

Conceptualizing Local Governance in the Context of Citizen Participation: Towards a Participatory Approach of Local Government Institutions in Sri Lanka

UAT Udayanganie

Department of Public and International Law, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo

thakshila@law.cmb.ac.lk

Abstract: This paper, provides a conceptual basis for institutionalizing citizen participation in the local government system under the existing constitutional structure. To achieve this objective, the study employs the assumption that effectiveness of decentralization accommodates more spaces for citizens for engaging in the process of decision making and as a result, participatory democracy could be institutionalized. In the discussion, two sub-questions need to be addressed as to how decentralization facilitates the promotion of citizen participation and why citizen participation is significant in the context of local government. Answering these questions, this paper seeks to advance the argument that due to weaknesses of the existing representative democratic system, the necessities of local communities have not been represented and therefore there is a requisite for an alternative mechanism through which entire local communities can be participated and represent their needs. The bottom-up approach of decentralization facilitates the creation of such a mechanism. Accordingly, the paper seeks to provide an overview, scope and applicability of the concepts of participatory democracy and decentralization by reviewing their definitions and critically assessing both their conceptual coherence and utility as realistic and policy tools. It seeks to analyze these concepts to assess the extent to which such practices are being implemented; and the problems and challenges faced during their implementation. This analysis facilitates to understand how, and under what conditions, citizen participation and decentralized governance can contribute to the more inclusive local governance system. In

particular, this conceptualization will assist in the evaluation and understanding of the patterns of decentralization and citizen participation in local governance in Sri Lanka. After discussing these issues from a theoretical perspective, the author examined a complex relationship between development, decentralization and citizen participation in democratic local governance with specific reference to Sri Lanka. The study employs a qualitative method and uses secondary sources such as journal articles, working papers, legislation etc.

Key Words: *Participatory Democracy, Local Government Institutions, Decentralization*

I. INTRODUCTION

The local government system of Sri Lanka has a long history which dates to the 3rd century B.C. In the advent of the colonialism, the British rulers changed the traditional system of local administration without considering the characteristics of the home-grown system of it. Even though the country was granted independence from the British in 1948, Sri Lanka continues to live with the colonial heritage of an imposed local government system. Perceived from a policy perspective, the idea of reforming the current local government regime has been on the political and policy agendas of the Sri Lankan Government since independence. However, such reforms have not materialized to date. Particularly, the Chocksy Commission of 1954, the Moragoda Committee of 1978, the Presidential Commission on Reforms of Local Government of 1998 and the National Policy on Local Government in 2009 can be cited as important policy initiatives in

this regard. Nevertheless, the potential of a multilevel system of the governance to empower the people and the nation is yet to be realized. Theoretically, local governments should facilitate people's participation in local administration. Though, other than electing their representatives at local government elections, people's participation at the grassroots level falls far behind when compared with other countries such as India and the UK.

II. METHODOLOGY

Local governance and participatory democracy-related literature provide some guidance for the use of different types of methodologies when researching issues connected with citizen participation. Theoretical, comparative and empirical methods have all been used to research local governance and citizen participation. It appears that there is no specific limitation as to the types of research methodologies that can be applied to address issues relating to local government institutions and citizen participation. Arguably, this means that research on issues associated with LG's and people's participation is an open field from a methodological perspective. Hence, this paper is purely based on doctrinal research including a literature review and comparative legal research method. As methods of data collection, secondary resources were mostly used and primary sources such as constitutions, legislative enactments were used where necessary.

III. DISCUSSION

A. *Conceptual Understanding of Participatory Democracy*

The original view of citizen participation goes back to the times of Aristotle. Modern political theory gives democratic participation by teaching that government is legitimate only if it originates in the consent of the governed. But the social contract theory that institutes government signifies the surrender of natural rights to govern or not to govern ourselves as we choose (Winthrop 1978). In that approach,

the democratic citizen is defined as 'one who has the right (power) to share in the office of deliberating and judging with skill'. Accordingly, a citizen is defined as 'one who participates in judging and ruling' (Winthrop 1978). This participation makes democrats more able citizens, and participatory democracy is made better because the participants are made better. Aristotle emphasized participation by judging. The lawmaker is sovereign in theory, but the judge is sovereign in practice (Winthrop 1978).

Tracing the historical evolution of the concept, modern participatory democracy was developed during the 1960s and 1970s in America. According to Mansbridge, the term was used for the first time as the Student for the Democratic Society (SDS) (1975). The whole idea of the concept is that in the decision making process, on issues having social implications and consequences must be conducted in public and participative ways. Further, the revitalization of the concept could be seen with the new global movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s with some innovative experiences such as participatory budgeting in Porto Algerian Brazil. The new approach of the concept is concentrated on local and communitarian views of democracy by highlighting bottom-up social protagonism (Florida 2013).

Moreover, the idea of Barber's strong democracy (1984) facilitates to shape the concept in a different approach with an inherent view. This approach identified democracy as 'Politics in the participatory mode'. His approach is greatly practical due to its suitability to mix with participatory institutional structures. According to him, 'Strong democracy tries to revitalise citizenship without neglecting the problems of efficient government by defining democracy as a form of government in which all the people govern themselves in at least some public matters at least in some of the time' (Barber 1984). It is clear that in some phases citizen participation

should be encouraged but at the same time, there should be a balancing approach towards it. Therefore, this approach provides a platform for bringing recommendations towards ways we should incorporate participatory democratic methods into the legislation and the ideal stage.

Following statement justifies the central part of his idea.

“I have insisted that strong democracy entails both the intimacy and the feasibility of local participation and the power and responsibility of regional and national participation [...] This is not to say that strong democracy aspires to civic participation and self-government on all issues at all times in every phase of government, both national and local. Rather it projects some participation some of the time on selected issues. If, all of the people can participate some of the time in some of the responsibilities of governing, then strong democracy will have realized its aspirations” (Barber 1984).

Above explanation proves the participatory democracy is not a new concept that has been reshaped over the years per contemporary requirements.

Concerning the process of participatory policy making, A.N.K. Michels & Laurence DeGraaf (2010) have traced the idea that citizen involvement has many positive effects on democracy and it upgrades the quality of the democracy. Threefold effects emphasize; more responsibility for public matters, increase public engagement encourages diversity of opinions and contributes to the higher degree of legitimacy of decisions. As devices of citizen participation, they emphasize collaborative governance, citizen advisory committees and participatory budgeting as valuable elements of democratic decision making.

However, it is important to consider the idea presented by Dhal. He encountered, an increase in political activity among the lower socio-economic classes which could lead to more authoritarian ideas and thus to a decline in consensus on the basic norms of democracy (1956). Democratic citizenship is the most

important aspect and apart from that the development of civic skills, the increase in public engagement, and the opportunity to meet and discuss neighbourhood issues and problems are some of the other issues which can be taken into consideration.

When directing the definition of Habermas on participatory democracy, at the level of abstract principles and that is characterized by the autonomy of the discourse, the equality of participants in the discourse and the openness of the discourse in more specific ways. According to Pateman's book on 'Participation and Democratic Theory' the aim is to reconstruct a tradition in political thought that is committed to the idea of institutionalizing opportunities for participation. Here, the equal opportunity to participate in decision making becomes a defining criterion of the participatory ideal as well as an institutional means for realizing this ideal. When considering all these discussions, five essentials have been identified to the concept; that is promotion of a new mode of decision making (deliberation); the strengthening of the direct mode of decision making; the democratization of the local level (local democracy); the democratization of functionally defined units of the political system (segmentation); and the implementation of representation as delegation (1970).

Fung & Wright in their article on *Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance (2001)* have explored five cases of recent developments in participatory governance which are neighbourhood governance council in Chicago, Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP), Habitat Conversation Planning under Endangered Species Act, participatory budget Porto Alegre, Panchayat Reforms in West Bengal and Kerala India. Considering these five initiatives authors have identified the common concept which is called Empowered Deliberative Democracy (EDD). He further, explains that these four reforms differ

dramatically in the details of their design, issue areas, and scope; they all aspire to deepen how ordinary people can effectively participate in and influence policies which directly affect their lives (Fung and Wright 2001). Those mechanisms are participatory because those were initiated based on the commitment and capacities of ordinary people to make sensible decisions through reasoned deliberation and empowered because they attempt to tie action to the discussion. As he observed, the institutional reform strategy was considered as the prime success of these mechanisms.

John Gaventa (2001) has taken a different point of view on citizen participation in local governance. His approach is closely related to rights of citizenship and democratic governance. Concerning grass root level participation, two factors are essential, the nature of democracy and skills and strategies for achieving it. He has pointed out six prepositions to achieve participatory democracy and the six propositions and some of them are as follows; building up a new relationship between ordinary people and the institutions and rebuilding relationship between citizen and local government focused on new forms of participation, responsiveness and accountability (Anarchies communitarian model on radical grassroots democracy and optimistic conflict model) and new forms of citizen engagement should be encouraged. According to Gaventa, the forms participation has gone beyond its traditional approaches and it is necessary to introduce new forms.

It is worth quoting the idea mentioned by Clark and Stewart (Gaventa 2001) that 'Representative democracy and participatory democracy have been argued as mutually exclusive opposites. An active conception of representative democracy can be reinforced by participatory democracy all the more easily in local government because of its local scales and its closeness to the local communities'. This statement reflects that participatory democracy can be interpreted broader manner.

The recent discourse of people-centered development underlines the assumption that people should be the architects of their own future (Burkey 1993). Sen and Nussbaum argue that the role of social capital, capabilities, freedom and the ability of ordinary people to manage development themselves should be focused in this discussion (Clark 2005). Under the capability approach provided by them, the ten capabilities are *goals* that fulfill or correspond to people's pre-political entitlements. Therefore, they say of people are entitled to the ten capabilities on the list (Nussbaum 2011). By defining them as objectives, Nussbaum highlights their politically normative character. Each of these ten practical orientations of human lives must be part of the political programmes of all the countries in the world with variations, thresholds, particular highlighting of certain particular capabilities, etc. According to Gaventa, 'a first key challenge for the 21st century is the construction of new relationships between ordinary people and the institutions especially those of government which affect their lives.

Based on the above investigation of the significance of the concept, it is suggested that by providing more spaces for citizens in the governance process it enhances the quality of democracy while protecting the rights of the people. Therefore, in assuring local democracy citizen participation is placed as a core component.

B. Participatory Democracy in Action

The application of participatory democracy can be seen in certain mechanisms that are implementing by local government authorities. One of the mechanisms is participatory planning. Many countries have provided institutional space for public participation through their legislation in grass-root level. The State of Kerala in India has put forth a prominent example of the People's Plan Campaign (PPC) that offered a pro-active methodology for decentralized planning with direct participation by citizens. Many other

countries including South Africa, Ghana, Uganda and Tanzania are some of the countries which experiencing community based planning.

Participatory budgeting is another instance of the applicability of PD. It is a different way to manage public money and to engage people in government and a democratic process in which community members directly decide how to spend part of a public budget. It enables taxpayers to work with the government to make the budget decisions that affect

Mini Publics are one of the mechanisms which provide an opportunity for citizens to deal with public issues. The concept of mini-public was first proposed by Robert Dahl in 1989. However, the roots of such processes can be traced back to the Greek political system when positions of political authority, including the selection of magistrates and council were often made by random selection. It is the random selection of citizens which is one of the defining features of the mini-public. Escobar and Elstub (2017) identified several features which characterize mini publics. Firstly, the purpose of the approach being to gather together a 'microcosm of the public' with each citizen having the same chance of being selected to take part, secondly, those that take part are remunerated for their efforts, thirdly, discussions are facilitated and finally a number of so-called experts provide evidence to the participants who in turn question (or cross examine) them. Goodin (2008) described them as democratic innovations consisting of ordinary, nonpartisan members of the public designed to be 'groups small enough to be genuinely deliberative and representative enough to be genuinely democratic'. These examples depict a picture as to how to apply PD in action.

C. Decentralization and Local Government

Gomez (2003) proposes that a cross-regional analysis of decentralization process should be based on vertical and horizontal relationships which can be established among the executive,

political parties and institutions that are responsible for the design of decentralization policies. He rationalized his examination of this factor on three variables: whether the legal framework and the informal relationship established allows for future changes within decentralization policies, the sequence of decentralization; and the economic circumstances under which national and sub-national governments negotiate.

Local government can be defined as 'a sub-national level of government, which has jurisdiction over a limited range of state functions, within a defined geographical area which is part of a larger territory. The term refers to the institution, or structures, which exercises authority or carry out governmental functions at the local level. On the other hand, the term local governance refers the process through which public choice is determined, policies formulated and decisions are made and executed at the local level, and to the roles and relationships between the various stakeholders which make up the society' (Mirror 2002).

These two concepts are different. Decentralization reinforces and legitimizes local governance processes when it is correctly done. Therefore, the decentralization is identified as a facilitator to effective local governance. In line with the main objective of the research, further discussion relates to the link between decentralization and two significant issues which are local development and citizen empowerment.

D. Decentralisation in Sri Lanka: A General Overview

The public debate over local government in Sri Lanka has been dominated by the ethnic conflict in the country. For the last 20 years, efforts to change and reform local governments in the country have focused on devolution as a means to provide increased representation for the Sri Lankan Tamil ethnic minority and resolve their demand for an independent state. As a result, there have been few efforts over the last fifteen years to improve local

representation and development. Although there have been many changes in local government over the last 25 years most have been *cosmetic in nature, changing the names of offices, and councils but having little impact on the power relations between the national government and local governments or in the efficiency of local governments*. Robert C. Oberst (2003)

It is significant to examine the applicability of the concept of decentralisation under the existing legal framework. After the 13th amendment to the Constitution, provincial Councils were established as the second tier of the government within the unitary framework. Close examination of this devolution process reveals that the functions of Provincial Councils were not considered as a whole. Though the process of devolution is a matter of addressing through the entire system of governance, it did not consider other related matters rather than providing a solution to the ethnic problem. As a result, local government became the subordinate institutions of Provincial Councils without conferring any additional powers.

However, constitutional recognition was gained through a statutory provision. Item 04 of the Provincial List, Local government specify the scope of devolution to provinces. However, 13th amendment would seem to have marginalised the local authorities in the intergovernmental contexts of multilevel governance it established.

The 'provincialization' of the supervision of local authorities did not lead to a service delivery relationship with the provincial council. The establishment of a provincial tier was essentially a transfer of state powers hitherto exercised at the national level to the new governance entities at the provincial level. However, setting out the role and functions of the primary level of government comprised of the local authorities is neglected in the process of devolution.

These issues lead to failing the system of local government in Sri Lanka. Though the 13th

amendment to the Constitution aims to introduce a new system of multi-level governance, it has become a superimposition of new devolved structure on an existing de-concentrated one. Ambiguity in the division of powers and functions has allowed the centre to conquer the powers of local authorities. As a result, both provincial councils and sub-national governance system (Local Government) have become complex and fragmented.

1. Problematising citizen participation in Local Government

One of the basic justifications for decentralization is building up a close relationship with other levels of governments such as provincial and local governments by creating a sophisticated environment. Citizens know their problems better and represent the best channel for people to take part in the decision-making process that affects their daily lives. Local level participation will provide citizens as agents to claim their rightful places as makers and shapers of development initiatives rather than users and choosers (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001). Sneddon and Fox argue that the broadening of State initiated forums of participation 'to more overtly political actions' and connecting geographically specific local state-society engagement practices to wider political economic processes at the national and transnational level. The arguments that call for increasing citizen participation related to local governance are threefold. Firstly, it is argued that it will improve the efficiency and efficacy of public services. Secondly, it means to render local government more accountable. Finally, it should deepen democracy as it will reinforce representative democratic institutions with participatory forms (Gaventa and Valderrama 1999). Participation should be aligned to the notion of citizenship, social justice and development as social change rather than its use as a technical fix for problems of poverty and inequality. The implementation of

approaches to enhance the citizen participation within the local sphere is varied in different scenarios. Therefore, it is problematic to conceptualize (Veltmeyer 1997).

However, the representative government gradually neglected active citizenship. People became active during election time and thereafter they are totally neglected by their elected representatives from the governance process. In representative democracy, theorists like, Dhal, Berelson and Eckstein argue for the importance of the electoral system in maintaining the democratic process. Dhal asserts that ordinary citizens can have some sort of control over the Universal Suffrage through the vote. Though Bentham and Mill have the same arguments, Mill has gone beyond that and argued for the need to have a well-informed citizenry which was very active in public life-in voting, in local government and jury service.

According to Rousseau, democracy depends on the participation of each citizen in the process of decision making. He argues that the relations established between citizen and the state institutions were absolutely crucial for the democratic process. Therefore, citizens must be educated to participate. Cole's model of participatory democracy was based on a vertical and horizontal structure of government, which had to be, organized 'from the grass roots upwards and (be) participatory at all levels in all its aspects'. Further, he emphasizes that the purpose of the vertical structure was the control of the economy and the horizontal structure encouraged the participation of whole society (Pateman 1970). Therefore, participatory forms should carefully institutionalize when designing the legal framework for it.

Legal and policy frameworks for participation are considered as an important aspect or enabling conditions for interaction between citizen and local government (McGee and LOGO 2003). This legal framework work will provide

citizens' legal basis to demand to be involved in planning, budgeting and administration of local government.

Sri Lankan legal framework on local governance does not provide a proper institutional and legal space for citizen participation in the decision making process. The only decision they can take at the election when they are choosing their representatives. Constitution as supreme law of the country does not guarantee the participation of marginalised people in the country. Similarly, the relevant legislation of local authorities is silent on this issue. Though, the discussion had emerged in the recent past, it also was limited for a debate only. In this context, designing a new legal framework for citizen participation in local governance is immensely relevant and important for securing democratic governance in Sri Lanka. Specially, the paper advocates to institutionalising participatory forms in development planning and budgeting.

2. Conceptualizing Decentralization and Citizen Participation in Local Governance in Sri Lanka: An analysis

2.1 Analysis under the Constitution

The well-designed constitution might help democratic institutions to survive, whereas a badly designed Constitution might contribute to the breakdown of democratic institutions. The preamble of the constitution set out the goals of the constitution. According to the preamble of the Sri Lankan Constitution, following aspirations should be fulfilled; Strengthens institutions of governance; assures a wider sharing of power; enshrines democratic values, social justice and human rights; facilitates economic, social and cultural advancement; and promotes peace, ethnic harmony and good governance. If we provide a broader interpretation of the phrase which 'strengthens institutions of governance', it will justify the central argument of the thesis. Further, the preamble provides that Sri Lanka is a Democratic Socialist Republic. The opening words of the preamble, 'We the people of Sri Lanka' signify

that the power is granted by them, and are to be exercised directly on them and for their benefit. This raises a question that is all the constitutional provisions to cover the needs and interests of entire Sri Lankans or is it for the class of people who have drafted. The underpinning concept of social contract theory is upheld by the Constitution. However, the question is whether the preamble is a part of the constitution or not. In search of an answer to this question, Sri Lanka does not clearly provide an answer or interpretation for this.

Generally, Preambles often outline a society's fundamental goals. These may be universal objectives, such as the advancement of justice, fraternity, and human rights; economic goals, such as nurturing a socialist agenda or advancing a free market economy; or others, such as maintaining the union (Orgad 2010).

But, under the Indian constitutional jurisprudence, in *Kesavananda Bharathi (1973 4 SCC 225)*, the Supreme Court held that the preamble was as much a part of the Constitution as any other provision therein. The supreme court of India enunciated the doctrine of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution in this case. It was decided that there are certain principles within the framework of the Indian Constitution which are inviolable and hence cannot be amended by the Parliament. These principles were commonly termed as Basic Structure.

In the light discussed above aims, it can be argued that Constitution accommodates the establishment of a mechanism for decentralisation while assuring citizen participation in the decision making process in local governance in order to provide a value coherent based interpretation to enshrine its values. However, it is doubtful whether values set out in the preamble are legally binding or not in the Sri Lankan context.

Therefore, though it is necessary to assure democratic and republican values under the Constitution, enforceability has become an

issue yet. Republicanism simply means that the supreme power rests in the body of citizens entitled to vote and exercised by representatives they elect directly or indirectly and by an elected or nominated president. Republicanism as an ideology will, therefore, be considered as being centrally concerned with 'political participation, civic virtue and mixed constitution' (Laborde and Maynor 2005). However, the ultimate goal of the system was not simply to encourage the act of civic involvement through political participation, which purely served as 'a means or an intermediate end' (Brett and Bleakley 2006). Though, the framers did not define the word 'republic' they undoubtedly meant a form that relies on the consent of the people and function through representative institutions and distinguished form of monarchy and aristocracy.

Article 3 of the Constitution designates the sovereignty of the people and Article 4 sets out the exercise of sovereignty. It may be argued that the phrase 'The people' mentioned in the preamble of the constitution further re-affirmed when reading Article 3 and 4 together. It has stated that 'In the Republic of Sri Lanka sovereignty is in the People and is inalienable. Sovereignty includes the powers of government, fundamental rights and the franchise.' These provisions underlie that popular sovereignty is the basis of Sri Lanka's constitutional system. The concept asserts that sovereign power is vested in the people and that those chosen to govern, as trustees of such power, must exercise it in conformity with the general will. Benjamin Franklin expressed the concept when he wrote, 'in free governments, the rulers are the servants and the people their superiors and sovereigns' (Jefferson 2018). In describing how Americans attempted to apply this doctrine prior to the territorial struggle over slavery that led to the Civil War, political scientist Donald S. Lutz noted the variety of American applications: To speak of popular sovereignty is to place ultimate authority in the people. There are a variety of ways in

which sovereignty may be expressed. It may be immediate in the sense that the people make the law themselves, or mediated through representatives who are subject to election and recall; it may be ultimate in the sense that the people have a negative or veto over legislation, or it may be something much less dramatic. In short, popular sovereignty covers a multitude of institutional possibilities. In each case, however, popular sovereignty assumes the existence of some form of popular consent, and it is for this reason that every definition of republican government implies a theory of consent (Lutz 1980).

2.2 Analysis under the legislative framework

Local government system in Sri Lanka is mainly based on three major legislations which are Municipal Council Ordinance, Urban Councils Ordinance and Pradeshiya Sabha Act. However, except Pradeshiya Sabha Act, the other two legislations dated back colonial period. Except for few amendments, there were no substantive amendments with regard to powers and functions of the Councils. These two legislations do not support to better decentralization due to its narrow scope of powers and functions. Due to the out dated nature of major legislation, they do not have any capacity to promote local economic development or citizen participation. In service delivery aspect, they are success to some extent. Under the Pradeshiya Sabha Act 1987, its preamble has stated that ‘...Pradeshiya Sabhas with a view to provide greater opportunities for the people to participate effectively in decision-making process relating to administrative and development activities at a local level;...’. According to the preamble, one of its prime objectives was to enhance citizen participation in the development related decision making process. However, the weakness was the Act does not clearly articulate the normative background related to it. Therefore, it is submitted that the principal legislation should be amended in order to include necessary principles of autonomous local government.

2.3 Analysis under the institutional framework

Decentralized structure of the political system in Sri Lanka, especially with regard to the policies and institutions at the local level and their capacities to manage diversity, to mitigate ethno-political tensions and to accommodate the interests of different identity groups have not accomplished its primary objectives (Bigdon 2003). Therefore, it requires a proper institutionalization, which means strong local administration, strong democratic representative institutions and vibrant civil society. One of the main problems associated with the institutional structure is that there is no space to obtain the citizen’s contribution in the governance process. Though, it has recognized as a significant feature, any reform does not attempt to establish such an institutional form. In this background, it is reasonably argued that after voting, people have deviated from the institution and their general will not get the necessary representation.

On the other hand, local representatives have to depend on financial support provided by the Central Government and Provincial Councils. Therefore, sometimes, they cannot implement development programmes according to the requirements of local communities. In such a situation social contract is under a threat and no proper agreement exists between the government and citizens. Institutional structure is key to assure a good contract between the government and the citizen.

3. Towards Participatory Local Governance: Issues in Sri Lanka

Local governance is widely recognized as the best training ground in which the citizen can learn the art of governance through their own experiences and the reality that exists around them. Local government which is the third layer of country’s administration is also always, in all circumstances, considered as the important vehicle and the only means to provide state benefits and services to the local citizens. In fact, “no political system is considered complete and

democratic if it does not have the system of local governance

-Havenga-2002, University of Pretoria
(Wijesundara 2017)

Abelson proposes four key basic elements of deliberative participation; (1) representation; (2) structure of procedure; (3) Information; (4) The outcomes and decision arising from the process (Abelson et al 2003). What is missing is public involvement in project implementation which is important to make sure what is being implemented is decided in accordance with decisions taken in the participatory meetings. The corollary is being the gradual emergence and integration of the voices of ultimate beneficiaries of development plans; local citizen's voices, their participation and into the decision making process. Such relationships sharpen the active civic participation or engagements in the decision making process of development activities while opening doors for participatory governance.

Perhaps the best place to observe and understand the impact with the broad forms of active engagement by citizens in policy formulation approval, implementation, monitoring and overall decision making is at the local level, where the concerns of the 'grassroots' or locality intersect most directly with governance and the government. Hence, local government as the most suitable administrative structure and decentralization as the most powerful reforming mechanism opened influential space for the wider and deeper active participation of citizens at the local level, and would lay the most viable and sustainable foundation for overall development efforts. However, participatory governance will not become a reality if there is no distribution of resources to the local communities in parallel.

Within a highly centralised government structure, local government has been subjected to the dominance of the centre in Sri Lanka. At present, it is an item under the list of Provincial Council. Therefore, local governments are to be controlled and supervised by the provincial

councils. In addition, various other central government establishments such as District Secretariat, Divisional Secretariat, and *Grama Niladari* are directly involved in local government affairs undermining the autonomous status of local government institutions. This dualistic control of the Centre and Provincial Council not only undermines, but also defeats the fundamental objectives of the Local Government system. Therefore, it is argued that the role of the Central Government should be based on the 'Principle of Subsidiarity' with the direct and continuous involvement of citizens in the process of decision-making at local levels. However, this issue has never been challenged even before the Supreme Court of Sri Lanka.

Other weaknesses of the existing local government system in Sri Lanka include political dependence for resources, lack of dynamism, lack of accountability and responsiveness as well as the absence of peoples' participation. Whatever theoretical underpinnings are embedded in the system of local government, Sri Lanka has not developed a culture of governance with a pre-requisite of citizen's participation (Social Scientists Association 2011).

Though it should be a voice of all social and ethnic groups in the society, Sri Lanka represents the lowest participation rate of women in local politics (Kodikara 2009) and is less than 2% (Women and Media Collective 2015). In the present framework, estate Tamil workers and indigenous community people are severely ignored by the system. Against this backdrop, it is necessary to investigate whether the local government has the potential to facilitate social transformation and provide opportunities for local communities, as well as marginalised, and socially-excluded groups to enjoy equal benefits of democracy through promoting their participation in the decision making process. Arguably, the existing framework of local government institutions in Sri Lanka does not serve this purpose. In this context, it is

essential to provide a legal and policy framework for ensuring citizen participation at local level.

IV.CONCLUSION

Autonomy, accountability and citizen participation are core components of local democracy. Both representative and participatory democracy provides a room for strengthening local democracy. An examination of the applicability of both concepts revealed that they have their own merits and demerits. Further, the discussion proved that representative democracy in itself has failed to ensure local democracy by accommodating citizens to involve decision making process.

While recognizing the valuable contribution made especially local government and participatory democracy scholars, the following two observations can be drawn in light of the overall review which is conducted in this paper in the context of institutionalizing participatory democracy. First, the representative democracy has failed to involve citizens in the decision making process at the local level within its traditional setting and institutional framework suggested for accommodating citizens to involve with it. Second, the existing literature provides evidence for the need to search for a suitable approach for institutionalizing citizen participation and participatory democracy builds a foundation for providing legal, policy institutional framework. Social Contract Theory has been integrated by the Constitution of Sri Lanka and it is articulated as people's sovereignty. Hence, through a decentralization mechanism the power can be enjoyed by the citizens either by themselves or by their representatives. Therefore, the legal framework is based on both participatory and representative democratic approach is not contradicted with the constitutional setting.

In light of these theoretical underpinnings, this paper advanced the need for adopting a cooperative approach for strengthening the local government system for institutionalizing citizen participation. Hence, representative

democracy is established, participatory approaches are essential.

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