COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AS A HOSTAGE OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND POLITICAL GOALS (A case study of Sri Lanka)

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Community empowerment is the process of enabling communities to increase control over their lives. Political leadership in social safety nets serve pivotal role in alleviating poverty by empowering communities. Hence, a sustainable mechanism in poverty reduction can only be developed by promoting a healthy relationship between the state and the civil society. For achieving a win - win relationship between state and society, it is necessary to improve connections between citizens and public officials across the public - private divide. Further, mutually supportive relations should be strengthened between these two actors. Of the several attempts in Sri Lanka to bridge the divide between the state and the civil society, *Samurdhi* the previous main social safety net in Sri Lanka, can be considered the most significant attempt. This study places its main emphasis on researching the fact that whether the *Samurdhi* program brings community empowerment by promoting constructive engagement between the state and the civil society. The research focused *Matara* district in Sri Lanka and qualitative methods have been applied in order to obtain more in-depth, comprehensive information about the program and thus about the potential positive synergy between state and civil society. The research used method triangulation for obtaining different kind of data by combining different research methods such as semi-structured interviews, observation and focus group discussions (FGDs). The study shows that political involvement in the program has created a 'distorted form of state- society interaction', thus leaving community empowerment as a hostage of the conflict between development goals and political goals.

Keywords: *community empowerment, social safety nets, state - society interaction, Samurdhi, political goals*