two former Prime Ministers (Wikipedia, Chandrika Kumaratunga).

citizens' viewpoints and allowing for the interests of all parts of society to be represented. Unfortunately, this is not the reality in Sri Lanka, where women's interests are often underrepresented. In the East, particularly in Trincomalee District where there is an almost equal presence of all three ethnic groups—Tamils, Muslims and Sinhalese—the complexity increases. The purpose of this chapter is to dissect the structure of local government; unearth the discourse of patriarchal politics; introduce the patriarchal continuum in political parties. To begin, we will analyze the structure of local government, setting the stage for the remainder of this thesis. To accomplish this, it is necessary to present the status of women's political representation so as to provide a deeper understanding of obstacles which women face on the road to an egalitarian representation.

Structure of Local Government

In Sri Lanka there are three tiers of government: central, provincial and local.⁹ The first and second tiers, Central Government and Provincial Government, respectively, are constitutionally bound and therefore enjoy a higher level of authority and decision-making power. The third tier, local government, was constructed through acts of Parliament and consequently has less power than the first two. Sri Lanka's local government has undergone many changes and obstacles since the days of the Sinhalese and Tamil kings. While local government was modernized in 1865 for the purpose of devolving 'important functions concerning local welfare which had devolved on the Central Government in the absence of municipal institutions in the Island,' it was not until the Thirteenth Amendment (1987) that the current system came into play (Kanesalingam 1971, 6-7).¹⁰ This newly devolved structure was enacted to address 'a number of issues pertaining to the resolution of the conflict in Sri Lanka' (Centre for Policy Alternatives 2010, 13). As required by the Indo-Lanka Accord, there was a move for devolution of powers to the provincial level. Thus, creating a devolved second tier of government with the thought this devolution would give Tamils a sense of autonomy and allow for self-representation.

The Indo-Lanka Accord was an international bilateral agreement signed on July 29, 1987 and resulted in the merging of the Northern and Eastern provinces to create the North Eastern Provincial Council (NEPC) which was established 1988. Elections were held that same year with the new head of the North East Province, Chief Minister Varatharaja Perumal, from the winning political party Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front

⁹ See Annex 2 for an organogram of the Sri Lankan government.

¹⁰The modern local government system was established under Ordinance No. 17 of 1865 (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1999, 12).

(ENDLF). The decision in March 1990 by Perumal to declare the North East Province 'the Free and Sovereign Democratic Republic of Eelam by moving a resolution in the North-East Provincial Council' resulted in President Ranasinghe Premadasa dissolving the provincial council and implementing direct rule (Ferdinando, 2000). It was not until 2006, when the Supreme Court 'ruled that the proclamations issued by the then President enabling the Northern and Eastern Provinces to operate as one administrative unit and be administered by one elected council were null and void and had no legal effect' (Lanka Newspapers 2006). Thus, the Province was de-merged back to separate Northern and Eastern Provinces. In 2008, elections were held again for the first time in twenty years in the Eastern Province. According to the *2010 Administration Report of the Provincial Department of Local Government in the Eastern Province*, local government 'institutions are the commonly accepted local structure of self government that contribute greatly to national development and overall good governance through accepted democratic principles and process' (2010, 1).¹¹ Let us now take a look at these institutions.

Local government, also known as local authorities, consists of three types: Municipal Councils (MC), Urban Council (UC) and *Pradeshiya Sabha* (PS).¹² There is no uniform guideline for which one is established; instead, it is largely dependent upon size and population of the area which falls under its jurisdiction. MCs are for an area with a higher concentrated population, for example in cities and larger towns and 'established for the purpose of transferring to the residents authority on certain aspects of administration in the area' (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1999, 12). Whereas UCs are established in areas with a lower population than in MCs, but in still urban areas. PSs are instituted in rural areas with the purpose 'to facilitate people's participation in administration and development' (Ibid, 20). Provincial Councils instituted via the Thirteenth Amendment are headed by a president-appointed governor for a term of five-years. The current governor of the Eastern Province is Rear Admiral Mohan Wijewickrama USP, NDC, PSC. There are five Ministries headed by Secretaries whom are appointed by the Governor. Under the five Ministries there are 16 Departments. The power devolved to the provinces by the Thirteenth Amendment are Executive Powers to the Governor and Legislative powers to the Provincial Council (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1987).

¹¹ I received the 2010 Administrative Report via an email correspondence with a government worker on May 13, 2011. The report is not a published document.

¹² In Sri Lanka, the local government bodies (MC, UC, and PS), are collectively known as local authorities. For ease and flow, I will use the term local government unless in direct quotes or as stated by interviewees.

There are three administrative districts within the Eastern Province and within those a total of 43 local authorities; 13 of the local authorities are in Trincomalee district where there are two UCs and 11 PSs.¹³ Currently, there is not a MC in Trincomalee even though it is the capital of the Eastern Province.¹⁴ Though, according to the 2010 Administrative Report, ‘action is being taken to upgrade the Urban Council to a Municipal Council’ (2). Within Trincomalee district, there are 11 District Secretariat Divisions, headed by the District Secretary (formerly known as Government Agent).¹⁵ Within the devolved structure, ‘the Pradeshiya Sabha Act (section 12) does provide a potential space for citizen involvement, through the provision for the nomination of committee members from the general public in addition to the elected Council Members’ (USAID 2005, 15). The document further notes: ‘according to the local officials interviewed, the provisions for citizen participation have not been implemented’ (Ibid). Pradeshiya Sabhas were established with the purpose to facilitate ‘the effective participation of the people in local government and development functions’ (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1987). However, this is complicated by the reach of the central government which dives even further into the village level than the PS, through the *Grama Niladhari* (GN). The complexity may increase, if the *Jana Sabha* (JS), which is currently being battled out in the Parliament, passes and goes into effect.

Another change is coming to local government: a new election system is currently being strategized. The new system will be a mix of first past the post and the Proportional Representation system, which is currently in place. As explained in an online news article on the Sri Lankan Government website, in this scenario: ‘two thirds of the members are to be elected on the First-Past-the-Post’ system and one third under the PR system’ (Government of Sri Lanka - Provincial Councils, 2010). Per the article, the ‘Municipal Council Ordinance, Urban Council Ordinance and the Pradeshiya Sabha Act, are also to be amended’ (Ibid). First Past the Post (FPTP) is a ‘simple majority system’ where ‘the winner is the candidate or party with the most votes and typically there is only a single winner in each electoral unit (UNDP 2010, 3). This differs from the Proportional Representation (PR) system, where ‘the electoral unit is generally larger and the system is designed to ensure that the overall votes for a party or coalition are translated into a corresponding proportion of seats in the

¹³ The three districts in the Eastern Province are Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara. For a map of the administrative boundaries for Trincomalee District, see Annex 3.

¹⁴ The two UCs are in Trincomalee are in Kinniya and Trincomalee town.

¹⁵ For map of DS Divisions in Trincomalee, see Annex 4.

legislature' (Ibid).¹⁶ Per the report, it is believed that 'women have a slightly greater advantage under PR systems rather than under FPTP/simple majority systems' (Ibid).

This belief was acknowledged by Chulani in an interview, where she stated: experience around the world shows that citizen majority systems of elections are not so favorable for women. Women do better in PR systems. So in this whole discussion about quotas, political parties keep saying that when we go back to a ward system women will find it easier to win.¹⁷ Chulani's concern with the PR versus FPTP systems were in a PR it is difficult for women because you must campaign in a much larger constituency (traveling 1-2 hours) and it isn't easy for women to spend the time campaigning. However, in a ward system, though the geographical area is much smaller and thus the campaign area is much smaller, it is much more competitive because the political parties can only put forth one candidate per each ward.

Given all that has just been said, why do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community based organizations (CSOs) continue to work with local governments as an ideal actor for citizen/government relations? I will explain by using a quote by Martijn Klem and Georg Frerks who state that local government 'due to their specific characteristics that position themselves between citizens and authorities, as well as between the local and the national levels, local governments have the potential to enhance the effect and sustainability of state-building and peace-building, as they strengthen both the national and the local social contracts' (2008, 47). As has been shown, local government is greatly complex and is strongly shaped by the wider political discourse in which it is inserted.

During an interview with Gita Sabharwal, Deputy Country Representative at the Asia Foundation, she spoke of an analysis recently conducted on people's perception of local government. They wanted to know to what extent do people understand the three-tier system, what is their faith in the system and in the services received. Their analysis seemed to suggest that the people tend to interact the most with the GN, and as stated before this is the village level arm of the central government. Within the devolved structure, the PS is the part of local government that people interact with the most. Within that tier, the further up you go in the decentralized structure, the interaction and participation with the community reduces. So for example, a man or a woman interacts most often with their GN and then

¹⁶ The Proportional Representation (PR) system was instituted only after the 1978 constitution.

¹⁷ Chulani Kodikara, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

they will next approach the PS and it keeps reducing the higher up the chain they go—UC, MC, PC, etc.¹⁸

Political Parties ~ who puts women forward?

What is the role of political parties in road to women’s elected representation? There are currently a multitude of political parties which contest elections in Sri Lanka. These political parties tend to be nothing more than patriarchal ‘mens club’ with few women represented. Most parties, however, do tend to have a women’s wing, though the effectiveness of it is arguable. Sri Lanka is generally thought to be a two-party system with the largest contingents being the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA) and the United National Front (UNF). The UPFA and UNP are alliances composed of a multitude of parties (see Annex 5). Mahinda Rajapaksa, current president of Sri Lanka, is the leader of the United People’s Freedom Alliance (UPFA). Within these alliances, there are two major political parties—the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and United National Party (UNP). For a woman to be nominated into one of these parties, there are ‘a lot of politics to get your name on list and lots of in-fighting, and unless a woman is backed by a strong political patron, it is very difficult to get on the nomination lists.’¹⁹ Table 1, below, provides an overview of the percentages of women nominated in varying political parties in the 2006 and 2010 local government elections.

Table 1.

**Nominations for women by the major political parties
at the 2006 and 2010 local government elections in selected districts**

	*UPFA			UNP			JVP			ITAK		
	Total no of nominations	Nominations for women	%	Total no of Nominations	Nominations for women	%	Total no of nominations	Nominations for women	%	Total no of nominations	Nominations for women	%
Galle	307	10	3.2%	327	15	4.5%	327	17	5.5%	-	-	-
Badulla	284	12	4.2%	284	18	6.3%	284	13	4.5%	-	-	-
Moneragala	138	8	5.7%	138	2	1.4%	138	6	4.3%	-	-	-
Kurunegala	427	15	3.5%	439	17	3.8%	439	18	4.1%	-	-	-
Trincomalee	117	6	5.1%	117	3	2.5%	103	27	26.2%	133	13	9.7%
Jaffna (MC)*	29	1	3.4%	29	4	13.7%	-	-	-	29	4	13.7%
Colombo	365	19	5.2%	278	17	6.1%	365	30	8.2%	-	-	-
Total	1667	71	4.2%	1612	76	4.7%	1656	111	6.7%	162	17	10.4%

* 2010 elections.

Source: compiled by ICES from nomination lists filed at the Department of Elections

<http://groundviews.org/2011/01/14/a-perennial-struggle-womens-political-representation-in-sri-lanka/>

¹⁸ Gita Sabharwal, interview by author, Colombo, April 12, 2011.

¹⁹ Harini Amarasuriya, interview by author via Skype on 9 February 2011.

Interestingly, the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), is one political party which puts more women on the nomination list than average. Because of the conflict, some, such as Chulani Kodikara—an activist for women’s increased political participation as well as Research Associate at the International Centre for Ethnic Studies—hypothesizes that parties such as the TNA put more women forward so as to not draw trouble.²⁰ Due to the conflict, During my interview with Chulani, she stated ‘it was interesting at the last local government elections the LTTE put pressure on the TNA to give nominations to women and some of those women got elected.’²¹ She further mentioned that in conflict areas you find ‘there are more nominations for women because men are scared. For Trincomalee, the JVP put an amazing number of women on the nomination list because of the volatile situation in Trincomalee at the time.’²² Hemanthi Goonaskera, Director for the Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance (SLILG), similarly stated that the TNA seemed to put forth more women candidates in the Eastern Provincial elections.²³ She hypothesized that it was potentially less risky for women to be put forward than men because of the nature of politics in Sri Lanka today.²⁴ Unfortunately, the party in power is the least likely to give nominations to women.

Patriarchal Politics

A culture of patriarchy is manifested in all levels of social, political, economic and legal aspects of Sri Lankan culture. We define patriarchy as: ‘systematic societal structures that institutionalise male physical, social and economic power over women’ (Reeves and Baden 2005, 3). Feminist theory has typically characterized patriarchy as a social construction which can be overcome by revealing and critically analyzing its manifestations (Wikipedia - Feminism). While Sri Lanka has high levels of human index indicators for women (see Box 2 and Annex 5), they have not moved forward to a more egalitarian approach to bring an increase in equality to the realm of politics in regard to sex and ethnicity. Because of the overarching patriarchal and elitist culture of politics, it seems that women tend to want to remove themselves from that environment.

²⁰ Chulani Kodikara, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Harini Amarasuriya, interview by author, via Skype, February 9, 2011.

²⁴ Hemanthi Goonaskera, interview by author, Colombo, June 1, 2011.

Box 2: Human Development Index

The Human Development Index (HDI) measures three aspects of human development: health, knowledge and income—thereby distinguishing between the development levels of countries.

Gender:

The Gender Inequality Index, which measures three dimensions of human development—reproductive health, empowerment, and the labor market, for Sri Lanka is listed at 0.576. Another gender indicator is the female-to-male ratio in parliament, Sri Lanka stands at 0.061.

Education:

Sri Lanka does fare well in the education HDI, with an adult literacy rate for adults aged 15 and older at 90.8%.

Health:

Sri Lanka also has a relatively high life expectancy at birth, 74.4 years.

Local Government Elections ~ March 2011

Coincidentally, nationwide local government elections were held on March 17, 2011, while I was in country, for 235 of the 335 local authorities (Wikipedia, Local Government Elections).²⁵ As noted previously, local elections in Sri Lanka tend to not be about local issues, instead, taking on the national discourse. As emphasized by Chulani in the same interview, this election in particular was about voting for the party in power.²⁶ The election propaganda was essentially: ‘if you do not vote for the party in power then you will not have development.’²⁷ As people clearly want development to occur in their villages, they overwhelmingly voted for the ruling party. This is represented in the fact that the ruling UPFA won an astounding 205 of the 235 local authority elections. According to an interviewee, this voting culture is unlikely to change unless there is an education of the voters.²⁸

For this election, there was a push by organizations, national and international, for higher representation and increased nominations of women. In a multi-authored article in a local Sri Lankan newspaper, the Daily Mirror, it was stated that in Trincomalee, out of the 113 local authority members only four women were elected due to the shortfall in the nomination list (Rizvi, 2011). In the same article, Kumudini states ‘We have been working with other women’s organization in five districts and we have given political parties names of 151

²⁵ The last major round of elections for local government were in 2006. At that time, elections were held in 288 out of 330 local authorities. Due to the civil war, elections were not held in the East or North until 2008 for 9 local authorities in Batticaloa District and for two in the Northern Province in 2009 (Wikipedia, Local Government Elections)

²⁶ Chulani Kodikara, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Hemanthi Goonaskera, interview by author, Colombo, June 1, 2011.

women from which they can pick and choose to be included in the nomination list' (Ibid). A few days after the election, I spoke with Kumudini, founder and director of Women and Medial Collective (WMC), a woman's group which focuses on women's rights and brings women's issues to the forefront of society, about the role of WMC in the election. She stated that WMC used all mainstream media to further the campaign for women, including the use of television, radio, press and internet. In the rural areas, women commonly used radio, pamphlets and posters to speak to the electorate. As they day for voting drew near, the women began using three-wheelers with load speakers to reach voters. Women also used creative methods, such as poetry and song, to speak to the electorate.

WMC was able to identify women through working with community organizations that worked with and had relationships with the women. These groups would identify which women had the strongest interest in entering politics and began to work with them, building their capacity to contest elections. WMC and partners also began to work with political parties, encouraging them to put women on the nomination lists.²⁹ Viluthu Center for Human Resource Development (Viluthu), another Sri Lankan NGO which works to build capacities in the hopes to build better governance, similarly worked with women wishing to contest elections.

The Politics of Being a Woman in Eastern Sri Lanka

Women's representation in the political arena has always been limited. During the war, women were able to actively participate in peace movements such as the Sri Lanka Women for Peace and Democracy (SLWPD) and Mothers and Daughters of Sri Lanka (MDL).³⁰ However, their role was restricted to that of an informal nature until the 2002 peace talks when a Sub-Committee for Gender Issues (SGI) was created 'to report directly to the plenary of the peace talks' (Samuel 2010, 2).³¹ This mechanism provided the first opportunity for women to gain an official voice in the peace process, though it proved to be only temporary, ending in 2003 when peace talks broke down.³² The post-war inclusion of

²⁹ Kumudini Samuel, interview by author, Colombo, March 23, 2011.

³⁰ Sri Lankan Women for Peace and Democracy (SLWPD) was established in 2005 and consists of a broad coalition of women's organizations. MDL was established in 1989 and is a coalition of women's organizations, which came together to fight against political violence by both State and Non-State Agencies. MDL consists of women's organizations working at the community level. (Women and Medial Collective).

³¹ The one exception was the wife of the LTTE's Chief Negotiator and Political Strategist Anton Balasingham, Australian-born Anne Balasingham.

³² According to the article, there were two formal meetings and informal meetings post-April 2003 when peace talks broke down.

women in decision-making positions has not fared any better, as women are still largely excluded and devoid of equal representation in government. This is even though women make up more than half of Sri Lanka's population (see Table 2). However, as noted previously, the majority of woman lack the right to full and active citizenship. The disparity in the ration of male to female population can be attributed to nearly three decades of civil war, particularly in the whole of the Eastern Province and in the Northern Province, as men were the main target of violence.³³

Table 2: Male vs. female population

	Male	Female	Total
Sri Lanka *	10,249,000	10,404,000	20,653,000
Eastern Province **	714,536	749,403	1,469,939
Trincomalee **	165,926	168,437	334,363

* Statistics from 2010

** Statistics from 2007

source: <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/page.asp?page=Population%20and%20Housing>

The percentage of women in elected positions in Sri Lanka has never reached more than six percent—at any level of government. Presently, the Eastern Provincial Council has only one female in an elected seat, out of thirty-eight.³⁴ The Hon. W.G.M. Ariyawathi Galappaththi is currently serving on the Provincial Council as the Deputy Chairman. The only other woman serving the provincial council at a higher level is the Secretary for the Council, Mrs. J.J.Muralitharan.³⁵ The dichotomy of Sri Lanka 'being one of the first countries in Asia to give women the right to vote and be elected to political office' juxtaposes with the low levels of woman's representation in formal politics. Consequently this has deprived 'women of any effective voice in governance' and created a culture of contradictions (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2008, 12). This has resulted in women having long been denied an adequate voice in decision-making levels of local government as well as the continuation of patriarchal politics. Furthermore, Jayawardena and Kodikara note that: 'the notion of full citizenship remains limited to men, while women continue to be marginalized from decision-making processes and differently incorporated as citizens' (Ibid, 4). Thus, the majority of women still lack the right to full and active citizenship.

³³ The population of the Northern Province is 580,000 males to 613,000 females according to 2007 statistics (Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka).

³⁴ There are 37 men on the council. Hon. Galappaththi is from the UPFA (Eastern Provincial Council - Members).

³⁵ There has never been a female appointed governor over a province.

While there have been no constraints for women in obtaining the seats of President or Prime Minister, Sri Lanka sadly has one of the lowest percentages of women in politics in the region. According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Press Release, the current makeup of female representatives is: six percent of Members of Parliament, four percent at the provincial level, and as stated previously, less than two percent of representatives at the local government level (UNDP, Press Release).³⁶ The advancement and empowerment of women is dependent upon the opportunity for them to be more engaged in politics—at all levels. Without their active participation, the incorporation of their perspectives and ideas are not attainable at decision-making levels. A quota system is often the essential first step toward quashing traditional notions that women and government do not mix. Quotas have the potential to break through gender stereotypes—and often leading to more progressive and more equitable legislation. As seen in Box 2 and Annex 5, Sri Lankan women, in comparison to many of their Asian neighbors, have enjoyed high rates of gender development in areas such as education and health. However, this has not transferred into the political realm. As stated by Jayawardena and Kodikara, while

state expenditure on welfare has had a direct and positive impact on the physical quality of life of women, it has proved negligible in changing patriarchal structures, culture and attitudes or increasing the choices available to women. Representatives of state apparatus have become fluent at paying lip service to women's rights, but women themselves have been prevented from becoming political actors engaged in transforming their own lives and playing a meaningful role in issues of governance (2003, 2-3).

As stated previously, it is at the local level where women are most likely to gain a leadership role, providing them with the opportunity to be socially influential in their communities. In reality, however, women are still consistently left on the periphery of society, particularly in decision-making and political processes.

Interestingly, Sri Lanka became the first country in the world to be governed by a woman. Though this should signify the great advancement of women in politics, Rajasingham-Senanayake states that, 'the phenomenon of women from powerful political dynasties becoming president or prime minister literally over the dead bodies of their husbands and fathers is also a telling reflection and indictment of the gendered realities of political power and violence in the subcontinent' (2004, 143). She argues that women who have become

³⁶ There are 225 seats in Parliament and only 13 are held by women. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Sri Lanka has a world ranking of 122 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2011).

heads of state have only done so because their male relatives paved the way. This is a common hypothesis in Sri Lanka's political world, and has been referred to in a multifarious of documents (Samarasinghe 2000; Kodikara 2009; Richter 1990). Women's participation in political life has been mostly reserved for supporting their husband or father and it is through this fashion that most women have been able to gain access to political seats, particularly at the higher levels, in Sri Lanka.

For those women without familial connections, the opportunity to enter politics often begins at the local government level as it is only at this 'level that women from non-political and non-privileged background have been able to access the system' (Jayawardena and Kodikara 2003, 28). The local level of the government hierarchy is more accessible for multiple reasons:

- (a) A smaller constituency base will allow the female candidate to know a greater percentage of the population;
- (b) A smaller community often results in the ability to foster relationships, thus enabling a substantial network of supporters;
- (c) The cost of running for election at the local level is much lower;
- (d) There are more seats available at the local level, thus a higher chance of being put on the nomination ballot by political parties.

However, even at the local level and despite seven decades of universal suffrage, women hold an abysmally low percentage of elected seats at the local level. This is even though Sri Lanka does have 'a justiciable constitutional guarantee of equality, an impressive national machinery for the advancement of women, a physical quality of life for its women commensurate with levels reached by countries with much higher income levels. And women at the highest level of government' (Ibid, 4). Ironically, according to a meeting I had with the UNDP, out of the 38 Presidential Advisors, not a single one is a woman.³⁷ This is representative of the patriarchal nature of politics in Sri Lanka and the many obstacles which women must overcome in the long struggle to elected representation. The next section will unearth more of the obstacles which women face, providing an in-depth look at each.

The story of two women's political journey

I had the opportunity to speak with two women who contested the local elections in Trincomalee, both for seats in the UC in differing political parties. As will be described in the

³⁷ Meeting at UNDP offices with Zoe Keeler, Fiona Bayat, and Dilrukshi Fonseka on June 2, 2011, Colombo.

next section, there are a multitude of problems which women face if they wish to contest elections. The two women I spoke with were no different, both offering to tell their stories. The first woman with whom I spoke was Janafa Rasmiya, aged 31. She contested elections in Trincomalee for the UC. She stated that the only support she received, other than assistance from Viluthu, came from her father and sister who helped her canvass her area prior to the election. I asked her why she decided to get involved in politics and her short reply was 'I had to be involved.'³⁸ Sadly, in the end, she only acquired 600 votes, losing the election. However, Janafa said that she has not given up and will try to contest the next elections, which are to occur in 2015.

A second woman with whom I spoke was 63-year old Plomina Puvenenthiraraja. She contested elections for the TNA. The seat she contested was, like Janafa on the Trincomalee UC—a seat once held by her brother. Plomina remarked that she became involved in politics 'by accident.'³⁹ She stated that the TNA approached, requesting that she contest the elections under their party. Like many women who have families divided on their political activity, Plomina stated that her 'sons were not happy, but my husband was supportive.'⁴⁰ After the election, Plomina stated that she was told she had received 1,350 votes. According to her, the following morning, March 18, she was told that she had won. According to her, this was reaffirmed on March 21, when a local newspaper 'included my name as having won.'⁴¹ The next day, however, she was told by the President of the TNA that she had in fact not won the election. When she requested to go in and recount the votes, something that is the right of the candidate, however she was refused.⁴² Plomina then threatened court action, but the TNA said 'it was a party matter.'⁴³ After this, Plomina felt that her hands were tied. Unfortunately, there did not seem to be any surprise by the two women in retelling their stories of the events which unfolded, only frustration.

Obstacles

As the personal reflections above showed, the obstacles faced by women on their path to contesting elections are formidable and plentiful. In May, I attended a workshop conducted

³⁸ Janafa Rasmiya, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 12, 2011.

³⁹ Plomina Puvenenthiraraja, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 12, 2011.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² According to her and those at the interview, it is the right of the candidate to request votes be recounted.

⁴³ Plomina Puvenenthiraraja, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 12, 2011.

by *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*, a German development organization working in Sri Lanka. During the session on women's participation in local government, the participants which consisted of local government employees, generated a list of nearly 20 reasons for women's under-representation in local politics (see Box 3). This section will dive into some of these obstacles, explaining them in the context of Eastern Sri Lanka.

Box 3: Obstacles faced by women:

- 1) No quota for women
- 2) Women's lack of confidence to run for election
- 3) Lack of experience to contest elections
- 4) The risk of defamation
- 5) An inherent patriarchal society
- 6) Lack of money and resources
- 7) Low education levels
- 8) Lack of familial connections
- 9) Lack of a viable network
- 10) Religious barriers (e.g. Islam)
- 11) Cultural barriers
- 12) Ethnic barriers
- 13) Social barriers
- 14) Few female role models from whom to learn
- 15) Unequal responsibilities at home (women tend to do most of the work)
- 16) No support from political parties
- 17) Violence, corruption and lack of security involved in politics

Quota

To make it to the nomination lists is an extremely difficult process, one that is exacerbated if you are female. As Kumudini explained it, there are incumbents who are automatically on the list, so if you only have 11 seats, nine of those may go to incumbents leaving only two seats open for election. Because there is a youth quota, that must be filled first.⁴⁴ Chulani stated that interestingly enough, they found that the youth quota was an opportunity to push women forward because not enough young men were interested in entering politics. Nonetheless, the end result of the March 2011 local government elections was a continuation of extremely low elected representation for

women. Arguably, one of the biggest surprises for this election was the contestation by seven Muslim women from Kinniya who contested elections for the Trincomalee and Kinniya UCs under the UNP.

According to Hemanthi, women's participation 'will not increase unless a quota system is introduced.' Otherwise, 'I don't think that there will be a self-motivating thing for women to come into politics. They need a lot of money. There's corruption and unless a husband or someone is in politics, it is a real challenge. A quota system is a must.'⁴⁵ Gita at the Asia Foundation had a similar view and also spoke of the fact that Sri Lanka is a 'pretty tokenistic

⁴⁴ Plomina Puvenenthiraraja, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 12, 2011.

⁴⁵ Hemanthi Goonaskera, interview by author, Colombo, June 1, 2011.

country and we have not moved beyond symbolic tokenistic politics. Women are not viewed as an important constituency in this country and if they were, then they would pick up 51 percent of the votes automatically.⁴⁶ Gita stated that she had asked the question, ‘why are women not viewed as a constituency?’⁴⁷ to several people and all she received in return was a ‘blank face.’ The politicians in Sri Lanka are not interested in wooing the female electorate and the constituency do not seem to be interested in voting for female candidates.

Religious, cultural, societal and ethnic barriers

Unfortunately, there are many risks when contesting elections, especially for women due to the culture of politics and society. During our interview, Janafa stated that ‘once you run for elections, the community views you differently.’⁴⁸ Often, the communities view them as loose or immoral or busybodies. Another factor for consideration when contesting elections, is safety. Janafa’s family was worried for her safety because she was contesting with the opposition UNP party, which would put her safety at risk. This risk was not unfounded, as elections in Sri Lanka are often associated with violence. According to the Campaign for Free and Fair Elections (CaFEE) in Sri Lanka’s website, there were 24 cases of violence from January 27, 2011 through July 20, 2011. According to an interviewee, ‘our culture is not about motivating women to get involved in politics—our culture is about protecting women and activities with politics are not for women.’⁴⁹ When there is this obvious lack of political will to give women space and even if women are given space, they are up against ‘patronage and patriarchal politics, money, corruption and hierarchies within parties’, how do you overcome this?⁵⁰

War

Perhaps one of the greatest effects on women’s participation has been the war. As stated by Samuel and Kodikara, ‘conflicts inevitably produce structural transformations for some women, opening up new social, economic and political opportunities which challenge and reframe gender hierarchies and roles’ (2010). Further in the article, they pose the question: but how does one sustain these positive gender shifts in the aftermath of war? (Ibid). This question which they put forth, exemplifies the difficulty for women in patriarchal societies to

⁴⁶ Gita Sabharwal, interview by author, Colombo, April 12, 2011.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Janafa Rasmiya, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 12, 2011.

⁴⁹ Mr. N. Manivannan, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 20, 2011.

⁵⁰ Kumudini Samuel, interview by author, Colombo, March 23, 2011.

escape the cocoon of cultural and societal expectation. Many women find comfort in knowing where their place is in society, what to expect from society, from their families and friends. However, in my Western mindset, I cannot help but to question whether this is simply a desire to keep what is familiar or a timidness at exploring uncharted territory. This territory, however, is not entirely unfamiliar.

During the war, women, particularly Tamil mothers, wives and daughters, were often forced to take upon new roles such as stated by Rajasingham-Senanayake, 'principal income generator and head of household' (2004, 144). However, the end of war often 'signals a return to the pre war gender regime and valiant efforts to reconstruct gender in the old way' (Samuel and Kodikara, 2010). This fear was mentioned by several interviewees as they spoke of a surprising reversion to traditional roles once held before the war.⁵¹ The patriarchal system, which invokes this reversion in Sri Lanka, runs deep and is difficult to overcome. As stated by Jayawardena and Kodikara, those 'biases and anxieties rooted in cultural constructs continue to undermine women's potential strengths, and treat them as a convenient and helpless victims (2008, 6). Thereby diminishing 'the individual and collective power that could otherwise have been wielded where such positive interventions are desperately needed' (Ibid).

Political Parties

As described above, the lack of support from political parties is an enormous burden for women's to advance in the political realm. This, in conjunction with the violent and corrupt nature of politics in Sri Lanka, decreases the chances for a woman to contest. According to one interviewee, Sociologist Harini Amarasuriya, 'because politics itself has such a bad reputation and is linked with corruption and violence, women do not want to be a part of it.'⁵² It is also difficult to get nominated into mainstream political parties simply because women feel that party leaders will not nominate them as it is viewed that they do not have the capacity to win elections—so why nominate women? Harini also stated that if looking at women's participation, one must look at the overall context of faith in politics which people have and their faith that politicians can change things.⁵³

⁵¹ Chulani Kodikara, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

⁵² Harini Amarasuriya, interview by author via Skype on 9 February 2011.

⁵³ Ibid.

Defamation

If taking the step to contest elections, women also must face the possibility of defamation or libelous behavior against their character and reputation. The impediment to women's contestation is the patriarchal culture, the resources which they do not have and the fact that the more public your position is, the more public your task becomes. In Sri Lanka, women tend to want to stay out of the public eye as they are afraid of character assassination.⁵⁴ In a country as traditional as Sri Lanka, your character and reputation, can be everything.

Education

Education is another obstacle which women must overcome in the East and is often reason for them not to seek leadership positions. Janafa, the woman in the story above, has a General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Level education,⁵⁵ which tends to be the highest level of education obtained in the East under normal circumstances according to another interviewee.⁵⁶ Alternately, Plomina has a GCE A/L education which is higher than the O Level and is rare for rural areas, particularly due to the conflict. She also previously worked for the government. Like many women who seek an elected position, Janafa and Plomina were active in a societal organizations before contesting elections. Janafa held positions of President and Treasurer within the WRDSs and Plomina was active in the Trincomalee Co-Operative Society. Janafa also participated in political meetings and gender-based trainings.

Conclusion

At the outset of this chapter, we saw a quote by Olympe de Gouges, stating that both men *and* women should equally hold positions of public office at all levels. As has been deconstructed in the chapter above, it is extremely difficult for women to penetrate the political realm due to a multifarious of obstacles. To gain insight into why there are so few women in politics, this chapter examined the structure of local government and the patriarchal culture of political parties and politics in Sri Lanka. This chapter showed the impact that the patriarchal culture of politics has on women's ability to enter the political arena. As has been argued, for women obtain elected seats, it will take the institution of a quota for women. Given that this is unlikely to occur, this thesis will now explore avenues through which women may participation in the government bodies which represent them. I

⁵⁴ Cayathri Divakalala and Susan Ward, interview by author, Colombo, April 1, 2011.

⁵⁵ GCE O/L education or Ordinary Level was introduced by the British. The next highest level is the GCE A/L or Advanced Level. In Sri Lanka, the O/L examination is regarded as the qualification examination for starting the GCE A/L.

⁵⁶ Priya Bhagirathan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 25, 2011.

would now like to take the next chapter to dive into the discourse of participation by providing a legal framework which calls for women's increased representation and participation in the political realm as well as introduce an avenue through which women may access local government.

Chapter 2: The Participation Dilemma

The advancement of women is reliant upon the equal participation of both sexes in all sectors of society—including the political. The participation of women in politics often faces formidable barriers, particularly at the decision-making level, as discussed in the chapter above. However, it is through women’s participation that their perspectives and needs can be incorporated into the political discourse of Sri Lanka. As will be described further in this chapter, the international community has provided multiple frameworks which call for the increased participation of women in the political realm. Without the participation of men *and* women, it is difficult for government to take into account the needs of the entire population. In order to construct a framework to conceptualize and analyze the role of women in local government politics, this chapter first introduces the international mechanisms which call for women’s advancement. This will lead into the current academic and development debate on participation. The chapter will conclude with an in-depth look at the village-level community based organization, WRDSs.

Legal Framework

The ramifications of over 30 years of conflict in Sri Lanka have thwarted the advancement and development of women. However, the resulting social and cultural marginalization of women which occurs during conflict can be reversed through the application and abidance of international declarations. These declarations include: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPFA), United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁵⁷ These instruments provide the basis for changing a country’s subaltern policies and provide platforms from which women can press for change.

The first framework discussed, BPFA, sought to formalize a new commitment to addressing women’s empowerment (See Box 4).⁵⁸ While BPFA is not a binding measure, it provides a

⁵⁷ Other instruments which are also pivotal for women include the Millennium Development Goals and Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

⁵⁸ Created at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The conference sought to address issues such as the advancement and equality of women as a human right, women’s empowerment and their inequality at decision-making and power sharing (UN Women).

In 2000, the Beijing +5 reviewed the goals set in China and due to their unfulfillment, reasserted their aim to accomplish them. Since then, every five years as seen a revisit to the original goals set in the Beijing Platform (2005 and 2010).

threshold for women's empowerment and rights.⁵⁹ One area of critical concern addressed during the 1995 conference was the 'inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels' (UN1996, 16). It is this concern which this paper attempts to tackle. Section G of BPFA, 'Women in Power and Decision-Making,' asserts that the need for 'the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life' (UN General Assembly 1996, 79). BPFA pushed women's agenda center stage, urging governments to take action.

Box 4: Beijing Platform (BPFA)

Strategic Objectives, Section G, *Women in Power and Decision-Making*

- 1) Take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making.
- 2) Increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.

Source: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995.

A National Plan of Action for Women was devised for Sri Lanka following the exposure of BPFA. The GoSL, Ministry of Women's Affairs, National Committee on Women, along with representatives from other relevant Ministries and women's organizations devised an eight priority plan which was relevant to women in Sri Lanka (Jayaweera 1999).⁶⁰ The second priority area specifically called for an increase in political representation. The considerable inequality for women in decision-making and power positions is surprising given that Sri Lankan women are far more empowered than many of their Asian neighbors. The post-war atmosphere is an opportune time to facilitate and encourage women's participation.

The next framework presented, UNSCR 1325 on 'Women, Peace and Security,' is an eighteen-point resolution that develops an agenda on how to address and react to issues which effect women during conflict. UNSCR 1325 was the first UN Security Council (UNSC) document that dealt with women in its entirety and encouraged that women be viewed not as victims but rather as agents of change. The framework establishes a list of

⁵⁹ BPFA is not legally binding, however, CEDAW and UNSCR 1325 are legally binding by states which ratify it or signatories of the UN Charter, respectively.

⁶⁰ Ministry of Women's Affairs was created in 1983 however, in 2005 the GoSL transformed the Ministry of Women's Affairs into a combined Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs (MCDWA). This was done amidst much controversy with women's groups stating that it has 'undermined the women's right to equality agenda, carefully built through years of partnership between the state gender agencies and women's groups' (WMC 2010, 10). This has siloed women into a certain societal role, suggesting that women and children's issues are the same and is reinforcing the negative cultural stereotypes that women face.

recommendations which encourages the participation and increased representation of women in conflict resolution and peace processes, particularly in decision-making roles. Additionally, it affirms the important role that women play in prevention and resolution of armed conflicts and in the peace-building process (see Box 5). At the same time, UNSCR 1325 recognizes that the social systems at play in societies are gendered with preferential treatment shown towards males. UNSCR 1325 provides ‘a comprehensive political

Box 5: UNSCR 1325, Recommendations

- 1) *Urges* Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict;
- 2) *Encourages* the Secretary-General to implement his strategic plan of action (A/49/587) calling for an increase in the participation of women at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes.

Source: UN Security Council, 2000.

framework within which women’s protection and their role in peace processes can be addressed’ (Bouta, Frerks and Bannon 2005, 144).⁶¹ UNSCR 1325 calls upon the Security Council, the UN Secretary General, member states and other parties such as militias, civil society and humanitarian agencies to encourage ‘an increase in the participation at decision-making levels in conflict resolution and peace processes’ and ‘stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the

need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution (UN Security Council, 2000). Box 5 includes two of the recommendations presented to the Secretary General on strategies to increase women’s participation and representation. Next I will present CEDAW, often referred to as the ‘women’s bill of rights’ and one of the nine international human rights treaties of the United Nations.⁶²

CEDAW addresses the nature and scope of State’s obligations—bringing attention to the various types of discrimination women experience and the measures that States should take

⁶¹ UNSCR 1325, created in 2000, was meant to formally acknowledge the changing nature of warfare, especially in regards the the targeting of women. UNSCR 1325 addresses this in addition to drawing attention the the pivotal role that women play in conflict resolution and promotion of peace. Other UNSCRs which draw attention to women include UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960.

⁶² CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1979 and entered into force on 3 September 1981. Sri Lanka signed the declaration on 17 July 1980 and ratified on 5 October 1981.

As defined by CEDAW: treaty, in a generic sense, is a legal instrument that is concluded by states or international organisations that hold the power to make treaties. It is the most binding form of International law. Being part of International law, states and not individuals are party to it. A treaty is also referred to as a Convention or Covenant (UNIFEM 2004, 52).

to eliminate this discrimination (see Box 6). It is a binding treaty for those States which have ratified or acceded the instrument. For purposes of this paper an emphasis will be placed on Article 7 of CEDAW as it specifically addresses women's participation in political and public

Box 6: CEDAW, Article 7

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:

- a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations.

Source: UN General Assembly, 1979.

life. As a human rights instrument, CEDAW uses a comprehensive conceptual approach to address the promotion and protection of women in both public and private spheres of life. It calls for women's equality politically, socially, and economically in addition to urging women's empowerment. As a ratifier, Sri Lanka thus has the responsibility to ensure women's increased political participation. After the ratification of CEDAW, Sri Lanka devised its own legal framework, the Women's Charter in 1993, which articulates the state policy on women. As stated by Jayawardena and Kodikara in their book, *Women and Local Governance in Sri*

Lanka, 'the Charter is based on the principles of the CEDAW standards, but keeps in mind the specific contextual situation of women in Sri Lanka' (2003, 74). Additionally, the Charter provided for the creation of the National Committee on Women (NCW), established in 1993. The NCW's mission is 'to promote and protect the rights of Sri Lankan Women, to establish equality, to give advice, assistance, to implement, to monitor and evaluate and establish the legal frame work for the full development of women' (Ministry of Child Development and Women's Affairs).

These are not the only national machineries for women, the Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Women's Affairs were established during the United Nations Decade for Women, however, they lack any real strength in changing the political discourse of women in Sri Lanka.⁶³ Following the introduction and discussion into international, legal mechanisms which urge nations to encourage and facilitate women's participation, this chapter will now turn to an examination of the participation paradigm.

⁶³ The Women's Bureau was established in 1978 with the aim to 'develop, implement, monitor, evaluate and coordinate the policies and programmes for the realization of women's rights' (MCDWA).

The UN Decade for Women was from 1976-1985 (UN - Global Issues)

Participation

In this analysis, the discourse of participation will be examined through the perspectives of various academics, development donors and UN agencies. The alternative paradigms of participation employed will be deconstructed through their use of definitions and methodologies. Close attention will be paid to the realm of political participation and the relationship of participation to terms such as empowerment and citizenship. There are numerous definitions, interpretations and approaches to participation. Participation as both theory and practice has evolved and gained momentum over the decades. It experienced a shift from a community participation discourse in the 1950s and 1960s (Botchway 2001) to a development discourse, tackling poverty in the 1970s and 1980s (Cohen and Uphof 1980; Bamberger, 1986). Robert McNamara, then President of the World Bank (WB), raised the term as a new direction for their institution in 1973.

Box 7: Participation, UNESCAP

Participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society would be taken into consideration in decision making. Participation needs to be informed and organized. This means freedom of association and expression on the one hand and an organized civil society on the other hand.

Source: UNESCAP, What is Good Governance?

The appearance of participation on the development agenda during the 1970s, 'gained much acceptance in development theory and practice [...] but for many people remained abstract, more a matter of preference (or rejection) than of empirical study and application' (Uphoff 2001, 215; Oakley, 1991). The 1980s, in particular, saw participation transformed from empowerment or capacity building goals to more 'community participation' through 'sharing of benefits by the poor, project efficiency and effectiveness and cost sharing' (Bamberger, 1986). Many argue that participation is the empowerment of individuals (Oakley, 1987; Oakley and Marsden, 1984). This in turn results in people taking 'active control of their own lives' (Rappaport, 1981; Barimah and Nelson 1994, 174). The participation paradigm was late coming to Sri Lanka, not taking foot until the late 1980s and early 1990s where a change in the development discourse shifted from an emphasis on community to a more participatory and empowerment approach (Woost 1997).

It was in this vein that the international arena in the 1990s saw a commitment by most donor agencies to promote participation as a development discourse in their projects and policies

(Woost 1997; Cornwall and Brock 2005; Bliss and Neumann 2008). According to Robert Gaventa, the discourse of participation is increasingly being 'related to the rights of citizenship and to democratic governance' (2002, 29). In 1995, the World Bank Learning Group on Participation defined participation as a 'process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them' (World Bank Learning Group). In the introduction, the eight characteristics to good governance according to UNESCAP was introduced, one of which was participation (see Box 7). As Cohen and Uphoff refer to participation, it is the inclusion of people in decision-making processes (1977). However, the extensive amount of literature on participation since that time, has allowed us to 'broaden our understanding of the concept' (Oakley 1991, 6).

Political Participation

There are many forms of participation within a society: household, cultural, economic, social and political. This paper argues that all members of society should have the opportunity to participate in decision-making spheres which influence their lives. As the political creates the greatest opportunity for systematic change, it is the focus of this analysis. Furthermore, the political sphere allows for citizens to play constructive and meaningful roles in society at the micro and macro levels. Political participation provides a means of disbursement of power throughout the community. Political participation is more than just voting or lobbying, it also includes having a voice in decision-making. As defined by Verba and Nie, '*political participation refers to those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take*' (1987, 2). This definition has broad and narrow connotations. As stated by Verba and Nie, it is broad in the sense that it includes all avenues of citizen involvement but is narrow in that they are only interested in the '*participatory activities*' of citizens which are aimed at *influencing* the government (Ibid, 2-3). Similarly, Burns, Scholzman, and Verba define political participation as an '*activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action—either directly, or affecting the making or implementation of public policy, or those indirectly, by influencing the selection of people who make those policies*' (2001, 4). In this vein, the entire following statement by M. Shamsul Haque is used as it accurately describes the different avenues for civic participation in local government

'there are various forms or modes of this citizen participation, including community-level involvement in decision-making, opportunity to vote for or against major policy mandates, use of informal means like the media to influence state policies, and direct representation of citizens in politics and administration. Among these major forms of

citizen participation, while community-level participation basically occurs at the lower level of state power, means of electoral votes is relatively indirect, and expression of individual opinions through media is quite fragmented, such participation based on direct representation or involvement of citizens at various levels of power hierarchy is more concrete and effective' (2003, 570).

In a workshop in 1999, Gaventa and Camilo Valderrama, discussed two traditions which are increasingly linked to a broader notion of participation. The first tradition included approaches to participation 'which have focused on community or social participation, usually in the civil society sphere' (1999, 1). The second tradition, which relates more to this thesis, is that of political participation, 'through which citizens have engaged in traditional forms of political involvement e.g. voting, political parties, and lobbying' (Ibid). Gaventa and Valderrama argue that participation in local governance 'will improve the efficiency of public services, that it will make local government more accountable, and that it will deepen democracy—complementing representative forms with more participatory forms' (Ibid, 4). If we take the definition of political participation as defined by Patrick Conge, it is the 'individual or collective action at the national or local level that supports or opposes state structures, authorities, and/or decisions regarding allocations of public goods' (1988, 247). Participation is defined as a process by which people (both men and women) take an active and influential hand in shaping decisions that affect their lives. In democratic countries people have the right to participate in decision making without any discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, caste race, class and gender. Sri Lanka, being a democratic country, should uphold this right. Therefore, women need and should be able to take an equal part in political participation and in shaping their society.

As defined in a document from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'participation strengthens civil society and the economy by empowering individuals, communities, and organisations to negotiate with institutions and bureaucracies, thus allowing civil society to influence public policy and to provide a check on the power of government. Participation also aids in dealing with conflicting interests in a peaceful manner. It follows that the creation of a climate and the capacity for constructive interaction between civil society and government is a critical component for long-term peacebuilding' (OECD/ DAC 1997, 39). This enables facilitating a culture of participation by all citizens in a postwar community enables peacebuilding and reconciliation to occur naturally. As stated by Bigdon and Korf,

'it is still essential to keep up the effort for participatory approaches to stimulate local development, not only for efficiency and cost-cutting reasons, but also to overcome dependency and to stimulate self-help and empowerment processes among marginalized groups. Especially in situations of complex emergency, empowerment processes and recognition are the only way to bring about democratisation and to achieve a more inclusive, pluralistic and tolerant society, which is able to resolve its conflicts with non-violent means' (2004, 17).

As defined by Zimmerman and Rappaport, citizen participation is 'involvement in any organized activity in which the individual participates without pay in order to achieve a common goal. This includes involvement in government-mandated advisory boards, voluntary organisations, mutual-help groups, and community service activities' (1988, 726-7). The application of this definition, in particular, will manifest in the introduction of WRDSs in this chapter and other societal actors in chapter three.

Participation to Empowerment

One might argue that an increase in decision-making and participation would automatically default to empowerment, however, I would argue that it depends upon the empowerment reality on the ground. Participation has been linked to the empowerment of people since the 1970s. The empowerment of women is often referred to as 'gender empowerment' or 'women's empowerment.'⁶⁴ Empowerment is another buzz term in the development arena, but what is empowerment? There are a multitude of definitions which cover a vast landscape of significance and connotation which depends upon the political and social-cultural contexts in which it is used. The definition of empowerment as used by the World Bank, 'is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes' (World Bank).

The feeling or action of empowerment is different for a woman in Trincomalee than in Colombo, in the Eastern Province versus the Southern Province. Even within Trincomalee, one woman's exertion of empowerment is different than another woman's. The development of a woman's empowerment and thus confidence in her capabilities, can influence and perhaps push her to question cultural and social norms over time. Women are able to engage in political participation through a number of ways, including 'voting and voter education, candidacy in national and local elections, lending support to candidates who carry gender-sensitive agenda, campaigning against those who have policies that are 'anti-

⁶⁴ It should be noted that the term 'gender' technically refers to both men and women, but it is increasingly used to imply women.

women's rights', and advocating for the integration of a women's rights agenda in the platforms of candidates and parties' (Bello 2003). However, their engagement in politics is often unacknowledged and unappreciated.

One of the four areas of practice for empowerment as defined by the World Bank, is the duality of inclusion and participation (World Bank, What is Empowerment?). The WB states that the 'inclusion of poor people and other traditionally excluded groups in priority setting and decision making is critical to ensure that limited public resources build on local knowledge and priorities, and to build commitment to change' (Ibid). The WB further states that participation can take many forms, however, I will focus on two of the forms mentioned, 'representational, by selecting representatives from membership-based groups and associations; and political, through elected representatives' (Ibid). It should be noted, that given the violent history of Sri Lanka's recent past, encouraging the participation of previously excluded groups from decision-making and political processes could foster hostility or create unneeded conflict. As one interviewee noted, 'this hatred though cooled down is deposited under the ash and with the blowing of ash you can spot it again.'⁶⁵ Therefore, when instigating a culture of inclusion and participation, particularly in conflict or post-conflict settings, requires the utmost care and understanding of cultural contexts.

Women's Rural Development Societies

One of the platforms available for women to springboard into local politics is through WRDSs (*Kantha Samithies* in Sinhala and *Madar Sangam* in Tamil). WRDSs are village-level societies that were initiated by the Rural Development Department in the 1950s. There is also a men's Rural Development Society (RDS), with both falling under the same government arm, the Rural Development Department (RDD). They do however, as noted by an interviewee, function separately in most areas.⁶⁶ The RDS came into existence first, but due to the lack of attention to women's issues, it gave way to the birth of the WRDS.⁶⁷ In his article "In the eye of the storm," Bart Klem describes the RDS as village councils that were 'created all over the island as a clearinghouse for government patronage and thus an important ring in the chain that connected rural villages to the state' (Klem 2010, 13). The societies had a 'paternalistic attitude, dominated by the village elite and their main activity was to mobilise the voluntary labour of the poor in order to improve the village

⁶⁵ Jayantha Wickramanayake, interview by author, Colombo, 24 May 2011.

⁶⁶ Gowry Gunaretnam, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁶⁷ Cayathri Divakalala, email correspondence, August 6, 2011.

infrastructure' (Kanesalingam 1971, 145). Arguably, the domination by village elite continues today as its members are often related to those in the men's Rural Development Society (RDS).⁶⁸ Thus, creating a ruling class of sorts, from the more wealthy members of the village. However, per an interviewee, this provides a way of the poor having support.⁶⁹ Either way, the more educated are often members of the RDS and WRDS, and thus the more affluent members of the village.

During the war, the capacity of the WRDS was reduced due to the effects of the war and according to one interviewee, the LTTE never allowed societies such as the WRDS to function in areas under their control.⁷⁰ Per an interviewee, the war greatly affected their level of functionality.⁷¹ However, in the same interview, the respondent stated that the RDD is working to strengthen and reform the WRDS. Because of the war, many members of the WRDS are spread out, particularly their executive members, thus it is difficult for them to function.⁷² I asked one interviewee, what has been the role of the WRDS in peacebuilding and reconstruction? He replied that 'there are Mediation Boards which are established by the Ministry of Justice and support the DS office to resolve village level conflicts. Before you go to the police station or even courts, you can first refer to the locally available mediator. There is a mandate for every village to have one, however this is not the case. I know one person in particular, a very proactive WRDS member of a mediation board in Batticaloa.'⁷³

Structure

The membership of WRDSs is generally comprised of the rural middle class with an executive committee.⁷⁴ Per the By-laws, the annual fee to become a member of the WRDS should not be less than Rs. 120/per annum (Bylaws, p 2).⁷⁵ Women do not tend to become members of the RDS unless there is not a functioning WRDS in their village. However, as to

⁶⁸ Shanthi Sachithanandam, interview by author, Colombo, April 6, 2011.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Sinnathamby Sooriyakumary, interview by author, Colombo, April 7, 2011.

⁷¹ Gowry Gunaretnam, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Kandeepan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁷⁴ Shanthi Sachithanandam, interview by author, Colombo, April 6, 2011.

The executive membership of a WRDS includes: President, Vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and eight Committee Members (By-laws 2006, 6).

⁷⁵ Rs. 120 = ~ €0.75 euros or \$1.09

be expected, if women are obliged to be members of the RDS, men take the dominant role.⁷⁶

The WRDS has the status of a formal organization (as opposed to informal which will be discussed later in this chapter) because it is a government-mandated institution with bylaws and government agents to whom it must answer—Rural Development Officers (RDO). The RDO, is the ‘official advisor to the society,’ providing oversight to the functioning of the WRDS (7). As official advisor, one of the duties of the RDO is to visit every RDS and WRDS under their area. According to an interviewee, a RDO covers anywhere from five to six villages because of the lack of staff. However, according to an interview I conducted with an RDO, she was

covering twenty villages.⁷⁷ This is especially difficult in rural areas where an RDO may have large distances to cover due to the remoteness of some villages in addition to the lack of infrastructure.⁷⁸

Funding for a WRDS comes from a number of ways. They often receive grants and contracts from local and international NGOs. Larger international agencies and donors are increasingly building their capacities and utilizing their connection to the ground. According to the By-Laws, the society can receive funding in the following ways:

- 1) Every society is entitled to receive governmental and non-governmental grants and assistance for development project activities, either by money or materials.
- 2) Temporary funds can be raised to meet any unexpected disaster and damage caused to the village with the permission of the Divisional Secretary of the area.

Box 7: Objectives of the WRDS*

- 1) Development work planned activities;
- 2) Health activities;
- 3) Education;
- 4) Protection of environment;
- 5) Development of women’s welfare;
- 6) Vocational and skill training activities;
- 7) Agriculture development;
- 8) Animal husbandry;
- 9) Cottage industries;
- 10) Micro credit activities;
- 11) Shramadana activities;
- 12) Religious development activities;
- 13) Art and culture development activities;
- 14) Sport development and entertaining activities;
- 15) Development ethical activities;
- 16) Activities for special needs beneficiaries.

Source: By-laws

*These are also subjected to the men’s RDS.

⁷⁶ Kandeepan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁷⁷ Rural Development Officer, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 2, 2011.

⁷⁸ It took more than two hours to travel from Trincomalee to Muthur, a distance of not more than 20 kilometers.

3) In the event of urgent needs of the society special funds can be raised within the region with the permission of the District Secretary and District Rural Development Officer.

Additionally, 'any society can undertake to do any contract works with the government department or semi government or non-governmental organizations' (2006, 11). However, before this can occur, permission must be 'obtained from the Divisional Secretary through the Rural Development Officer' (Ibid). Additionally, the WRDS must have a 'society account at a recognized bank' which comes with rigorous oversight. According to the By-laws, 'the first signatory shall be the treasurer and the second signatory shall be either the president or in his absence the secretary. The Divisional Secretary and the Rural Development Officer shall certify the specimen signature' (Ibid). It is only after this, that the WRDS can remove funds from the society account.

According an interviewee, a WRDS starts out as a women's group. In order to become an official WRDS, the group must for a period of six months (a) have monthly meetings, (b) have the meeting minutes for each month well documented, (c) conduct community work or common activities in their village. They must then submit the monthly meetings as well as reports of community work conducted as well as prepare a constitution for themselves. After they gather and submit the appropriate documentation to their respective RDO, they in turn submit it to the Social Services Department. Once their application is reviewed and, if all is in order, they can become an officially registered WRDS. Just as nearly every interviewee has said, the RDS has more power than the WRDS, but are less efficient and reliable. The RDS gets 'most of the contract work and thus gets more opportunities.'⁷⁹ The allocation of work tends to call with the RDS getting contract work for village roads, drainage and minor infrastructure work while the WRDS tends to get more livelihood related tasks. However, this is not set in stone and if the capacity is there, a WRDS can also obtain light infrastructure work. According to Priya, most of the government contracts come through the DS, but NGOs also give contracts, mostly for livelihood-related issues. The effectiveness of WRDSs was expressed in multiple interviews, including one with Joe Williams, National Peace Council. Mr. Williams stated that he often worked with WRDS in the past through grassroots projects which were UNDP-funded as very often found 'that projects implemented through WRDS were very, very effective.'⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Priya Bhagirathan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 25, 2011.

⁸⁰ Joe Williams, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

Though the WRDS is a government-mandated institution, I was unable to find any evidence that the government provided significant assistance to the society itself.⁸¹ However, during an interview with the Social Services Department (SSD) in Trincomalee, the Director of the Eastern Provincial SSD, stated that if a particular society needs any assistance from department they can come and talk with a Social Services Officer (SSO) who in turn can make a recommendation for assistance. If the SSO finds that a WRDS is capable of and has the capacity to run a business they can submit an application. However, Mr. Manivannan commented that we [the SSD] 'are not helping individual WRDSs, but instead are providing assistance to individuals within the WRDS.'⁸² He noted that 'we are are not ensuring that it is the WRDS that can run a business, but rather the women who are members of the WRDS.'⁸³ He further stated that priorities are given to WRDSs because as a member of the WRDS, the women are bound to rules and regulations.⁸⁴ Mr. Manivannan provided an example of assistance provided last year to a woman who was working with WRDS: 'she came for a training program and asked me for assistance for this WRDS society in Muthur Division. I said yes, send an application. She identified a number of ladies and submitted the application. The application was approved and the SSD provided money for them to run a small business.'⁸⁵ Instead, from those that I spoke with, most support comes to the WRDS via NGOs or perhaps through 'the decentralized government systems such as different welfare programs which channeled through the de-concentrated system.'⁸⁶ It should be noted, that women from the WRDS are also quite often members of other village level societies (such as Fisherman's, Farmer's or Temple Societies) because they realize that this is a way to gain access to multiple types of services and training.⁸⁷ WRDSs do have a strong presence in village governance, as according to the By-Laws, a 'minimum of 51 percent of the total population of families in every village shall be enrolled as members of every society' (By-Laws 2006, 2).

During the course of my time in Trincomalee, I was able to visit an IDP camp as well as three recently resettled villages. In Sampukali, a recently resettled village near Sampur, I spoke with a member from the WRDS and President of the RDS. The WRDS has 42

⁸¹ I was only able to find very little written material on the government relationship with WRDSs.

⁸² Mr. N. Manivannan, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 20, 2011.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Gita Sabharwal, interview by author, Colombo, April 12, 2011.

⁸⁷ Kandeepan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

members and they hold meetings once a month. It was interesting to find out that in this village, the RDS and WRDS are working together to create a co-operative farm. The idea is to have approximately 40 families employed, half women and half men and they workers will change on a rotating basis. According to RDS President, the 'women work like men.'⁸⁸ The WRDS in this village was formed from widows and their main activity is making food, lunch boxes, to sell, a common job women have in rural areas.

Formal vs Informal CBOs

It should be noted that within village society, there are formal and informal women's groups. Informal groups, such as self-help or micro finance groups, tend to be created by NGOs and are not subject to the same rigorous oversight as a WRDS (as described above). Depending upon the organization or person one talks to, there are strong preferences to work with informal or formal groups or sometimes both. In one interview, it was stated that a reason why some organizations would prefer to work with informal women's groups in the community rather than the formal WRDS is the lack of bureaucracy.⁸⁹ However, another interviewee felt strongly that NGOs should only work with formal institutions as they are registered, thus reducing the competition between groups for services and funding.⁹⁰ Per the same interview, it was stated that NGOs themselves tend to want to work with the informal groups because of the lack of bureaucracy. However, the government is 'keen to regulate' this.⁹¹

Chapter 12 of the *Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Local Government Reforms*, focuses on 'People's Participation and Social Development' (Government of Sri Lanka). The focus of participation as a part of this paper's analytical framework is due to its ability to provide a way for citizens to communicate their needs and desires to their government. In a post-war environment, this can be even more crucial to ensure that the needs of all citizens are heard and represented. While I do focus on the participation of women within this analysis, I do not wish to exclude that there should also be appropriate representation of the other minorities which are part of the political makeup in the Eastern Province: Tamils and Muslims. Participation offers strategies for 'marginalised groups to recognise and strengthen voice: "for people's self-development"' (Rahman 1995 as cited in Cornwall 2002, 6). The

⁸⁸ Interview with president of local RDS in Muthur. May 19, 2011. Name is unknown.

⁸⁹ Gowry Gunaretnam, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁹⁰ Kandeepan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 29, 2011.

⁹¹ Ibid.

participation of an individual may be limited to that of a voter or political party volunteer—but as a group, their effectiveness can greatly increase.

Conclusion

As demonstrated through the mechanisms at the beginning of this chapter, there has been an international call for nations to address the low levels of women participation in decision-making positions. Through deconstruction of the participation discourse, it became evident that the call for an increase of citizens, particularly women's, participation in government and decision-making has been on the international agenda for decades. In this chapter I introduced WRDSs, presenting how they can be a platform for women in rural villages to become more active in their local government structures. The WRDS is just one of the avenues through which can become more actively engaged in their community and become increase their status in society. The next chapter, will further examine actors in society through which this can occur, called 'brokers.'

Chapter 3: Societal ‘Brokers’ in Local Governance Structures

Brokers are found throughout society—in family, religion, social, economic and political circles. As shown thus far, women face a multitude of barriers when attempting to enter politics. However, as the preceding chapter displayed, their participation is critical for the development of society. This chapter aims to introduce four actors which function as brokers, thereby improving our understanding of the role they play in society. The role of a broker can be more pronounced depending upon the society or circumstances which acquire the function of brokerage. The first section will examine the concept of brokerage, providing the academic debate.

Brokerage

The concept of brokerage was chosen as an analytical tool to explore the actors in society which can facilitate and encourage women’s participation in local government. Eric Wolf conducted one of the earliest studies on brokers, in his 1956 examination of the relationship between the community and state in Mexico (Vincent 1978). In his analysis, Wolf defined brokers as the ‘groups of people who mediate between community-oriented groups in communities and nation-oriented groups which operate primarily through national institutions’ (1956, 1075). These groups of people—brokers—‘stand guard over the crucial junctures or synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole’ (Ibid). Furthermore, Wolf states that the basic function of a broker ‘is to relate community-oriented individuals who want to stabilize or improve their life chances, but who lack economic security and political connections’ with that of ‘nation-oriented individuals who operate primarily in terms of the complex cultural forms standardized as national institutions’ (Ibid, 1075-76).

Broker became a key political anthropology term in the 1960s and 1970s (James 2011, 318). The term ‘broker’ or ‘brokerage’ largely tends to be referred to in terms of development discourse (Bierschenk, Chauveau and Sardan 2002; Frerks 1991). Blok (1969) as cited in Frerks (1991) defines *brokers* as keeping ‘a foot in both structures between which they bridge the gap. They are able to do so because they understand the different values and symbols that set these structures apart’ (34). In the same vein, Tilley and Tarrow in *Contentious Politics*, define brokerage as the ‘production of a new connection between previously unconnected or weakly connected sites’ (2007, 215). By connecting the two

social sites, a broker, becomes a bridge enabling new relationships to be established or those which were established, to be reconfigured. Yet, according to Tilly, 'the activation of brokerage does not in itself guarantee more effective coordination of action at the connected sites' instead, the effectiveness of a broker 'depends on initial conditions and combinations with other mechanisms' (Tilly 2003, 21). The action of brokerage can result in a polarization of the two sides which it bridges, if for example, the broker 'connects factions on each side of an us-them boundary without establishing new connections across the boundary' thus resulting in a reduction of the 'overall coordination of their actions' (Ibid). As noted by Tilly, brokerage can be a mechanism or process, depending on the 'scale of analysis' (Ibid, 22). He notes that if 'a single actor produces a precise link between two other clearly defined and previously unconnected actors' then it is a mechanism (citation). Whereas, 'when speaking more broadly about how a whole category of actors produce previously missing links', brokerage is a process (Ibid). However, the action of brokerage automatically results in a manipulation and changing of the boundaries in which the act of a broker takes place (Ibid).

Bierschenk, Chauveau and Sardan have provided the most in-depth analysis of brokers. They state that becoming a broker is more out of 'discovery' than the part of a 'well-elaborated plan' (2002, 19). However, this does not mean that there is no premeditation on the part of the broker (Ibid). A person, organization or society can consciously decide to become broker. This is found particularly in NGO-funded programs which have the purpose to bring two parts of society together. As will be shown further in this analysis, the action of brokerage was actively sought by the NGOs in question, though not using that specific terminology. The role of broker is not an 'official' or even 'informal position,' and it is not a term which anyone defines himself or herself, but rather 'exists solely for the sake of analysis' (Ibid). Rather it is 'often a passageway or a stage in a social trajectory, usually marked by upward mobilization. Becoming a broker can be, in itself, a form of social promotion, or a step upwards leading ultimately to social promotion' (Ibid, 24). It must also be mentioned, that because of the 'informal character' of a broker it does not have a permanent position in society and risks the reversal of its status if there is 'a loss of confidence,' as it is 'essentially dependent on a fiduciary capital' (Ibid). Through these definitions, we can understand brokers as the actors in society which provide a channel of facilitation between various levels of that society.

Local Societal Brokers

During the course of field research, several brokers working to bring together local government and village society in Sri Lanka manifested. To understand how the whole of a

society works, one must understand the individual parts. Through the above deconstruction of brokerage, one can conclude that brokers are the actors in society which bridges one part of society to the other, drawing on the unique abilities of each to facilitate cohesion and building of societal relationships. We will now identify and dismantle the actors in Eastern Sri Lanka which, arguably, act as brokers in this endeavor.

Viluthu ~ Anangu Project

To move from a theoretical analysis to a more societal analysis, this paper will now introduce the first broker in society. Viluthu, a local NGO, works to support and strengthen the people in the conflict affected Northern and Eastern Provinces. Their aim is to 'promote a culture of democracy by facilitating changes in legislations, policies and institutional culture through building capacities and instilling values that underpin a democratic and inclusive society' (Viluthu, Mission). The organization engages both formal and informal women's groups in villages and have been working with WRDSs since 2007. During our interview, I asked Shanthi, CEO of Viluthu, why they chose to engage WRDSs. Her response: 'because they are formed out of a parliamentary act and are part of the Rural Development Department. They are government mandated and every village division must have one.'⁹² According to the interviewee, UN organizations and NGOs are increasingly working with the WRDSs as they are seen as reliable partners for local projects. Shanthi stated that Viluthu provides gender and other relevant trainings for WRDS members as well as activities which build the capacity of the WRDS. Thereafter, Viluthu connects the society to a relevant local authorities, urging the WRDS to be more proactive and participatory citizens. Further in the interview, Shanthi stated that 'no one knew what a local authority was because they never functioned. No elections were held for a long time and thus everyone thought the Divisional Secretary was the local government.'⁹³ According to her, they once they took the members of a WRDS to their local authority to ask about a road. When 'they looked at members fumbling on answers, that gave immense power to the women. They started observing proceedings and organizing joint meetings.'⁹⁴

In one example, Shanthi spoke of a WRDS in a Muslim village, *Pulikkudy Bazar* in Trincomalee, which Viluthu was instrumental in founding. She stated that they trained and taught them the by-laws of a WRDS as well as provided gender training. She noted that this

⁹² Shanthi Sachithanandam, interview by author, Colombo, April 6, 2011.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

WRDS has been quite successful and the members encouraged their president, Nazeera, to contest elections. However, like most women, she was not put on a nomination list. Though this specific WRDS has been successful compared to others, it has not been without challenges. Shanthi commented that the WRDS wanted to organize a woman's day, a special event for the community through which the talents of the women could be shown. However, members of the Mosque leadership banned the event arguing that it was against Islamic culture. In response to this, Shanthi stated: 'we told Nazeera this is the time you have to build other alliances. Look for alliances because if you are alone in the village they will mull over you.'⁹⁵ After this, Nazeera then linked her WRDS to neighboring WRDSs which was in Sinhala and Tamil villages. Together, they decided to have a joint women's day celebration on an adjoining piece of land. On the day of the celebration they set up a tent on the land and held their event. The District member of Parliament, whom they invited, came to the celebration as well as other DS officers. Shanthi stated, that upon seeing the guests which were attending the event, how can 'the religious leaders disagree, so they also came and graced the occasion.'⁹⁶

Shanthi noted a target of Viluthu is linking governance to day-to-day issues. They are attempting to accomplish this aim under their current project, *Anangu*, is a Tamil term for Goddess (or woman with supernatural powers). Shanthi stated that, 'we named it *Anangu* because we felt that working on governance you had to have some supernatural powers in Sri Lanka in order to pluck up the courage to work on it. So any woman who comes to work on this is a goddess.'⁹⁷ *Anangu* started in 2009 and Viluthu is currently working with 115 WRDSs under this program. The Anungu program consists of four levels:

- 1) Strengthening the WRDSs
- 2) Providing skills for resource mobilization (how to write letters, interact with the DS office, write proposals, etc.) It is at this level which we link the WRDS to the local Authorities.
- 3) Building the capacity of WRDS members—training them in the understanding of conceptual issues (e.g. Domestic violence, gender issues, governance, women in politics, etc.), providing them ways to make a collective societal change.

⁹⁵ Shanthi Sachithanandam, interview by author, Colombo, April 6, 2011.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

- 4) Facilitating networking and build common forums for collective action (Viluthu, Anangu).

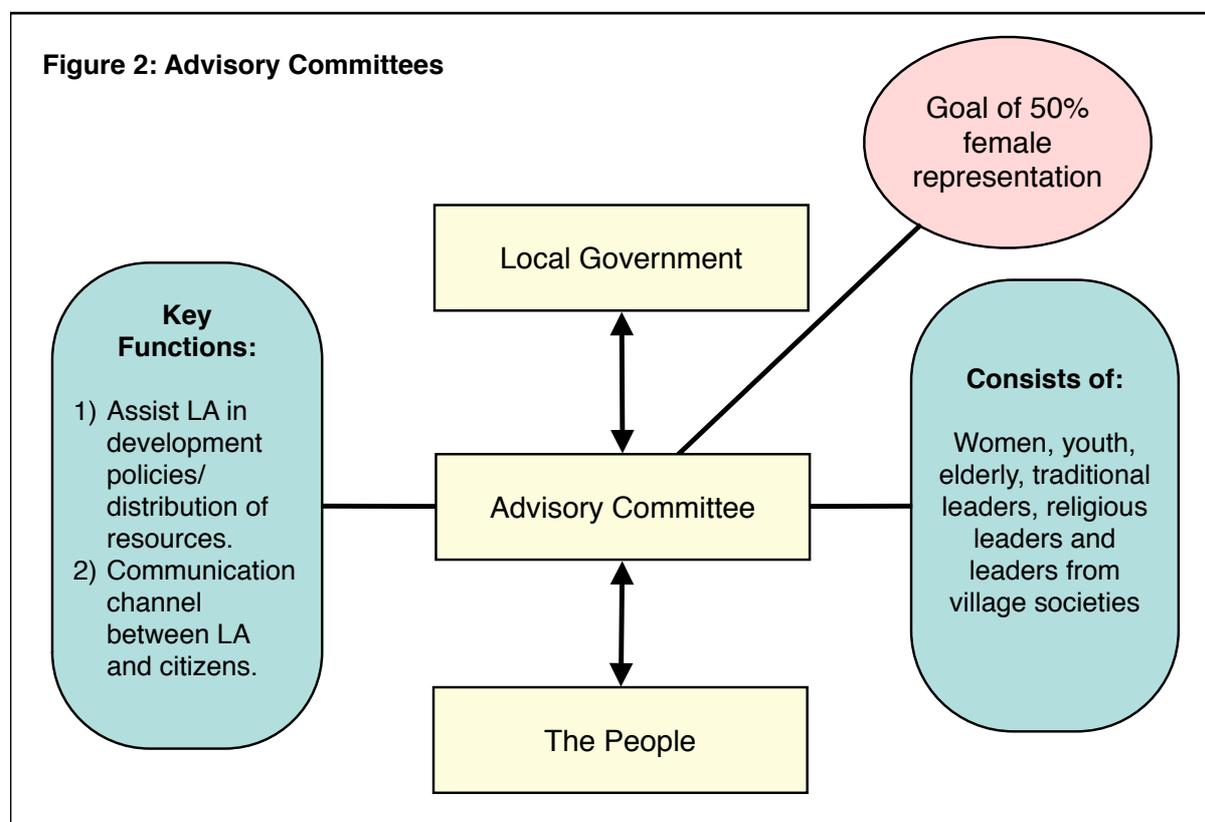
In addition to these efforts, during the lead up to the March 2011 election, Viluthu campaigned to 'promote women's nominations' (Viluthu, Campaigns). They specifically chose Trincomalee district to launch their 'pilot project with the objective of ensuring at least 20% women's nomination in 10 electoral lists of all major political parties' (Ibid). During the campaign, they encouraged the participation of two women from Muthur and three Muslim women from Kinniya to contest the local government elections in Trincomalee District. As demonstrated, an organization such as Viluthu provides the mechanisms for women to become more engaged and empowered in civil society.

Performance Improvement Project/GTZ

In 1998, the Presidential Commission on Local Government Reforms was established to examine the local government system in existence. The report suggested more than 400 recommendations to reform the Local Government system of Sri Lanka. One such recommendation was for the establishment of Advisory Committees.⁹⁸ In section 12.1.3.2, the report stated that Advisory Committees would be 'composed of senior citizens, subject specialists, ward members, and other competent persons in the area who could contribute to Local Government' (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, 1999, 242). These committees are one of the outputs for the Performance Improvement Project (PIP) implemented by GTZ in co-operation with the Sri Lanka's Ministry of Economic Development (MED) and Australian Government Aid (AusAID) (for the author's interpretation to the functioning of Advisory Committees, see Figure 2). According to the report, the committee should have the following functions: (a) assist the Local Authority in deciding development policies and distributing resources, taking into account the needs of the residents; (b) function as a communication channel between the Local Authority and the people in the exchange of information and ideas; and (c) assist and advise the representatives in the discharge of their responsibilities' (Performance Improvement Project). In doing so, according to PIP project documentation, 'the advisory committee will function as a communication channel between the local authority and the people as a means of keeping activities that affect the public transparent' (Ibid, 3). GTZ is currently piloting these Advisory

⁹⁸ In Sri Lanka, the legal enactment is yet to be passed for the establishment of Advisory Committees, though they are expected to be set up as an administrative matter (Performance Improvement Project).

Committees select local authorities, with the aim to ‘provide a way in which to increase citizen’s participation and ‘serve as a link between the Local Authority and the people’ (Ibid).



Circular No. 10, issued by the Ministry of Local Government and Provincial Councils: ‘An advisory Committee on community affairs should be appointed in every Local Authority, consisting of senior citizens, subject specialists, ward members and other competent persons in the area, who could contribute to Local Government. This committee should serve as a link between the Local Authority and the people. The committee should be non-political and will perform following functions: Assist Local Authority in deciding development policies and distributing resources, take into account the needs of the people. Function as a communication channel between the Local Authority and the people in the exchange of information and ideas. Assist and advise the Councillors in the discharge of their responsibilities’ (Ibid). According to the project document, there are four objectives of the Advisory Committee: (1) to be an advisory board, (2) to be a representative structure, (3) to be independent and (4) to be impartial and perform its functions without fear, favor or prejudice. The composition of the committee would consist of numerous different actors, with the goal of fifty percent female representation. An example of the different types of groups

which are proposed to compose the committee are: women, youth, elderly, traditional leaders, religious leaders and associations, to name a few.

USAID/SuRG Project

Another project focused on local government is the Supporting Regional Governance (SuRG) funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in conjunction with various government Ministries.⁹⁹ The aim of SuRG is to ‘strengthen local governance in conflict-affected areas of the East’ and help them ‘administer their activities more effectively and respond to the needs of their communities’ (USAID/Sri Lanka 2009). As stated by Rebecca Cohn, USAID Mission Director, the project not only aims to build the capacity of local authorities, but hopes that through this capacity building, local authorities will ‘encourage their citizens to participate more fully in decision-making. Citizen participation is an important cornerstone of democracy, and we want to help our local authority partners work cooperatively with their communities’ (Ibid). The SuRG program has four components, Social Equity, Local Governance, Community Empowerment and Transformation and Open Dialogue. Two of the subcomponents which are related directly to this thesis, are Social Equity: ‘Expand the range of ‘traditional’ civil society organizations which promote social equity as an integral part of their mandate, such as cooperative societies, trade unions, farmers’ societies, and district chambers of commerce’ (USAID/Sri Lanka, SuRG). The second subcomponent is from Community Empowerment and states: ‘Increase citizen participation in governance by expanding consultations between communities and government institutions to promote community-led development and mitigate local conflict’ (Ibid).

While in Colombo, I spoke with Susan Ward, Chief of Party for the SuRG project and Cayathri Divakala, Gender Advisor on the SuRG project. They stated that SuRG routinely works with WRDSs because, for women in rural communities, it is one of the primary avenues through which women can participate in community development. As WRDSs are part of the official fabric of village society, they present a way for ‘people to get involved and engaged in politics and development’ and this is facilitated through their being ‘sanctioned’ by the government.¹⁰⁰ The WRDS has ‘been one of the few jumping off points for the very

⁹⁹ Ministry of Nation Building, Ministry of Provincial and Local Government, and Ministry of Constitutional Affairs and National Integration. US Contractor implementing the SuRG program: ARD Inc. and MSI as a subcontractor.

¹⁰⁰ Cayathri Divakalala and Susan Ward, interview by author, Colombo, April 1, 2011.

few women who are engaged in politics in this country, particularly at the local level.¹⁰¹ Official societies at the local level present avenues for people to get ‘involved and engaged in politics and development.’¹⁰² However, per the same interview, they noted that it is still extremely difficult to move from community leader to elected representative.¹⁰³

In Trincomalee, I spoke with staff at the SuRG field office to learn more about their programs and their relationship with and knowledge of WRDSs. The SuRG project’s interaction with WRDSs consists of them providing grants to local partners and in turn those partners work directly with WRDSs or other women’s groups. One reason that they work with both formal and informal village groups, is because sometimes the WRDS does not consist of the most vulnerable women in the village. Therefore, in the women’s groups, they ‘select the more vulnerable women, not the WRDS.’¹⁰⁴ Because of the lack of knowledge, understanding of the role of local government, I asked who the WRDS goes to if they have problems. Ideally, they would turn to either the local GN or PS. However, according to Priya, they often ask for assistance from partner organizations because those organizations tend to know how to approach the PS whereas the WRDS feel uncomfortable doing so. The WRDS, and perhaps the larger of village society, tends to be fearful of approaching the PS or other local officials. Priya stated that the fear felt by the WRDS towards the PS can be attributed to several causes, including, their lack of opportunity to leave their respective villages, the education level of the villagers compared to the officials of the PS. Priya also stated that most of the elected officials are male thus the women of the WRDS ‘are thinking that if they go and ask them anything, the men will shout at them.’¹⁰⁵ However, SuRG is trying to address this—through education and training.

The SuRG program is providing a similar committee, called the Participatory Governance Forum (PGF) (for the authors interpretation to the functioning of the PGF, see Figure 3). Per an email communication from Susan, a PGF is an informal forum set up under the SuRG project in all 11 SuRG partner LAs in the East. The PGFs are a mechanism through which citizens provide input into local authority planning, decision making and service provision. The inclusion of 50 percent community representatives on the Advisory Committees is

¹⁰¹ Cayathri Divakalala and Susan Ward, interview by author, Colombo, April 1, 2011.

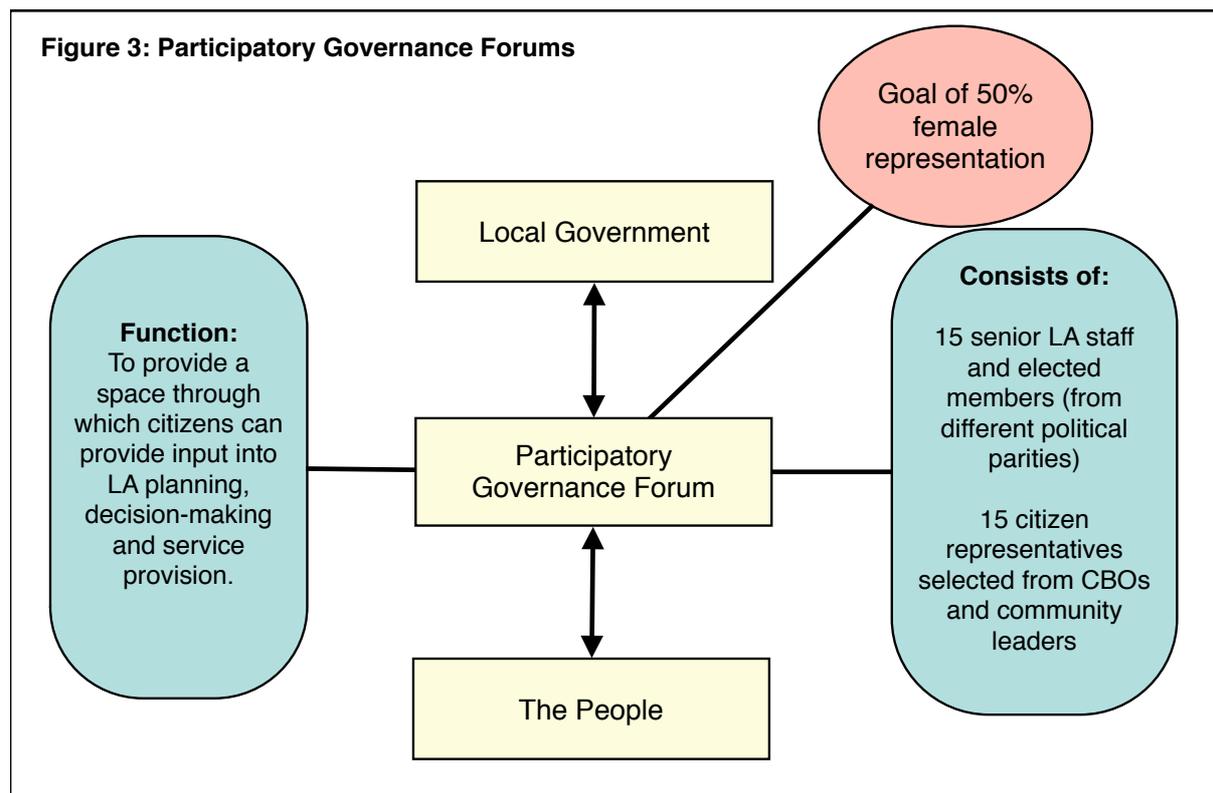
¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Chulani Kodikara, interview by author, Colombo, April 5, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Priya Bhagirathan, interview by author, Trincomalee, April 25, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

mandated by the Pradeshiya Sabha Act.¹⁰⁶ It is the aim that a PGF be comprised of 50 percent Local Authority staff and 50 percent community members. The community members would consist of '15 citizen representatives selected from CBOs and community leaders' (email communication with Susan). According to an email exchange with Cayathri, the numbers on the PGF vary depending on how many people understand the process and the importance of PGF and come forward—especially women.¹⁰⁷ However, SuRG does urge the PGF to have 50 percent of women in the makeup of the community members on the PGF. She stated that: 'SuRG also promotes meaningful women's participation by giving space to women to share their concerns, be heard, be respected for their contributions and be part of decision making.'¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Cayathri stated that 'SuRG strongly believes that mere women's representation in numbers is not enough to gender equality. Though the numbers are important, the aspects of equality must be interwoven in every decision, action and remedy of community structures like the PGF. Only then we can reach our ultimate goal of transforming gender roles in communities.'¹⁰⁹



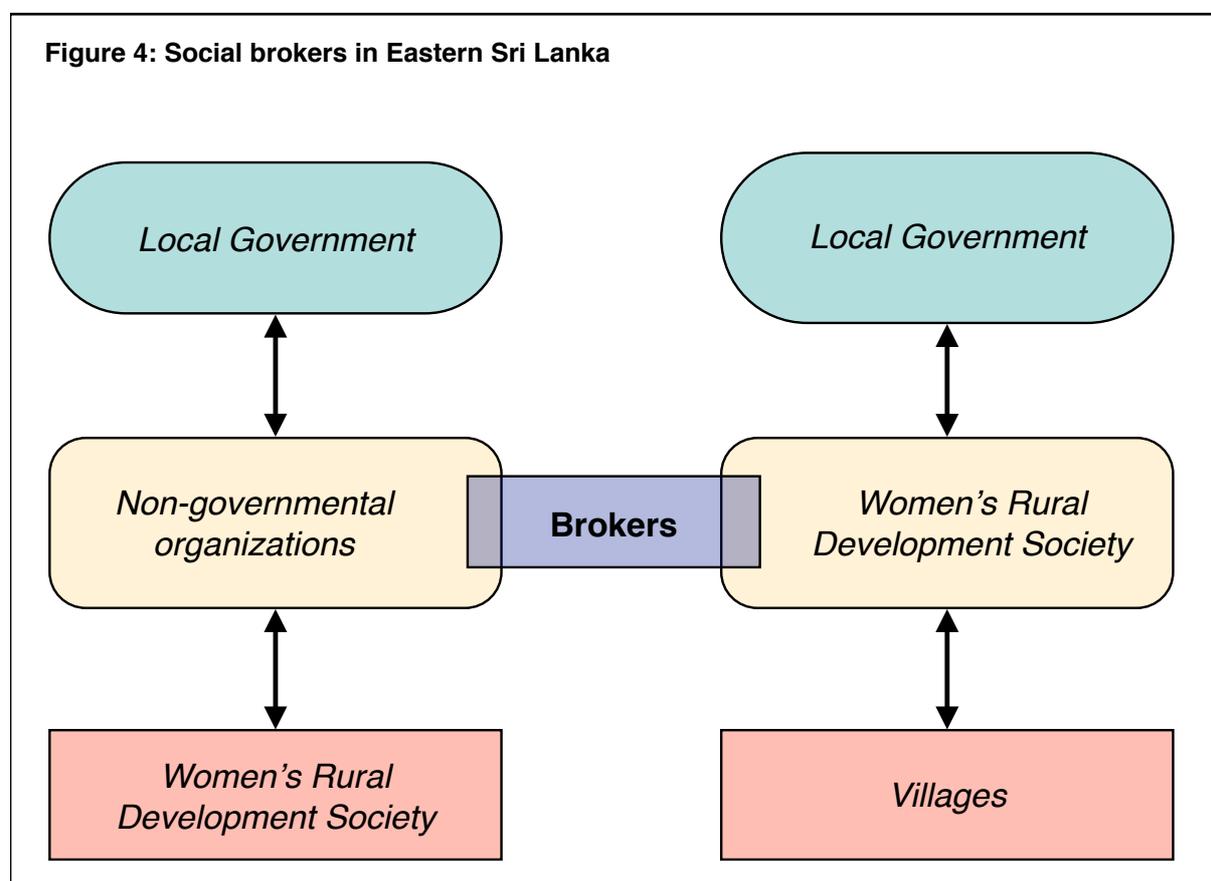
¹⁰⁶ Susan Ward, email correspondence, August 8, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Cayathri Divakalala, email correspondence, August 6, 2011.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

The Local Authority representatives would consist of '15 senior LA staff and elected members (from both the ruling and opposition parties).'¹¹⁰ The PGF would hold monthly meetings and provide round-table discussions between local authorities and the community to discuss relevant matters in the respective Local Authority level. Susan also stated that 'in each of SuRGs 11 partner LAs, community members sitting on the PGF are also representing the community on the official LA Advisory Committees.'¹¹¹ As we can see in Figure 4, there are two types of brokers in Eastern Sri Lankan society which this thesis aims to display: (1) NGOs, such as the ones described above and (2) WRDSs. While these are most assuredly not the only brokers present, these are the two which are the focus of this paper. This next section will examine and explain how WRDSs function as a broker in society.



Women's Rural Development Societies

Chapter two provided an in-depth look at the creation, structure and workings of WRDSs. Now, this section will present why WRDSs are one of the brokers in rural society. An analysis

¹¹⁰ Susan Ward, email correspondence, August 8, 2011.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

of WRDSs was chosen as a case study for three reasons. First, they can provide a platform from which women can become more active in their communities and in politics. Second, the WRDS can provide avenues through which women can become engaged in village development, peacebuilding and reconstruction. Through interviews conducted, it was shared that there have been cases of WRDS from neighboring, but ethnically different, villages working together to facilitate a harmonious relationship between the groups (citation). Third, as they are government mandated village societies, this provides them with the unique ability to straddle both worlds creating a link between the village and the government.

WRDSs have much potential in functioning as brokers. Because of their position in village society, they are able to understand the needs of the greater population. Their relationship with NGOs enables them to continuously build their capacity, thus allowing them to understand the needs of their community. This allows them to respond to those needs by engaging the appropriate actors which can facilitate a response. WRDSs are ideal brokers because they understand the needs of their communities and understand village politics. Through their engagement with NGOs, they are increasingly able to understand the world of local government—thus enabling them to straddle both worlds. As figure xxx shows the WRDS is able to act as a bridge between their respective villages and local government officials. This act of brokering help to build and establish relationships within the community. This is extremely important in society which has undergone decades of civil strife. The relationship between the village and local government has not been strong and in many places non-existent because of the civil war. Therefore, the role of the WRDS in facilitating this is ever the more needed and important. The act of brokering may begin with an NGO or program and their role in building the capacity of and working with WRDSs and local government. This results in the WRDS acting as a broker between the village and local government through avenues such as Advisory Committees and Participatory Governance Forums, described below. Through these mechanisms, they are able to challenge and manipulate the boundaries of rural society and create a new avenue for women's participation in the village and local government. We will now introduce another broker within Eastern Sri Lanka that works with WRDSs.

Conclusion

In Eastern Sri Lanka, due to the immense lack of confidence in local government and general lack of knowledge to their functions, it is even more pivotal to have a broker that can

foster relationships between local government and village actors. Due to the overall lack of women's presence in decision-making positions, it is important that brokerage actors work with relevant women and local government to facilitate this increase in women's role in those institutions. The fostering of both of these relationships—the village to local government and women to local government, can ideally, nurture the beginning of a harmonious relationship in this war-torn province.

Currently, women's role in local government is mostly focused on behind-the-scenes work in non-decision making roles.¹¹² I argue that WRDS is an avenue through which women may be able to gain access and increase participation in the decision-making circles of local government. Since the WRDS is government mandated and a registered society at the village level, they are the perfect actor which to straddle the village and government lines; providing a platform from which women can gain a higher position in the community and potentially contest elections as well as providing an avenue for increased participation in local government through Advisory Committees and Participatory Governance Forums. NGOs such as Viluthu are the catalysis in ensuring that this facilitation continues after international NGO projects have ended.

¹¹² Mr. N. Manivannan, interview by author, Trincomalee, May 20, 2011.

Conclusion

This thesis began with the following quote from an interviewee: local government is the best way to give people power. It has been the aim of this paper to apply this quote to the context of women in Eastern Sri Lanka. The following research question guided this endeavor: how is women's participation in local government shaped in the context of post-war Eastern Sri Lankan and what is their position in society vis-à-vis local governance structures? It has been the attempt of this thesis to answer this through a critical, constructivist approach.

An analysis of the local government system, in chapter one, revealed that Sri Lanka has an immensely elitist political system which is deeply complex. Women's participation within this system—from the highest to lowest levels—is hindered by the patriarchal culture of its institutions. As was recounted in the personal reflections, the road to nomination—and then winning a seat—is fraught with obstacles. The chapter further demonstrated that the lack of will in political parties to nominate women in addition to the lack of a quota for women, are both impediments in this struggle. Other obstacles noted were a lack of resources, political, social and cultural barriers as well as the violence and corruption associated with politics.

As revealed in chapter two, the international arena has offered mechanisms to prevail over these obstacles. It is through an analysis of the frameworks presented, Beijing Platform, UNSCR 1325 and CEDAW, that the importance of participation shines through. Through the deconstruction of participation literature, it became evident that there are a multifarious of definitions and notions of participation. However, their interpretation and meaning are dependent upon the person or organization defining the concept. An avenue presented for women at the village level to become more engaged with local government, was WRDSs, a village-level CBO. When studying the case of WRDSs we found that the evidence revealed it as the most viable avenue from which women can be come more active in local government.

It is through women's participation in a civil society such as the WRDS, that their role within the economic and societal activities in their community can be increased, thus resulting in empowerment. This in turn would ideally result in women's ability to gain influence in the community and become more present in decision-making roles, particularly at the local government level. As discussed, women's participation in local government needs to be addressed and increased. However, due to the political culture and recent three decades of war, women's voice within local government structures is rarely heard. As stated by the Local Government Reforms, 'much more can be achieved through the discharge of people's

traditional obligations and responsibilities to Local Government. The quantum of work done by Local Authorities can be increased substantially and their quality improved through people's participation' (Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka 1999, 242).

Chapter three, presented the theoretical framework of 'broker.' When attributing the 'title' of broker to actors in Eastern Sri Lankan society, three different criteria were applied: their relationship with the government, their relationship with civil society, particularly the village and 3) if those actors actively facilitated relationship between the two. As was demonstrated, four in particular fit this criteria: Viluthu, SuRG, GIZ, and WRDSs. The newly formed ACs and PGFs have the potential to serve as brokers for women to become more involved in local government and in decision-making positions. However, because they are in the early implementation stages, both require additional analysis to ascertain their effectiveness in bringing citizen's voices to a higher level. I argue that local governance spheres are where women will be able to facilitate their voice.

To enable their voice at the local government level, they do require the assistance of CBOs and NGOs because there local authorities do not have the resources to devote capacity building to women. As was revealed, WRDSs have the potential to act as brokers between the village and local government, providing a voice for their communities. This can also encourage and facilitate women's involvement in politics. As was shown in this chapter, there are brokers in Eastern Sri Lankan which can facilitate this endeavor. As was evident in nearly every interview conducted, women's indifference and shunning of involvement with politics is due to a number of factors, including, the negative reputation of politics as well as high levels of corruption and violence. Therefore, for women to enter the political realm, there are a number of factors which must occur beforehand, including but not limited to capacity building and facilitation by all levels of society and the assistance and facilitation by social actors known as *brokers*.

Further Analysis

This study has indicated that there are numerous challenges which women face before they are equally represented in government structures. Given the increasing role of WRDS's in society and their use by various actors in society, a further analysis and investigation into this role and the society in its entirety is required.

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Annexes

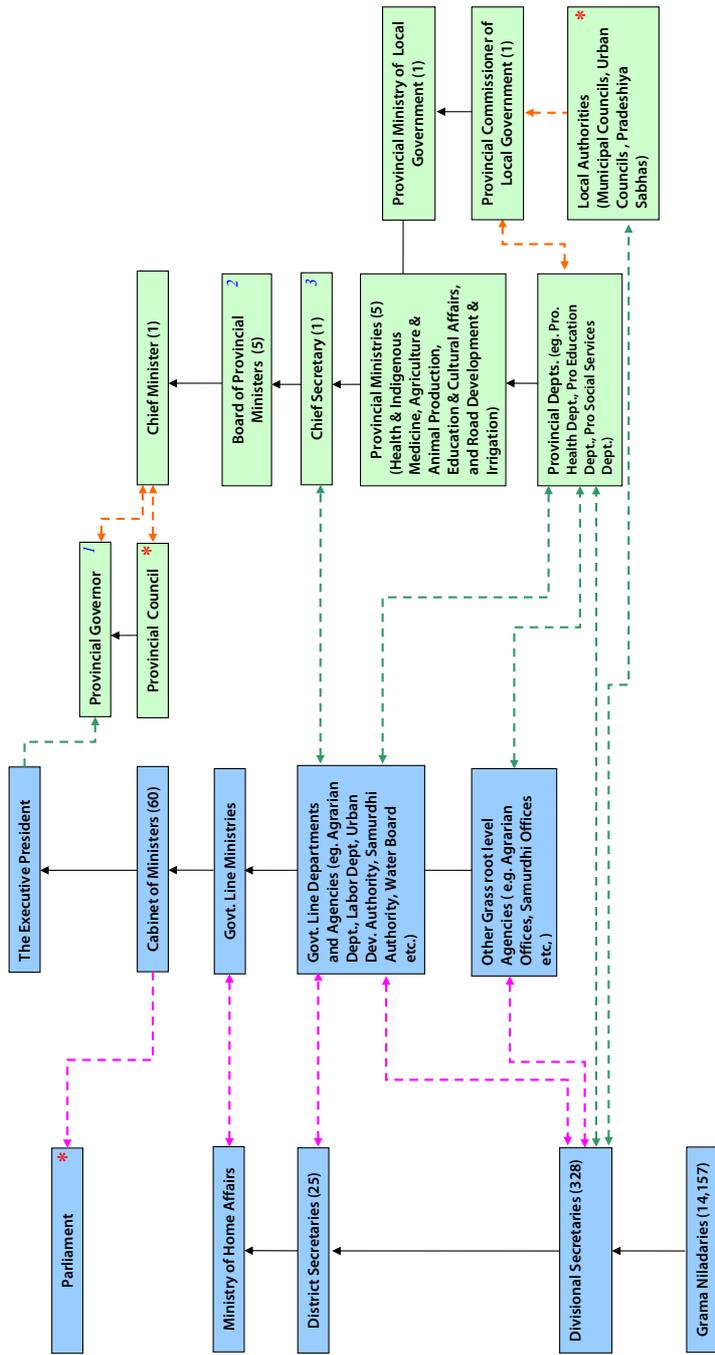
Annex 1: List of Interviewees

Name	Title	Organization	Date of Interview
Harini Amarasuriya	Sociologist	University of Colombo	February 9 & March 19
Swarma Jayaweera		CENWOR	March 18, 2011
Udan Fernando	Consultant	Context International	March 19, 2011
Kumudini Samuel	Director, WMC	Women and Media Collective	March 23, 2011
Mark Silva	Democracy & Governance Officer	USAID	March 30, 2011
Susan Ward	Chief of Party	SuRG Project	April 1, 2011
Cayathri	Gender Advisor	SuRG Project	April 1, 2011
Timmo Gaasbeek	Policy Development Officer	ZOA	April 3, 2011
Patricia Lawrence	Professor	University of Colorado at Boulder	April 4, 2011
Chulani Kodikara	Research Associate	International Centre for Ethnic Studies	April 5, 2011
Amal Jayawardena	Department Head Faculty of Arts	University of Colombo	April 3, 2011
Joe Williams	Chairman, Board of Directors	National Peace Council	April 5, 2011
Dr. Jehan Perera	Executive Director	National Peace Council	April 5, 2011
Shanthy Sachithanandam	CEO	Viluthu	April 6, 2011
Raga Alphonsus	Operations Manager	ZOA	April 7, 2011
Sinnathamby Sooriyakumary	The Secretary	OfERR Ceylon	April 8, 2011
Gita Sabharwal	Deputy Country Representative	Asia Foundation	April 12, 2011
Priya	N/A	SuRG Project	April 25, 2011
Asmi	N/A	SuRG Project	April 25, 2011
Brett Massey	Deputy Chief of Party	SuRG Project	April 25, 2011
Chandran	N/A	SuRG Project	April 25, 2011
Gowry Gunaretnam	Documentation Officer	Viluthu	April 29, 2011

Name	Title	Organization	Date of Interview
Kandeepan	N/A	GTZ	April 29, 2011
Lisa Biblo	N/A	Swedish Refugee Council	May 1, 2011
N/A	Rural Development Officer	Department of Rural Development	May 4, 2011
Rohan	N/A	SuRG Project	May 11, 2011
Manitha Weerasuriya, PhD	Director - Technical	SuRG Project/EML Consultants	May 11 & 24, 2011
A. Jeyaratnam	N/A	GIZ	May 12, 2011
N/A	N/A	Caritas	May 13, 2011
Rohana Nanayakkara	Program Officer	SuRG Project	May 19, 2011
Mr. N. Manivannan	Director, Eastern SSD	Social Services Department	May 20, 2011
Jayantha Wickramanayake	Senior Technical Advisor, Local Government Policy and Planning	Asia Foundation	May 24, 2011
Dr. P. Saravanamuttu	Executive Director	Centre for Policy Alternatives	May 25, 2011
Lena Koch	Advisor	FLIT Forum	May 25, 2011
Nelun Gunasekera	Social Development and Gender Specialist	Asian Development Bank	May 26, 2011
Dr. Tressie Leitein	Consultant - Regional/ Provincial and Local Governance	Consultant, Former Professor, Univ. Of Colombo	May 30, 2011
Patrick Vandenbrouaene	Senior Operations Officer	World Bank	May 31, 2011
S. Manoharon	Senior Rural Development Specialist	World Bank	May 31, 2011
Dinesha deSilva Wikramanayake	Team Leader - Local Economic Governance	Asia Foundation	May 31, 2011
A. Subakaran	Senior Technical Advisor, Local Governance	Asia Foundation	May 31, 2011
Hemanthi Goonasekera	Director	Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance	June 1, 2011
Dennis McGilvray	Professor, Research focus on Tamils and Muslims of south India and Sri Lanka.	University of Colorado at Boulder	June 1, 2011
Zoe Keeler, Fiona Bayat, and Dilrukshi Fonseka	N/A	UNDP	June 2, 2011

Annex 2: Government and Administrative Structure of Sri Lanka

GOVERNMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF SRI LANKA



Key:

- Line of Authority: Solid black arrow
- Intra Provincial Relations: Dashed orange arrow
- Inter Provincial relations/ Coordination: Dashed green arrow
- Intra Govt. Relations: Dashed pink arrow
- Govt. Administration: Blue box
- Provincial Council Administration: Green box

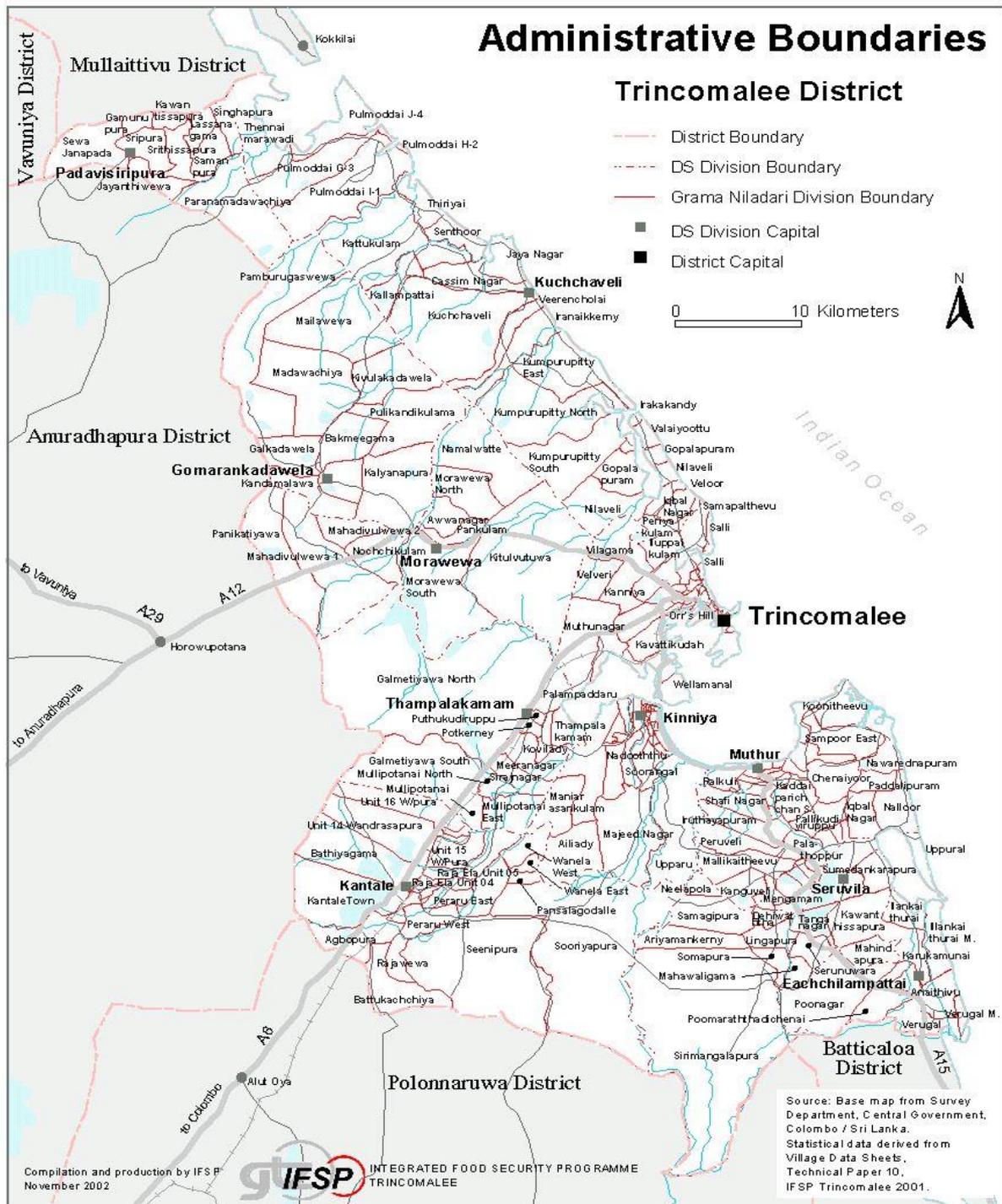
* - Elected Bodies
 * - The Govt. is appointed by the President and as such he is his representative
 1 - The Governor appoints the Board of Ministers consisting of the Chief Minister and four other Ministers
 2 - The Chief Minister is appointed by the President with the concurrence of the Chief Minister

Country Figures:

Provincial Councils - 9	Local Authorities - 330
Provincial Council Membership - 455	Municipal Councils - 18
Western - 104	Urban Councils - 42
Central - 58	Pradeshiya Sabhas - 270
Southern - 55	
North - 33	
North Central - 34	
Uva - 34	
Eastern - 37	
TBD	
North - 37	

Prepared by:
USAID | **SRI LANKA**

Annex 3: Map of administrative boundaries in Trincomalee District

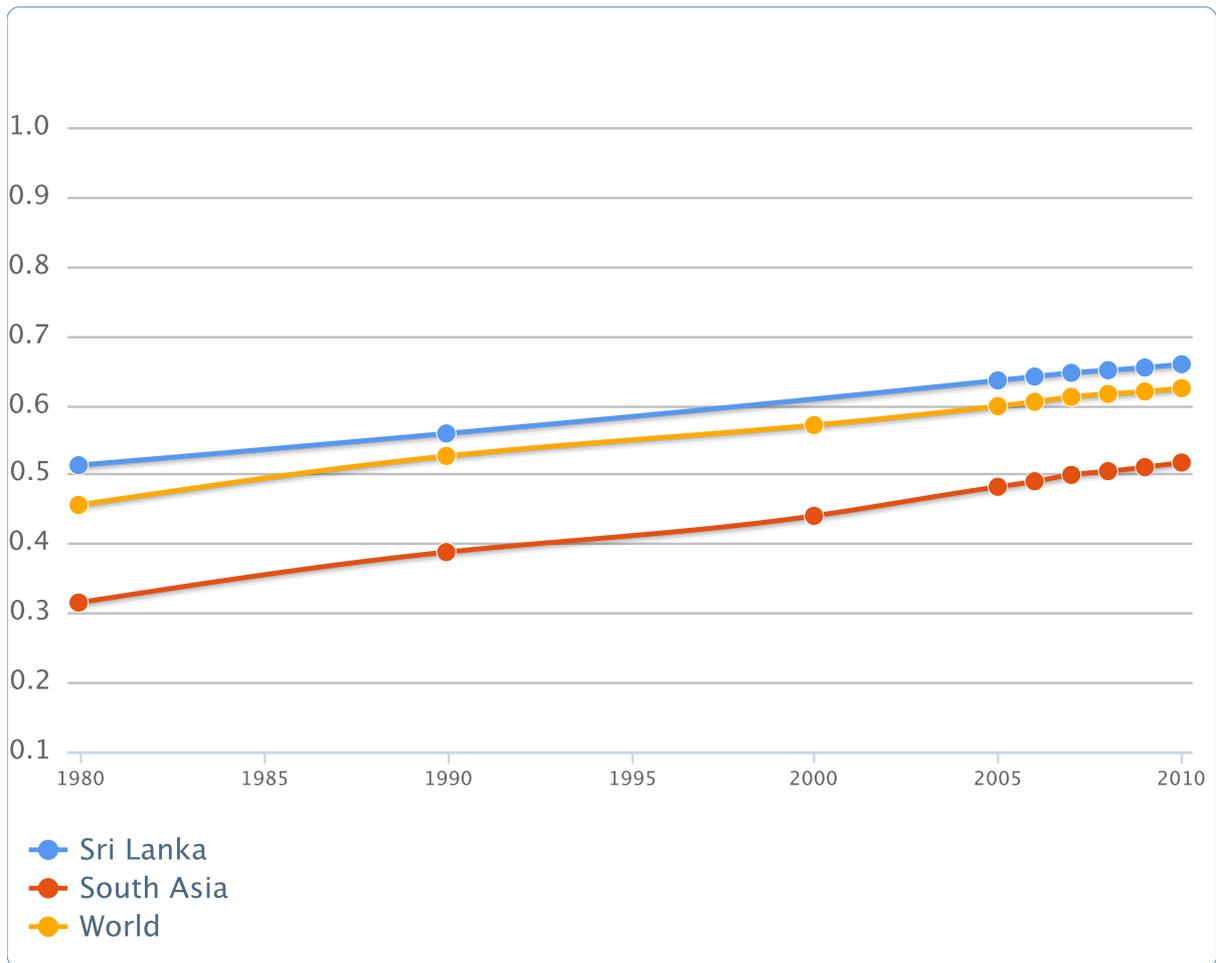


- Main Road
- Minor Road
- Railway
- Tank, River
- Town

Annex 4: Map of DS Divisions in Trincomalee District, 2007



Annex 5: Human Development Index: Trends 1980 - present



Source: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/LKA.html>

Annex 6: Table of numbers/percentages of Sri Lanka women's participation in politics

Women's Participation				
Category	Year	Total	Number of Women	% of Women
Parliamentarians				
Ministers of Parliament	2007	107	3	2.8%
Members of Parliament	2007	225	13	5.8%
Members of Cabinet	2007	52	3	5.8%
Provincial Councillors				
Ministers of Provincial Councils	2006	35	0	0.0%
Member of Provincial Councils	2004	380	19	5.0%
Members of Local Government Councils				
MCs	2006	330	10	3.0%
UCs	2006	379	13	3.4%
PS	2006	3,243	51	1.6%
Representation in the Executive				
Secretaries to Ministries	2007	56	5	8.9%
Additional Secretaries	2000/2001	99	24	24.2%
District Secretaries	2006	25	4	16.0%
Divisional Secretaries	2006	315	72	22.9%
State Sector, Semi Government Sector & Provincial Public Sector Employees				
State Sector	2002	295,734	86,547	29.3%
Semi Government Sector	2002	247,845	58,825	23.7%
Provincial Public Sector	2002	292,071	165,932	56.8%
Private Sector Employees	2005	644,591	321,807	49.9%
Source: http://www.cenwor.lk/status_of_women.html				

