

Womens Development Societies (Kantha Sagwardana Samithies) in Sri Lanka and Participatory Development: A Case Study on Womens Development Societies in Peliyagoda Urban Council in Gampaha District

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(EE) Enhancement of women's participation in the participatory development (PD) is important for a country to attain its social, economic and political sustainability. PD is a wide range of phenomena attached to political, social and economic elements which have been in existence in development discourse and debates for the last few decades in Sri Lanka. The purpose of this study is to examine the contribution of the women's development societies (DS) in PD, identify the weaknesses of the women's development societies (WDS) and uncover the role of women's societies in Sri Lanka. The aim of this research is also to evaluate to what extent the focus of the research is influenced by the determinant factors of colonial and neo-colonial oppression, such as modern patriarchal system, self-reliance, political, social and economic structure, and exploitation and so on. To achieve this purpose, qualitative and quantitative methodology was used, with secondary sources as an instrument of data collection. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, focused group discussions and in-depth interviews. Two women's development societies (TWDS) were selected for this study namely, Malwaththa WDS and Peliyagodawaththa WDS. These TWDS have women's development based objectives and they target the underprivileged women in the society. Based on the data analyzed, findings show that the role of the TWDS have different social, political and economic dimensions. PD aspects are not fulfilled by these TWDS. The research shows that the economic empowerment (EE) alone is not sufficient to gain the PD. In some instances these women's societies (WS) help EE. However, unfortunately social upward movement, personal growth, domestic responsibilities, self-reliance or other values of the lives cannot be granted through programs of the women's DS. Research findings show both women's DS play only a debt provider (DP) role. DP role has established and maintained poor power relations between the rich and the poor. As an empowerment tool women's DS had not integrated women into development by targeting women directly through empowerment. It diminishes self-reliance within women. Hence, it can be concluded that the stakeholders should have strong commitment to empower WS and utilize the potential of the government to bring about PD through WS..

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