

GRAMODAYA MANDALAYA: The newest village organisation

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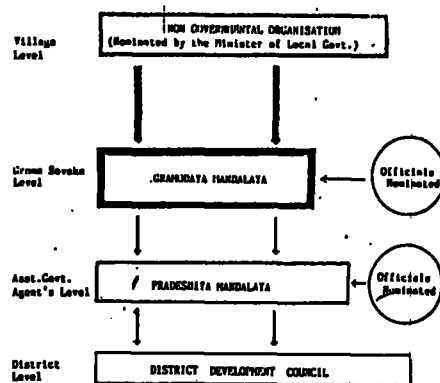
In Sri Lanka several attempts have been made with the hope of decentralizing the administration and eliciting a greater degree of local participation in the administration. Among such recent attempts of note were the Divisional Development Council (1971), District Political Authority and Decentralized Budget (1974), District Minister System (1978), District Development Council (1980). The 'Gramodaya Mandalaya Scheme' which was established in October 1981 was another attempt to harness village institutions in trying to achieve this objective.

The term 'Gramodaya' means the awakening of the village; Gramodaya Mandalaya as a whole implies an organisation which brings light to the village and this concept rests on the principles of self-help, self-reliance, popular participation and local decision making. The objective of the Gramodaya programme is to mobilise the existing local organisations, so that they can participate in local development and administrative activities. They are also expected to create a cleaner environment; ensure basic health needs, facilities for education and housing.

One 'Gramodaya Mandalaya' is formed in each village headman's (Grama Sevaka's)

Division which is the lowest level in the government administrative system. Sri Lanka is divided into twenty four administrative districts, which are sub-divided in two hundred and forty four Assistant Government Agent's (AGA) Divisions. These are further sub-divided into 4457 village headmen's (Grama Sevaka's - GS) divisions. On this basis there should be 4457 Gramodaya Mandalas and according to the Gramodaya Information Centre about 3500 Gramodaya Mandalas are in operation (See table for numbers established).

The Gramodaya Mandalaya may consist of the heads of all non-political organisations in the area covered by it. Only the organisations functioning in the Grama Sevaka Divisions and engaged in social services and other activities contributing to public welfare are recognised for representation at the Gramodaya Mandalaya. The final decision to include an organisation in a Gramodaya Mandalaya rests with the Minister in charge. Thirty six such organisations (eg. Rural Development Societies, Community Centres, Women's Societies, Sport Societies, School Development Societies, Religious and Cultural Societies) have so far been recognized. In addition a certain number of government and public corporations' officers eg. special service officers, cultivation officers, heads of schools, family health workers working in



the Grama Sevaka division may also be nominated by the Minister for membership of a Gramodaya Mandalaya.

The Gramodaya Mandalaya is entrusted with the responsibility of identifying and servicing the development needs and priorities of the area it represents. It is also expected to submit its recommendations concerning development activities of the area to the higher level organisation, Pradeshiya Mandalaya Divisional Council of the AGA's Division.

A Pradeshiya Mandalaya is formed in each Assistant Government Agent's Division and consists of representatives from all Gramodaya Mandalayas. Also, selected government and semi-government officials of the division are included in the Council. Some of the plans prepared at Gramodaya Mandalaya level are submitted to Pradeshiya Mandalaya, while others are directly implemented. The Pradeshiya Mandalaya considers all these and forwards its programmes of development of the division to the respective Development Council of the District for incorporation in the Annual Development Plan.

The fundamental idea of establishing a Gramodaya Mandalaya at the village level is to create opportunities for the local people to get actively involved in the development of their localities by using their knowledge and the resources available to them.

Guidelines given in the Gramodaya Mandalaya handbook describe the expected role and provide instructions for realising this role. These go on to indicate that most of a village community's needs remain unattended due to lack of funds. Therefore, in developing a village, mere consideration of needs is not sufficient. It is equally important to consider the availability of resources. Since needs can be unlimited, planning should be done in small phases, depending on the funds available. Thus, village development plans should identify priorities. Money is only one

GRAMODAYA MANDALAS ESTABLISHED 1981-1986

District	No. of GS Div.	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Colombo	195	185	185	189	189	193	194
Gampaha	444	419	419	420	442	444	444
Kalutara	253	246	247	249	249	252	252
Matale	175	174	173	170	170	175	174
Nuwara Eliya	142	139	139	139	139	139	139
Galle	318	267	272	272	272	318	318
Matara	225	143	223	225	225	225	225
Hambantota	174	150	162	158	158	167	167
Batticaloa	101	39	101	101	101	88	101
Ampara	122	118	118	122	122	120	120
Trincomalee	60	44	60	46	59	59	59
Kurunegala	515	485	509	509	512	515	515
Puttalam	184	184	184	184	184	182	182
Anuradhapura	188	188	188	186	188	188	188
Beddulla	159	152	159	159	159	156	153
Moneragala	88	80	82	83	83	88	88
Ratnapura	182	165	175	179	179	179	179
Kegalle	201	200	197	197	197	201	200
Polonnaruwa	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Kandy	408	371	395	395	407	407	378
Jaffna	176	—	141	167	167	—	—
Mannar	34	—	—	35	35	34	34
Vavuniya	24	—	—	24	24	24	24
Mullativu	26	—	—	24	24	12	12
Sri Lanka	4457	3812	4130	4296	4348	4229	4206

Source: Dept. of Local Government

Contd. on page 33

Gramodaya Mandalaya.....

of the resources needed. Manpower, however, is considered more important.

Since non governmental organisations are the main agent in the Gramodaya Mandalaya programme, its success depends mainly on the availability of such organisations and their ability to work effectively.

A paper by T. Abeyrama, a Research Associate in the Human Settlements Development Division and K. Saeed Associate Professor of System Science and Management, of the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand, reviewing the Gramodaya Mandalaya concept concludes that "In principle the Gramodaya Mandalaya scheme seems to be a sound way of improving the people's participation in development. But this can be done only if proper attention is paid to overcoming barriers which may hinder the proper utilisation of existing voluntary organisations in harnessing the people's participation in development. This may require the reform of the existing voluntary organisations as well as the provision of

opportunities for the training of their members. Furthermore, social development inculcating values of self-reliance, self-help, self-sufficiency and mutual co-existence is to be undertaken, and technical knowhow and management training is to be provided.

Organising the masses is not an easy task. Since different people and groups of people have different interests, conflicts of interest will develop. Also, the administrators and politicians may see mobilisation of the masses as a threat and may implicitly or explicitly discourage programmes attempting such mobilisation.

Thus, even though participatory development schemes are conceptually very appealing, their implementation is quite problematic. The Gramodaya Mandalaya scheme attempts to increase the people's participation but if it is implemented without paying attention to the social environment of the scheme, the chances of its success will be low".