



Empowering Citizens for Participatory Planning in Sri Lanka

CSO:	Transparency International Sri Lanka (TISL)
Years:	2009-2012
Country:	Badulla and Monaragala District, Sri Lanka
Amount:	\$35,000 USD
Sector:	Governance: Strengthening Citizen Participation at the Local Level

Corruption Problem:	Lack of citizen participation in local government leads to weak and corrupt service delivery
Tools employed:	Participatory Planning, Capacity Building, Media Campaign, Survey, CRC, Constructive Engagement

Poor service delivery by local government units in Sri Lanka – attributed to a lack of inclusion and participatory formats – have prompted the Sri Lanka chapter of Transparency International (TISL) to conduct the “Curbing Corruption in Local Government” project, aimed at increasing citizen participation and thereby enabling local governments to produce more directed outputs. The Project has had to cope with a variety of difficulties and is still ongoing – preliminary M&E measures however show that success can be achieved and sustained.

Corruption Problem Addressed

Local government is the third level of government in Sri Lanka, after the levels of central government and provincial councils. The local government bodies are known as local authorities. They are responsible for providing a variety of local public services including roads, sanitation, drains, housing, libraries, public parks, markets and recreational facilities. Local authorities are divided into three different groups: municipal councils, urban councils and Pradeshiya Sabha (PS) - divisional councils. All local authorities are elected using the open list proportional representation system.

Many local government officials and elected council members are not familiar with the principal legislation framework, governing local government in Sri Lanka, the Pradeshiya Sabha Act of 1987 (PS Act), its related procedures and financial regulations. Corruption issues identified during the preliminary needs assessment phase of the TISL-PTF program identified the limited opportunities for community engagement at the local government level in the Reedimaliyadda Division PS.

Despite the commitment of newly elected members of the Reedimaliyadda PS to enhance community participation in the governance process, there is limited capacity to do so. The absence of a participatory strategic intervention (division development plan), and limited financial provisions for such engagement accentuate the problem. These problems lead to poor governance and poor quality of life for local people. These issues are widespread and were explicitly captured in the focus group discussions and survey.

Actions Taken by TISL

As a first step, TISL conducted a discussion with the apex authority mandated with capacity building and knowledge enhancement of local government

officials, the Sri Lanka Institute of Local Governance (SLILG), and the local authority commissioner in the selected province, to plan the training and prepare the content and supporting material. In addition, a TISL local partner, a local community radio station (Uva Community Radio), shared their “People’s Voice” program plan with elected members.

A two day training program for 10 elected members and 4 government officials focused on: (i) the significance of transparency and accountability for good governance, (ii) mapping administrative institutions and elected institutions and their functions, and the local governance system and its relation to provincial and central structures, and (iii) provisions in the PS Act relevant to people’s participation and financial regulations. In addition, the concept of a development plan was explained and the steps to prepare a participatory development plan were identified.

A public meeting was held with the Provincial Council Minister, elected officials and the public to share the development plan approach. A Citizen Committee was formed to represent six working areas of the PS. Two consultation meetings were held with the Citizen Committee to prioritize problems. A four day stakeholders meeting formulated a draft development plan.

The SLILG partnered with TISL in the design of the participatory development plan and knowledge sharing exercises. Thirty problems related to service delivery were identified through discussions held between the community and council members, ten of whom were trained on the PS Act and rules and procedures, especially on the financial aspects.

The local community radio station is also a key partner in this project. It is allocating air time to give Reedimaliyanda citizens the opportunity to voice their concerns on governance issues, focusing

on corruption. The station also follows up on the response of government officials to these issues and set out to monitor actual service delivery.



The local market – an outsourcing responsibility of the PS few community members know about

Impact and Results Achieved

As an outcome of the training, 10 elected members were assigned to identify specific problems related to PS services with the consultation of CBO leaders. They also took responsibility to mobilize the public which is in the PS Act to ensure citizen participation. In addition, seven steps were identified to prepare the participatory development plan and budget.

The TISL-PTF intervention is unique in analyzing the local governance landscape and providing support to the Reedimaliyanda PS to develop a four year participatory development plan with community participation. The Chairman said:

“Local elections are only the first step on the path to community participation. Voting once every four years and then leaving us [elected representatives] to carry on with our work is one approach. But it is an approach that does not necessarily bring about effective democratic PS [...]. Community participation



is one of the key pillars that make a PS effective. But it does not just happen. In more centralised cultures, local people may expect local members and officials to make the decisions, to tell them what to do. They are not used to sharing in decision-making. Community participation is something the PS must work at. It needs a strategy both to engage local people and to bring local organisations into constructive partnerships. Therefore the four year planning document is very important to us”.

Documentation

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at www.ptfund.org under the “Where-we-work” tab.

A variety of documents can be found on TI Sri Lanka’s website at <http://www.tisrilanka.org/>