CHAPTER SIX

STATE AND DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS: CONSTRUCTION OF DENAGAMA IN A NATIONAL IMAGINATION

6.1 Introduction

Foregoing chapters of the thesis discussed theoretical perspectives relevant to the main argument, methodological issues of the subject matter and empirical reality of local communities of the post-colonial society. Chapter 6 focuses on the role of development experts in the present development practice. It will discuss how development experts function under the state legitimacy for constructing a national imagination in local societies. National imagination in the post-colonial society is closely linked with development and modernity. The ruling elites in the posts-colonial society think that their country is backward and underdeveloped and hence invite foreign aid and expertise to change the existing situation in line with Western modernity. The development of the society in line with Western modernity is the national imagination of the post-colonial society.

It was pointed out in chapter 2 that development discourse is a continuation of colonial relations in a new form. Modern state, its administrative structure and institutions are the legacies of the colonial rule. The technologies of rule that were followed by colonial administrators are adopted in the same manner in the post-colonial state. Despite the temporal break associated with independence and decolonization, still there are structural continuities between the colonial period and present day post-colonial
society. Particular ideologies and dichotomies that were used for the construction of colonial institutions and practices still continue in the post-colonial society. The most notable of these is the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. As pointed out in chapter 2, this dichotomy was used during the colonial period to justify the imposition of Western forms of rule over the society in subject territories. In the post-colonial period, the same dichotomy is used to maintain unequal power relations between 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' countries. Therefore, the term 'development' is another connotation of colonialism. The production of knowledge is the basis of power in the modern world. The production of forms of knowledge and the practice of it have become a major legitimizing force of state power over society.

We saw in chapter 5, how the colonial state practiced the Western knowledge in reorienting Sri Lankan rural society in a direction of Western capitalism. Denagama, the village community lost its self-sustained and self-sufficient economy and became dependent on the state for its survival. Its incorporation into larger political economy of the country, of course, created new opportunities for livelihood. Thus the villagers did not incline to see state intervention in a negative way. For example, in the 1930s, the villagers petitioned the state regarding the issues of landlessness and population pressure in the village. The Government agent of the district distributed a portion of 'Crown Land' (state land) among villagers to stop their agitation. Although the problem of landlessness was relieved temporarily by the Crown land distribution, rapid population increase regenerated the demand for more land. In the 1960s, the demand moved from more land to cultivate to specific 'development' projects. By this time (10-15 years after Independent in 1948) both the state and the local communities in Denagama understood that local
resources such as land was not a main link between the state and them. By this time the state had developed a clear image of the rural society as 'underdeveloped' and 'poor' areas that need 'development' support. On the other hand, rural communities wanted to tap such external development assistance to improve their life chances. The most important aspect of these changes at the ideological and policy planning level is the 'preparedness' of the state and local communities to embrace external development assistance. Another aspect of development process started in the 1960s was the local patterns of development assistance control. In the past, community leaders played an important role in solving problems faced by the villagers. But that role is now played by politicians and experts appointed by the state. Similarly, earlier the 'community' played a critical role in regulating individual behavior within the village community. But this role has been taken over by state agents (experts) who intervene in directing the fate of local communities.

6.2 Role of experts in the post-colonial state

The term 'experts' is used specifically in this thesis to denote those who function in the capacity of advisors or consultant in the field of development. They perform a mediatory role between local and national society as well as between national and global. Because of the continuing post-colonial dependency of the Third World countries, the developed West compels these countries to accept cultural traits and the knowledge systems produced in the West. These influences come in the form of aid, development dialogues and setting targets for development as instructed by powerful institutions such as the World Bank, IMF and international NGOs. The mediators of this alien knowledge are the so-called development experts. I do not reject the idea that foreign expert
knowledge is necessary for the development of Third World. For example, the importation of motor vehicles from the West implies and entails learning of proper road rules. This knowledge, therefore, has to be imported whenever the need arises for improving the transport facilities in a non-Western country. The point that raises in this thesis, however, goes beyond this level and it is specifically relating to the imposition of certain forms of knowledge, which essentialize modernity.

Development experts in fact originated in the colonial bureaucracy. Colonial bureaucracy performed a vital role in introducing and practicing the Western knowledge brought from Europe. The state-level bureaucracy formulated policy, while local level officers implemented these policies often controlling marginalized communities and their resources. The village headman, for example, although did not participate in policy formulation, faithfully implemented state policies at the village level on behalf of his colonial masters such as the Government agents (GA) and Assistant Government Agent (AGA) of a district. The GAs and AGAs at the district-level had the authority to function independently and to take appropriate action on behalf of the Government. With the gaining of Independence in 1948, most of the colonial bureaucracy survived and extended as the functions of the state increased rapidly. However, their role gradually shifted from 'administration' to 'developed administration'. For example, a GA now is the District-level Secretary and also the coordinator of the development activity in a district.

Parallel to this shifting of emphasis, a new category of experts was created by the state to produce a national imagination at the local level. The new category consisted of development consultants, development planners and advisors of the state. They function directly under the state legitimacy, and therefore, have necessary power to go beyond the
authority of bureaucratic officers at the provincial and district-levels. This latter who held power in the colonial state is now implementing development policies and programs designed by the former category that is, experts.

The orientation of development policies and programs designed by these experts closely link with aspirations of modernity. In association with experts of international development agencies such as the World Bank and IMF, they advise the state to take a modernist stance for the development of the country. Following their advice, the state then invites international development aid for implementing development projects such as highways, irrigation dams, schools, hospitals etc. This process finally leads to a dependence of the state on international development aid and to follow a donor-driven development agenda in the country.

As discussed in chapter 2, development planning in the Third World countries is largely influenced by foreign experts who work in development aid agencies. Sometimes they use money and power to write the policy on behalf of the local policy makers. In this way ideologies associated with Western modernity are injected into post-colonial societies. It should also be mentioned that some experts thus assigned to develop policy want to plan for the benefit of the people who will ultimately get affected by development policy. But their views are very often overlooked or disregarded by development agencies.

Development projects and programs are the overt link between Third World and the West. In the post-colonial society, development projects and programs are the means by which state and local communities are linked. In both situation experts play a mediatory
role. The case study presented below discusses how development experts play this mediatory role in Denagama in Sri Lanka.

6.3 The coastal resource management project in Denagama: a case study

6.3.1 Background of the project

In 1994, the Coast Conservation Department of Sri Lanka (CCD) initiated a pilot Special Area Management Project (SAMP) at two coastal sites. Denagama was one of them and the other was Hikkaduva. The main objective of the project was to design a 'development plan' for effective management of coastal resources in each site. Coral mining and degradation of the coastal environment were the main issues identified at the Denagama site that need immediate attention. The project agencies and personnel held the view that exploitation of natural resources is inextricably linked with livelihood issues of the community such as poverty. Therefore, poverty alleviation was the strategy adopted in achieving the project's objectives. Thus, economic development was taken as the basic orientation of the project.

Both the concepts of economic development and effective natural resource management emerged in the specific context of industrialization and capitalist growth in the West. The same concepts were applied to the project where the issues are fundamentally different. The project location was primarily rural agrarian social system with hardly any signs of industry. As this site is small-scale social system, its needs are different. This demonstrates the manner in which the ideology associated with development creates the West in the imagination of non-Western people. The experts who involved in the project tried to convince that the lack of economic development is the main reason of environmental degradation in Denagama. As pointed out in Chapter 2,
development creates conceptual space for linking the 'First World' with the 'Third World' and in that process, people of the 'Third World' tend to think that economic development is the solution to the social, political, economic and environmental problems that present in their countries.

6.3.2 Perceived environmental issues in Denagama

The environmental issues that were perceived by the project staff are in fact not historically informed issues in the village. Their origin in fact is closely connected with the recent monetization of the Denagama economy. It was discussed earlier how the semi-subsistence economy in the village got monetized with the introduction of cash-cropping. Cash-cropping, generated profits (as well as losses). Parallel to this transformation of the economy, a material culture has developed in the village, which encouraged individuality, competition and accumulation of material wealth. Basic foundation of the development of a money economy was laid during the colonial period itself, but its real manifestation could be seen from the late 1940s in Denagama. Coral mining as a business began in Denagama during this period.

The Coast Conservation Department (CCD) established in 1979, saw coral mining as a disastrous activity to the natural coastal environment. Coastal erosion along the coast of Denagama increased in recent years as a result of damages made to the coral reef, which has provided a natural barrier against coastal erosion of the land. Apart from that, a serious threat was made to the mangrove cover of Denagama Those who burnt coral for the production of lime used mangroves as fuelwood. These intertwine practices directly affected the natural fish production cycle in the lagoon.
The CCD’s perception about coral mining was different from that of the villagers. The CCD believed that coral mining and destroying of mangroves are disastrous to the coastal environment of the area and hence immediate measures should be taken to stop these activities. The CCD officials pointed out that the destruction of mangroves in a lagoon system would extinct several fish species. They also pointed out that coral mining is the main cause of coastal erosion. This perception is primarily based on scientific rationality found in classical theories of the West. The villagers held a different perception about coral mining. They thought that coral mining would not a seriously threaten the life supporting systems of the community, and therefore, believed that they could use this resource to generate income and employment. However, they did not deny the fact that felling of mangroves is disastrous activities to the lagoon environment.

### 6.3.3 Coral mining

In order to understand the argument raised in this case study, a background knowledge is necessary about the origin of the coral mining in Denagama. During the pre-colonial times in Sri Lanka, a limited amount of lime was produced from corals for the use in important buildings such as temples and houses of the ruling elite. The production and supply of lime for these buildings was the duty of Hunu (lime burners) caste people, who lived mainly in the coastal districts of the Low Country. Numerically as well as socially they had a lower position in the area when compared to the three predominant castes in the Low Country, viz. Karava (fishing), Durava (toddy tapers) and Salagama (Cinnamon peelers). However, as noted by Brice Ryan (1993), caste-bounded occupations were carried out by the appropriate caste, but members of other castes also
engaged in those occupations. However, lime burning remained as a caste bounded occupation in Denagama until the late 1950s.

According to old villagers, lime burning was not an economic activity in Denagama prior to 1942 and lime burning was introduced to the village by a group of Hunu caste people came from Godavanagoda, a village near Tangalla. At that time, small quantity of coral was mined for the construction of houses. The Hunu caste people, however, started lime production as a business. They did not mine the coral reef but instead used derbies and chunk of coral that were found on the beach. Therefore, at this early stage the activity of lime burning did not make a threat to the natural coastal environment of the village.

In 1949, a Karava man from the Denagama hamlet (see map 2) started a lime kiln by breaking his caste taboos associated with lime production. In the Sinhalese caste hierarchy, Karava caste is placed in the second rank just under the Goyigama and the Hunu caste occupation is in the seventh position in the caste hierarchy. Thus the Karava community in Denagama perceived that lime burning as an inferior occupation. Such a perception about occupational inferiority prevented Karava people from entering into lime burning enterprise, although they were the dominant caste in the village.

However, a tendency of blurring these imagined occupational distinctions started in Denagama from the 1960s as result of the spread of the money economy. Its first sign appeared in the late 1940s with the starting of a lime kiln by the said Karava man but the change was not rapid until the 1960s. Adherence to caste taboos is one way of maintaining a specific identity of a (caste) group. The Karava community in Denagama was maintaining the caste taboos associated with its caste until the penetration of market
forces into the village community. It should mention that the lime kiln started by the Karava man in fact did not construct on his own land which was in the middle of the hamlet but, instead, he located it on an unclaimed land adjacent to the village cemetery. The reason is clear. He knew that the fellow Karava men would blame him if the kiln would construct within the Karava settlement and therefore, the best way to redress their anger is locating the kiln on this remote land. At this time the semi-subsistence economy of the village began its transformation into a market-oriented economy. However, basic forms of the traditional social organization did continue with a slow phase of changes. Thus it was not easy for an individual to break away from the traditionally maintained caste taboo, even though he was free to do so within the new economy. This was why the Karava caste people did not enter to the enterprise of lime production. The first Karava man who started a lime kiln knew that the direction of the village economy is changing but he had a fear of violating the caste taboo. However, the values accompanied by the new money economy clashed with the traditionally maintained values in the village. It made easy for those wanted to break away from some of the traditional social barriers such as caste taboos. As a result, several other Karava persons started coral mining and lime production without paying any respect to the existed traditional occupational distinctions. For example, the number of lime kilns run by Karava people increased up to 6 by the year 1961. Their number was further increased to 14 by 1961. The new enterprising Karava villages build kilns within the Karava settlement itself.

The number of lime kilns and the number of those who were engaged in coral mining increased considerably after the 1980s. A survey conducted in 1990 revealed that almost 30 percent of households in Denagama hamlet were engaged in lime burning and
coral mining. According to the survey data, 179 persons engaged in the lime production in 64 kilns and 180 persons in coral mining. In addition, 55 households depended on fuelwood supply to kilns and transporting coral from the beach to the kilns (see Ranaweera Banda, 1990). According to the villagers, the prolonged drought in the late 1970s to the mid 1980s affected agriculture in the village adversely, and as a result, many farmers took to coral mining and lime burning as a livelihood. Most of the lagoon fishermen in Denagama also joined them as a result of the depletion of the fish in the lagoon (for details see the section Lagoon fishing). These circumstances led to a rapid increase in the number of coral miners and lime burners in the village.

Some of the Hunu caste people who started this business in Denagama shifted to alternative employment such as carpentry and masonry when the Karava dominant group increasingly involved in the enterprise. Those Hunu people who remained in the enterprise also began to supplement their income with alternative means of livelihood as they could not compete with the Karava people. At present, there is no single Hunu caste person engaged in lime production in Denagama. Almost all coral miners and lime producers are of Karava caste. They no longer consider lime burning as an inferior-caste occupation. Instead, they believe and also express openly that the Karava caste has a customary right to exploit these resources.

This new tendency of Karava caste infiltration to coral mining and lime burning demonstrate the internal cultural politics that were operating in the community. These politics could not clearly visible within the tightly bounded social structure of traditional Denagama. However, these cultural politics came to surface when the village community got incorporated with the market networks since the early 1900s. Tradition and caste
taboos prevented a competition between dominant Karava group and minority Hunu caste people in exploiting this natural resource but, the former group began to show its dominance once the tradition was shaken by market forces. New market economy offered a freedom to members of different castes to compete for new economic opportunities. Thus, it made essay, particularly to the dominant Karavas to break away from the traditionally maintain caste taboos in the pursuit of new economic opportunities.

The economic rationality, which was accompanied by market forces, made a significant impact upon the natural resource management in the village. In the previous semi-subsistence economy of the village, caste taboos associated with different occupations played an important part in the management of natural resources. However, under the new market economy, caste system became incapable of maintaining natural resources, particularly because of the economic rationality that it introduced.

It was discussed in chapter 4, how these cultural politics operate in the contemporary Denagama. The Karava caste people attempt to maintain a domination, which derives from their numerical majority in the region. Though Goyigama people consider themselves as higher in social status, they have put into a secondary position in the village since they do not have a firm base in this coastal region. Thus Goyigama caste people always show a quasi compliance when associate with Karava community in the village. This was the main reason of Goyigama people refrained themselves from coral mining and lime burning. The Karava caste people realized that highlighting their dominant caste identity is the best way to keep their command of the resource and to keep others out of coral mining and lime burning.
6.3.4 Lagoon fishing

Prior to the 1980s, a considerable number of Denagama families depended on lagoon fishing for their livelihood, most often they belonged to a Karava sub-caste known as Kevul. The Kevul sub-caste holds an inferior position compared to the other sub-caste of Karava people. This hierarchy arises from the nature of fishing. The Kevul fisherman fish only in the lagoon while other Karava sub-caste such as oru karava (boat fishers) and dandu karava (rodfishers) fish in the sea. In this manner, the two sub-castes maintain a social distinction at an occupational level. Sea fishing by its nature is a challenging and is more profitable than lagoon fishing. This is reminiscent of Malinowski's distinction between deep sea and lagoon fishing among the Trobriend people: who going to deep sea fishing command higher respect than those who fish in the safe water of lagoons. The distinctive status of the two groups prevented a competitive utilization of natural resources in a complex ecosystem in Denagama.

The 250 ha. Denagama lagoon is surrounded by a strip of mangroves and scrub forest. It is bounded on the seaward by a broad sandy beach, approximately one km long. Landward of the lagoon is a large track of paddy fields, most of which have now been abandoned due to high soil salinity. The lagoon, together with its water supply and flow, fisheries, mangroves and scrub forest, agricultural land, dynamic beach environment and the people who depend upon these resources, constitute a large and complex ecosystem. This complex ecosystem was functioning well at a time when human interventions into the system were minimum, which was insured by social taboos and caste-based occupation system.
The ecological balance of the lagoon environment was first disturbed by an irrigation network in the area. The Kirama Oya, which is the principal water source of the lagoon, was partially diverted in 1812 by the British to fill in the 162 ha. Kirama tank. Eighteen weirs have since been built by the Irrigation Department on the river to irrigate land. The Rekawa Oya, which is a small river with a catchment basin of 78 sq.km. used to provide water to the lagoon. Two major tanks and four minor tanks have been constructed on this river too to irrigate land. These irrigation works have impeded fresh water flow into the lagoon. This has caused salinization of land. As a result, about 400 ha. of Tangalu Velyaya (paddy field of Tangalla) of the western fringe of the lagoon has now been abandoned.

The inflow of fresh and brackish water into the lagoon has critical environmental impact on the lagoon ecosystem. The influx of seawater when the lagoon mouth is open and the inflow fresh-water from the rivers- Kirama Oya and Rekawa Oya helped maintain the ecological balance of the lagoon.

A canal constructed in the Tangalu Velyaya in 1980 to drain saline water into the sea disturbed the natural inflow of fresh water into the lagoon. Before the construction of the canal, the lagoon received sufficient fresh water during the rainy season to flush the lagoon into the sea. When the lagoon mouth is open to the sea, inflowing brackish water recruits shrimp larvae into the lagoon, helping to increase the lagoon's shrimp fishery. This natural process of recruiting shrimp larvae was impeded by construction of the canal.

Another development project introduced in 1984 further worsened the above situation. The construction of a causeway near the lagoon mouth using 30 cm diameter
hume pipes restricted the flow of seawater into and out of the lagoon. This reduced significantly the amount of shrimp larvae and fish entering the lagoon from the sea. These ill-conceived development projects finally disturbed the overall ecological balance of the lagoon system, which in turn affected adversely the livelihood of lagoon fishermen.

Those who supplied fuelwood to lime kilns in Denagama did not hesitate to cut mangroves. Traditionally villagers used mangroves as a source of fuelwood for cooking, for housing, and also for medicinal purposes. They used this resource in a limited scale without disrupting the natural environment. This was the first instance in its known history, the villagers in Denagama destroyed the mangrove cover for commercial purposes. The owners of lime kilns, in association with their fuelwood suppliers, destroyed the entire mangrove forest (200 ha) within a period of 12-15 years.

6.3.5 State intervention and development

Coral mining and environment degradation in the lagoon system in Denagama provided a justifiable cause for the state to intervene into affairs of the village. This intervention came in the form of a village resource management for 'development'.

Where the post-colonial state has stepped into the control of the natural resources, particularly forests, its inefficiency and short-term profit making have usually cause rapid deterioration of the environment. The Resource Management project in Denagama should be understood as a form of state intervention for controlling natural resources. The beach, coral reef, mangrove strip, lagoon and its fisheries existed as communal properties until the state intervention in the form of development. The CCD as an agent of the state saw that communal ownership of these natural resources prevents potential
opportunities for generating an income for the state. Thus the CCD wanted to prepare a suitable background to replace existing communal ownership of natural resources with a system of private ownership. One of the undeclared objectives of the project was the promotion of tourism in the village through private investment.

6.4 The resource management project in Denagama

Although the project was initiated in 1994, the preparation for the intervention began in early 1980s. The Coast Conservation Act, No.57 of 1981, and the Amendment Act, No.64 of 1988, are the most important legal instruments in this regard. According to the section 31 A (1) of the Amendment Act, “no person shall within the limits of the coastal zone engage in the mining, collecting, processing, possessing, storing, burning and transporting in any form whatsoever of coral”. The Coast Conservation Department instructed the police station in Tangalla to sue those who violate the clauses of the Acts. Accordingly, a Police Post was also established in Denagama in 1993 to control coral mining. The Police supported the CCD to demolish all lime kilns located within the limits of the gazetted coastal zone. The broader meaning of taking such drastic measures was that the in Denagama people are responsible for the environment degradation, and therefore, the state has the rights to intervene to change the situation. However, although the CCD thought that the situation could be controlled by enforcing the law, the environmental problems in Denagamma further aggravated. The authorities (CCD) soon realized that coral mining and other environmentally hazardous activities in Denagama are difficult to control by law enforcement alone. The alternative that they identified was a Special Area Management Project (SAMP) to mobilize community participation in the management of natural resources. In proposing such an alternative, the authorities-
highlighted that 'poverty' is the primary reason for environmental degradation in Denagama.

The concept of 'poverty' is an invention of the West during the post-war period and 'development' is the remedy that it was suggested to overcome it in the Third World. The alternative approach to law enforcement proposed by the CCD was based on these concepts. The authorities reinterpreted the situation in Denagama to fit into these concepts and then designed the Resource Management Project as a new beneficial intervention.

6.4.1 Inventing a backwardness in Denagama

The Resource Management Project in Denagama is not the first project that invented 'backwardness' to justify state intervention into a rural community. The British rulers, for example, interpreted the chena (slash-and-burn) cultivation as a primitive form of agriculture and imposed restrictions upon it by encouraging villagers to do cash-cropping. According to the rulers' views, cash-cropping was the civilized form of agriculture. The Hambantota Integrated Rural Development Project (HIRDEP) is a recent example that illustrates how 'backwardness' was invented in the Hambantota District in order to pump massive amount of funds that came in the form of development aid from the NORAD. A series of development programs ranging from primary health to education, infrastructure development, agricultural credit, fisheries, animal husbandry were implemented as a (self-defined) strategy for alleviating poverty in the district. Denagama was one of the villages selected for implementing these development programs. If a 'development' project like HIRDEP were not implemented, Denagama would not have been labeled as a 'poverty stricken' village.
The above two examples show the manner in which 'backwardness' was invented by the state and development agencies to justify their interventions. In such a process, those who intervene always position themselves at a superior position compared to those who are being assisted. It is assumed that the 'imagined' superiority of the interventionist lies in the knowledge system and modern technology that it possesses. In Denagama, for example, they intervened considering it as an 'unlawful' community, which has violated the Coast Conservation Law. The next step was the introduction of a development project to make the community lawful, which is a characteristic of the imagined superiority of the interventionist.

A number of parties involved in preparing this development project in Denagama. Among the parties involved, the CCD, and USAID funded Coastal Resources Management Project (CRMP) are important. Government officers, the CCD and Coastal Resources Management Project (CRMP) staff liaised with community groups to identify resource management problems and priorities in the villages. While studying resource management issues and technical questions, Special Area Coordinating Committees, comprised of both community representatives and government officers, were established under the project. At the same time, the officials prepared reports and environment profiles. Based on the findings of technical studies and recommendations of the Coordinating Committees, the CCD and CRMP prepared a Special Area Management Plan for Denagama in 1996. It contained 16 strategies and 116 specific actions that should be adopted in dealing with four key problems:

(a) Poverty in the community;
Among the four key problems, inadequate water circulation in the lagoon and coral mining were the issues directly relevant to Denagama, but poverty alleviation was also considered as a key area to be addressed by the Project. The Project assumed that environmental issues were interrelated with livelihood issues.

Although the village lost some of its prosperity as a result of environmental degradation, Denagama has never been a 'poor village' as the Project identified. A death due to starvation had never been reported throughout its known history. In fact, hardships were experienced by its inhabitants at the times of crop failure, but the villagers always had a surplus to sell or exchange in an emergency. In the past, people from neighbouring fishing villages came to Denagama to exchange fish for cereals and pulses. Village paddy fields usually produced ample food for all villagers. In the 1930s, Denagama was one of the main citronella oil producing centers in the district. Monetary returns gained from agriculture steadily increased since then and the Talpitiya hamlet became a main vegetable producing centers in the area. Fishing did not give large monetary rewards, but the sea, lagoon, and fisheries have always been sources of income.

According to a socio-economic survey conducted in 1994 in Denagama, only sixteen percent households depended on remittances and government welfare programs (see Ranaweera Banda et al, 1994:10). The rest were engaged in agriculture, fishing, and coral mining. Fifty four percent of households in the village were benefiting from the Janasaviya Program. This did not mean that they were poor as most of the Janasaviya
recipients were selected on their political party alliances than on income basis. Thus it is
difficult to lend support to the basic assumptions on which the CCD's Resource
Management Project was designed.

6.4.2 Imposing a development vision on Denagama

One of the major components of the Project was a social mobilization program to
convince the villagers that a proper management of natural resources is the way to
overcome poverty in the village. A young male graduate from outside was placed in the
village for a period of two years to initiate and coordinate an awareness building program
called ‘social mobilization’. He selected and trained a group of female social mobilizers
to conduct awareness-building exercises with the villagers. He, the program coordinator
at the village-level, conducted lectures and organized discussions with the community on
themes such as development and modernity. In those discussions he emphasized the
importance of resource management for the development. It was essentially an exercise
of projecting an ideal model of ‘developed’ Denagama into the minds of the villagers.
According to the model, if natural resources would be well maintained, new income
earning opportunities would become available reducing the level of unemployment.
Research institutes and universities would identify the well-maintained natural resource
system in Denagama as a laboratory to conduct their research. For this, a resource center
would be equipped with a library, a laboratory, an auditorium and guestrooms in the
village. Such agencies would insist the local authorities to improve infrastructural
facilities such as the road system, water supply, electricity supply and communication.
Finally, these developments would lead to a transformation of the traditional Denagama
into a modern village where the thinking and practices of people are different from the earlier period.

Imposing this development vision on the villagers was the task expected from the social mobilizers. For that purpose, they visited each and every family in the village over a period of two years. At the beginning, the villagers did not cooperate with the social mobilizers, but the situation gradually changed after they made various promises on behalf of the project. The social mobilization program made two important changes: One is training of villages in natural resource management, and the other is the convincing them to accept the project. As a result of the awareness building, the villagers stopped coral mining and the destruction made to the mangroves also came to a halt. The greatest achievement was the community support to implement the project. The villages themselves formed an informal organization called 'Community Coordinating Committee' to act upon the issues pertaining to socio-economic development of the village. Resource management was one of the priority areas of its work. Some of the members wanted to work independently from the project but the majority inclined to get advice and guidance from the project staff as they thought the experts of the project are more knowledgeable than them.

This ideological dependence was utilized by the Project officials to guide the community to the direction that they desired. The formation of the Denagama Development Foundation (DDF) in 1996 was an outcome of such guidance. It was a result of convincing a particular vision of development to the Denagama community. When looking at it carefully, this was a turning point of a series of planned activities. The initial step of the process was the invention of 'backwardness' of the villagers. This
ideology of development was projected to the minds of the villagers through a systematically designed social mobilization program. The villagers responded to it by organizing themselves into an action group - coordinating committee-which was ready to think about development in the village. An idea of planned change was not present at this stage, but the community tends to think about such a direction at the next stage, and finally they form the DDF. Thus the focus has shifted from the resource management to 'development', a vision that goes beyond the community. It is the vision that was advocated by international development agencies such as USAID and NORAD.

6.4.3 Reconstruction of Denagama in a vision of development

The influence of the Resource Management Project on change the pattern of thinking of Denagama people is enormous. The villagers believed what they had in the village was undesirable to the majority of villages and 'development' projects were the only way to change the situations 'Change' has now become an undisputed necessity. The agencies involved in the Resource Management Project found this shifting in orientation as a strategic point to implement the Development Plan prepared in 1995. It focused on three main development activities:

(a) Revitalization of the lagoon;

(b) Promotion of tourism in the area;

(c) Introduction of shrimp-culture as an income generating activity.

Among the three development activities proposed, the latter two were rejected by the villagers on cultural and environmental reasons. Their argument was the promotion of tourism will pollute their traditional Buddhist culture and shrimp production might affect the lagoon ecosystem. They were aware about the potential monetary rewards of these
two activities but the desire for material gains was suspended on the fear of a potential cultural pollution. As a result, the revitalization of lagoon was considered as a priority development activity.

The resistance to the promotion of tourism in the village arose from all caste-communities. The Project personnel took unusual interest to convince the village community that if tourism is accepted, then its enormous and varied benefits will accrue to all villagers. Among the benefits promised were employment, infrastructural development such as electricity, improved water and sanitation and roads. The plan was to improve the marginal land between the lagoon and the sea by restoring mangroves and improving the shoreline. Several investors also contacted to probe the possibilities of constructing holiday resorts. However, the villagers by this time had a clear idea of the ill-effects of tourism, especially foreign tourism in the area. The massive threat to the local culture posed by foreign tourists in Tangalla Town area was well known to the Denagama villagers. Even though some villagers were willing to support prospects from tourism, their ambition was restrained by the community-level fear of cultural pollution. Thus in the end opposition to tourism appeared as a community-wide resistance based on Sinhala-Buddhist cultural ethos.

The project attempted to promote shrimp culture on the grounds of better economy, more employment and poverty alleviation. The Karava community initially considered its feasibility by visiting shrimp pounds in the Puttalam District. One important factor that discouraged them in starting shrimp culture in the village was its capital-intensive nature of the enterprise. They had fears that if shrimp culture was allowed in the village, outside entrepreneurs would enter the village, as the Karava caste
members did not have sufficient capital to initiate the enterprise. Two other factors also influenced the villagers’ resistance to the shrimp culture. The first is the possibilities of soil salinity in the fringe of shrimp pounds that would affect agriculture. The second was the possibility of blocking the water source that watered the lagoon. Both these environment factors together with economic factor described above led the community specifically the Karava community to oppose the shrimp culture project. The Goyigama and Hena communities did not display any interest in the project initially. That was mainly because of their inability to influence the dominant Karava caste. However, when the Karava community decided not to go ahead with proposed project, the Goyigama and Hena communities joined the former to form Denagama community-wide opposition to shrimp culture, again invoking Buddhist cultural values.

6.4.4 Revitalization of the lagoon

As mentioned earlier, insufficient circulation of fresh and brackish water was the main problem in the lagoon system. Therefore, measures were taken to reconstruct the causeway, which had caused insufficient inflow of sea water into the lagoon. Technical expertise and funds were made available for the task. Newly formed Denagama Lagoon Fisheries Cooperative Society took the responsibility of managing the lagoon. Similarly, an expert was hired by the Project to study the potentials of introducing a hybrid shrimp variety to the lagoon. Initially, 200 fingerling were released to the lagoon on an experimental basis. The survival rate of this variety of shrimp was high as 75 percent. Then funding was made available to release a stock of 30,000 fingerling into the lagoon in two rounds. In doing so, the agreement between the project and the village was that the Lagoon Fisheries Cooperative Society would develop its own fund to release
fingerling from the fourth round. Accordingly, the Cooperative Society prepared a scheme to purchase the shrimp harvest and sell it to private traders with a profit. For this purpose, the Project assisted the Cooperative Society to hire a market outlet on lease from the Talpitiya junction. However, the program could not be implemented as expected due to lack of cooperation from the members of the cooperative society. Some of them sold their shrimp catch to private traders at a higher price (Rs.350 per kg.) than what was promised (Rs.250 per kg.) by the Cooperative Society. The social mobilizers did not intervene in the individual decisions of the fishermen. This made it difficult to build up a fund to purchase fingerling for the next release. As a result, a competition grew among the lagoon fishermen to exploit the naturally grown shrimp and fish in the lagoon.

The District Fisheries Office (DFO) intervened by introducing a licensing system of oru (canoe) in order to control the number of fishermen who do fishing in the lagoon. The lagoon fishermen did not oppose the new regulations but instead they requested the DFO not to register new canoes. In response to their request, the DFO issued license for oru (56) that engaged in fishing in the lagoon. According to this new regulation, those oru, which are registered at the DFO, Tangalla, would only be allowed fishing in the lagoon. Further, the types of nets and the fishing methods were specified to control overexploitation of the lagoon. Overall outcome of revitalization of the lagoon was the loss of control of fishermen over the lagoon. The Cooperative Society and the DFO became the decision-making bodies on matters pertaining to this resource.

6.4.5 The Denagama Development Foundation

The Denagama Development Foundation (DDF) was the brainchild of the Resource Management Project. The organization was formed in 1997 as a NGO to look
after the 'development' Projects in Denagama. It is an extension of the Community Coordinating Committee that was formed informally to take care of natural resources in the village. The DDF is an umbrella organization represented by seven community level organizations. Each community level organization sends seven members to the Mahasabhāva of the DDF for a period of one year and which is the main decision-making body of the DDF. The members of the Mahasabhāva are entrusted with the responsibility in seven areas of development activities viz., Agriculture; Fisheries; Lagoon and environment; Self-employment and micro-enterprises; Health and Education; Vocational training; and Awareness building. A Board of Directors consists of 15 members implements the decisions pertaining to these activities. Two members from each community organizations sit the Board of Directors.

The members of community level organizations meet monthly to discuss development issues in the village/hamlet and their proposals are then sent to the implementing body, i.e. the Board of Directors, through their representatives. The Board of Directors discusses those proposals sent by community level organizations in order to identify appropriate actions. Sometimes, the proposals which are difficult to execute within the resources of DDF are submitted to a committee at the Divisional Secretary level. This committee is represented by government officers from various departments and boards. If the submitted proposals fall within the subject area of the representative agencies, then they will suggest appropriate actions that may be taken.

A number of development projects have been implemented by the DDF through such a process of external support. Most of them are externally funded projects. Poverty alleviation, education and improvement of health and sanitation were the primary
objectives of most of the projects. For example, out of the 32 development projects that it implemented, poverty alleviation was the objective of 8 projects and the improvement of sanitation in the village was the objective of 5 projects. Poverty and lack of sanitary facilities, particularly latrines, were seen by the DDF as characteristic feature of under development of Denagama. These images (i.e. poverty and sanitation) were in fact created by development projects brought into the village. For example, improving the sanitary facilities in the village was one of the areas that considered by NORAD in its intervention in 1980s. Again, Plan International reconstructed this same image in 1997 and it provided funds for 140 families in the village to construct latrines. This shows that the DDF itself has now been inclined to accept the invented backwardness for Denagama. I take one of the poverty alleviation projects as an example to show how the DDF accepted the invented backwardness as a reality.

6.4.6 Foster parent program

In January 1997, the Plan International a Canadian development organization (hereafter PLAN) opened a project office in Tangalla to work with women groups in the area. Through a preliminary survey, PLAN identified Denagama as a suitable location to implement its development activities. However, the organization faced with a problem in approaching women groups in the village as the villagers thought that women focused development programs would create new problems within the community and at household level. They, particularly the men, pointed out that women focused development programs would support for a reordering of existing women’s role within and outside the family. It was a male biased argument, but they questioned the development approach of the NGO. Particularly, the men argued that such an approach
might create more burdens on them as the program world attempt to reorder the women’s role. Because of these conflicting views, PLAN finally decided to work with DDF as some of the women groups in the village are already represented in it.

One of the development projects supported by PLAN was the Foster Parent Program. It was a program in which the children of ‘poor’ families would be linked with some Canadian nationals who would be willing to look after their welfare. A child who is linked to the program would receive a certain amount of money and sometimes gifts from the foster parent(s) in Canada which enables the child to meet the expenditure of his/her education, clothing, medical treatments etc. The procedure that has to be followed in linking a child with potential foster parents is a complex one. The DDF identifies a child, using criteria such as house type and the size of the household. Thereafter it forwards an application with a photograph of the child to the Project Office of PLAN INTERNATIONAL. Then the Project Office would send the application to the Head Office in Canada through the Country Office in Colombo. The identification of foster parents is done by the Head Office through publicizing the information about the child in media such as TV, newspapers and radio in Canada. When a positive response is received from a willing family/person to look after the child as foster parent(s), the details of the child are provided to such person(s). Through this process, a link would be made between the two parties and then necessary administrative procedures are arranged by the Head Office in Canada to send money to the respective child through the Country Office in Colombo, Regional Office in Badulla, Project Office in Tangalla and partner organization (DDF) in the area. In each of these linking stations, an administrative cost is charged.
from the money sent by foster parents. Finally, the beneficiary child receives the balance money through the partner organization.

PLAN initiated the project and DDF coordinated its activities at the village-level. Assisting the poor children in the village was the explicit objective of the project, but the underline conception of the whole program is that 'village' is poor and hence it should be developed by the 'urban' rich in Canada. In a sense, it is an attempt to convince the superiority of the Canadians over the Denagama community. It is an invention of poverty for these villagers. By recruiting children to the program, DDF justified the conception of the Canadian organization that Denagama is poor. In linking the village children with the program, DDF created an image of poverty among villagers. The project considered a family living in a thatched small house as 'poor', although, a house type does not indicate the income levels of households in rural Sri Lanka. Sometimes the rich in the village live in small houses while poor families sometime live in large houses. The house type was used by the DDF as a criterion to 'fabricate' a 'poverty' image in the village. A photograph of a half-naked child standing in front of a thatched house demonstrated an image of poverty that was needed for the rich Canadians to donate and establish their developed and non-poverty image. A project document (PD) was prepared for each identified child to testify that the household lives in poverty. The DDF prepared PDs in such a way to justify the family to which the child belongs is unable to look after him/her due to their chronic poverty. Poverty was the most important factor that was emphasized in writing a PD. Accordingly, it is a concretization of the already 'invented' poverty by the Resource Management Project.
6.4.7 Conflicting perspectives

So far we discussed how the ideology associated with the concept of 'development' was internalized to the Denagama people. The CCD and other agencies involved in the Resource Management Project initiated this task and DDF continued it by implementing a poverty alleviation development projects in the village. However, everybody in the village did not agree with the development vision advocated by the officers of the Resource Management Project and the DDF. Some of them responded positively to these development interventions, while others perceived them as a threat to the local village culture. Their open protest to the promotion of tourism and shrimp culture in the village is an outcome of such perceptions. The introduction of shrimp culture to the village was seen as a threat to the natural environment. Interestingly however, no one opposed openly to coral mining and to the destruction of mangroves. This was mainly because of the involved persons in the latter were not outsiders and hence there was no reason to feel a threat to the natural life pattern of the villagers. But in case of tourist industry and shrimp culture, the villagers knew that outsiders would infiltrate into the village, if they were allowed to promote these capital-intensive enterprises. The villagers did not oppose to tourism when it was introduced in the neighboring Tangalla Town, but expressed their serious concerns and fear when it was introduced to the village. This serious concern regarding tourism expresses itself the way in which villagers attempted to protect the imagined culture boundaries. It is interesting to note that urban Tangalla Town did not oppose tourism in the area. The main reason for this is the lack of a 'community' among the urban dwellers and the cultural mixture that is evident in the urban center.
Another instance where this perceived cultural identity was positively expressed was the unconditional cooperation to the revitalization of the lagoon. The villagers knew that it would not make any adverse impact upon their local culture. The lagoon is not an open resource, and therefore, the possibilities for outsiders to infiltrate the village through the lagoon was very limited.

The withdrawal of the Karava community's support from the DDF (see p. 238.) activities also shows a culturally motivated response to development among villagers. Initially the Karava community of the Denagama hamlet actively supported the formation of the DDF. After its formation, the non-Karava caste people acquired its control by electing their members to its key positions such as the Chairman, Secretary and the Treasurer. The Karava community saw this as a threat to its dominant identity in the village. The Goyigama and the Hena castes in the village which had a high representation in the Mahasabhāva of the DDF attempted to secure their identities by supporting the development activities that were carried out by the DDF. Thus irrespective of caste identities, the Karava and non-Karava caste got together to preserve their common cultural identities. However, the non-Karava groups were more tolerant towards the flow of alien cultural forms and practices into the village community than the Karava group. It was because of the latter as the dominant group in the village was more concerned with protecting the local culture.

6.5 Summary

The case study shows how global development vision reaches rural communities in the Third World countries through First World development projects. The agencies involved in the Resource Management Project invented a ‘poverty’ for Denagama in
order to 'essentialize' development. For them, lack of 'development' was the primary cause of the natural resource degradation in the area. Those agencies held the view that 'rural' is essentially 'poor' and 'urban' is unquestionably 'rich'. However, in reality, Denagama is neither poor nor rich. It has its own system of survival, which is difficult to explain using the western concept of development.

A social differentiation based on material wealth has been developing in the village since the 1940s, but it is still difficult to decide the village as poor and rich. The concept of poor and poverty are essentially imposed by development programs initiated in the 1990s.

The case study also shows the relationship between 'development' and 'expert knowledge'. The CCD hired experts from the University of Rhode Island, USA to plan and evaluate the development project. Those experts, together with local consultants, concluded that the lack of awareness about the natural resource management among villagers was the reason for resource degradation and poverty in Denagama. They neglected the fact that how and in what manner the natural resources in Denagama survived until recent times. They missed the crucial fact that these resources survived not because un-exploited, but because of the local knowledge applied to manage the natural resources, which provided livelihood to the people. Instead of exploring the local systems of resource management, those professionals who came from outside wanted to impose a 'scientific' rationality, which they thought would resolve the problems.

Denagama people, however, did not behave as passive recipients of what the experts offered to them. They rejected tourism and shrimp culture, which the experts thought the best alternative income earning avenues for the coral miners and the
unemployed youth in the village. But the majority of villagers did not consider money as everything; they thought that preserving the local culture is more important than economic rewards.

The case study demonstrates how (a) development experts invent discourses that support in the construction of Third World as a reality for development and forms of knowledge produced in the West; (b) the experts blame rural people for resource degradation while overlooking cultural politics of development operate at the level of international development agencies; (c) the ideology associated with dominant development paradigm makes it difficult for rural communities to define their own interest in their own cultural terms; and (d) current practices of ‘development’ controls rather than enhances local communities access to natural resources.
Notes:


2. See for example, Michael Roberts, 1982:52-54.

3. 'Coastal zone' is defined in the Coast Conservation Act of 1981 as the area 2 km out to sea, 300 m inland, and 2 km inland for rivers, lagoons and estuaries.

4. It is stated in the closure 31A(1) of the Coast Conservation Amendment Act, No.64 of 1988: No person shall within the Coastal Zone.
   
   (a) engage in the mining, collecting, possessing, processing, storing, burning and transporting in any form whatsoever of coral;

   (b) own, possess, occupy, rent, lease, hold or operate kilns for the burning and processing of coral;

   (c) use or possess any equipment, machinery, article or substance for the purpose of breaking up coral; and

   (d) use any vehicle, craft or boat in or in connection with the breaking up or transporting of any coral.

5. In 1989, the government started a special poverty alleviation program called 'Janasaviya'. As a preliminary requirement, Janasaviya Entitlement Certificates were distributed among the food stamp receiving families without considering any eligibility criteria. The certificate was the proof of access to the Janasaviya Program. Each selected family was given a pool of resources valued at Rs.2,500/- a month during a 24 month period for their consumption and investment purposes.