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Seeking for 'Self-Help': Cross Cultural Dialogue with Sarvodaya Sri Lanka and Salvation Centre Cambodia

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ABSTRACT

Background: The term 'Self-Help' has been attracting the attention of scholars across the globe, invested in sustainable-development especially after the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established by the United Nations in 2016. In this study, a joint discussion between NGOs from two nations, Sri Lanka and Cambodia was conducted to look into the successful factors in Self-Help development and the current challenges in both nations.

Methods: In addition to literature reviews for theoretical discussion, the research sets the international dialogue in 23th May 2017 between Sarvodaya Sri Lanka and Salvation Centre Cambodia (n=7). The author also visited the local offices of Sarvodaya in Trincomalie and Batincaloa districts in Sri Lanka and interviewed the local officers (n=10) in addition to JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) volunteers (n=2) who work in a field of community welfare. In each district, five villagers (n=10) selected via snow ball sampling were also interviewed.

Results: Self-Help starts from spiritual awareness, which leads to collective thinking and community practice. It is a crucial process to bring about change in a community through self-determination. Sarvodaya Sri Lanka has maintained its philosophy for decades and this implication provides an important perspective for the current challenges in Cambodia. The lessons learned from Sarvodaya punctuate 'collective thinking' and 'integrated idea' in implementing a holistic approach, recognized as strong impacts for Self-Help development.

Conclusions: Being the key factor for sustainable development through Self-Help effort, collective thinking to define the issues is perceived to play a critical role in promoting integrated/holistic development.

Keywords: Self-help, Sarvodaya, Buddhism, Cambodia, Health-care

INTRODUCTION

It has been a half a century since Dr. A.T Ariyaratne had commenced the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement from a village, Kathaluwain, in 1958 and proposed an alternative approach of grass-roots development based on an indigenous Buddhist philosophy, instead of Westernbased modernization. Sarvodaya articulates the process of

bottom-up or self-governance system in an integrated manner and 'perhaps its greatest contribution to the field of human development'. Considering the aforementioned contribution to promote an idea of Eastern-based Self-Help development, learning successful factors from the Sarvodaya is considered to be beneficial for practicing sustainable development.

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The stagnating situation in Cambodia would be vividly contrasted with the self-help based development of Sarvodaya. A problem of Aid-Dependence has provoked scholar's attention for decades in the nation; such dependence has become a chronic status between traditional donors and the government, where 94.3 percent of the national budget from 2002 to 2010 came from international aid (net).^{2,3} Rothstein shows how foreign aid has a negative impact on the National governance system by inspecting grass-root level livelihood and human rights. Long-term international aid has made Cambodia a "laboratory for donor's trial and error experiments". 4 Most of the projects are donordriven without a coherent strategy and do not contribute to capacity development for the country.⁵ Reducing dependence on foreign aid and bringing up the spirit of self-help are to be crucial for realizing the national sustainable development.

Whilst the term 'Self-Help' has been recognized as a key concept for the future of Cambodia, there are few studies that have attempted to illustrate an effective mechanism of 'Self-Help'. This study focuses on the methodology of 'Self-Help' through the examination of the principle and theory of Sarvodaya Shramadana movement.

METHODS

In addition to literature reviews to elucidate the philosophy and methodology of Sarvodaya on 'self-help' development, a cross-cultural dialogue was conducted on May 23rd, 2017 at the Sarvodaya head quarter office in Sri Lanka with five officers including V. Ariyaratne (the General Secretary of Sarvodaya) and two directors of the NGO from Cambodia, a Buddhism-based organization called Salvation Centre Cambodia (SCC). The author also visited two district offices of Sarvodaya in Trincomalie and Batincaloa to conduct non-structured interviews with five officers (in each office). Also, five villagers were selected through snow-ball sampling in both districts in addition to two JICA volunteers. The interviews were conducted from May 22nd to May 28th 2017 along with complementary discussions among the authors during the period.

RESULTS

Spiritual infrastructure and collective-thinking

'Self-help starts from 'yourself' which reaches to mutual-help through shramadana (sharing) practice and gramadaya (village awakening or village development) in Sarvodaya methodology. During collective action, the individual thinking ties to community mind-set to bring a change in his (or herself) at the same time. In this sense, Self-Help is paradoxical to its literal sense of the term in denying the individual 'self' (self-denial). The self-denial means acknowledging a limitation of capacity and resource that the individual owns and broadening 'self' to

'others' through 'Meththa' (loving kindness) and 'Dhana' (compassion and action)'.

According to Dr V. Ariyaratne, 'thinking' starts from the present, containing various issues and the complexities of social problems, which transforms into collective-thinking in the community. Collective-thinking identifies dormant 'problems' and 'needs' in the village. The above philosophy has unique development steps (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Village development process of Sarvodaya.

The first implication is that any development ought to start from 'psychological/spiritual development' (stage 1) in principle. In stages 1 and 2, Sarvodaya exclusively provides 'social empowerment' in order to facilitate collective-thinking and detect the main cause of the issue in the community as well as to enable the community to establish its own development plan.

Collective-thinking invites 'reflection of spirituality and personality' in the process of detecting the problems in the community, such as any type of injustice, income disparity, environmental destruction (water/sanitation) among other social issues. The discussion is evaporated through a 5 day camp traditionally called *Shramadana* camp. It has gradually incorporated a new form of collective meditation. The mindfulness enables the individual mind to ascend towards the realization of indigenous self-value and peaceful mind among the people.

Only after completing the first two stages (Social Empowerment), Sarvodaya begins to provide the technical support for the following stages (Stages 3 and 4; technical/economic empowerment).

Ven. Som Chea (a monk team leader of SCC), expressing an agreement with the strategy, comments 'In Cambodia, community mobilization requires distribution of small incentives in a name of transportation cost (around 5 US dollars) to call for the participants. The created modality is quite different from the Sarvodaya Village'. Then, Dr. V. Ariyaratne responded briefly, 'Perhaps, international/external Aid might have undermined the Cambodian's self-reliance and hinders spontaneous "thinking" of the people'.

Table 1: Ten basic needs.

1	A clean and beautiful environment
2	Clean drinking water
3	Adequate supplies of clothing
4	Adequate and balanced nutrition
5	Simple housing
6	Basic health-care
7	Basic communication facilities
8	A minimal supply of energy
9	Holistic education
10	Satisfaction of spiritual, cultural needs and
	peace building

The attendants in the discussion unanimously acknowledged that there is a key difference in a domain which gives a definition on the issues and identification on the problem and project-planning, i.e. from the outside of the community in Cambodia, or from the inside of the community in Sri Lanka.

The author asked the following question regarding the 10^{th} basic need in Chart 1; within the tangible/material basic-needs from No.1 to 9 in the Chart, No. 10: 'satisfaction of spiritual, cultural needs and peacebuilding' seems to be especially difficult for the villagers to understand its function and meaningful role for their development compared with the rests of the needs.

Dr. Ariyaratne answered; 'the No10, spiritual/cultural needs are usually revealed in the process of reflective consideration and accomplishment of other basic-needs. The people realize the value and need eventually in thinking and working together for other basic-needs'.

The remark designates spiritual value and self-awareness emerging in collective-thinking and practice. In other words, 'self-help' does not literally mean 'isolated-self' effort made by individual, but does a resonance of collective thinking and practice with others.

Mr. Tep Monyrotha (a director of SCC) commented that the sustainability relies on the people's self-awakening in this methodology. After awakening, 'thinking' becomes an automatic, sustainable vehicle toward following practices. Sustainability and autonomy of self-help initiative is underpinned by people's 'thinking' capacity and this is the most significant lesson he learned from the Sarvodaya strategy.

Mobilization in community mental health

According to the JICA volunteers, who are social workers in the districts of Trincomalie and Batincaloa, the public administrations have been vertically fragmented in provincial areas, especially between the two governance lines of provincial council and district secretariat.

It is legally mandated to establish Self-Help Group (SHG) for disabilities or seniors in Sri Lanka, however the outcomes of the policy have been questionable; the people do not seem to passionately participate in the group for improving their own welfare.

On the other hand, the community-health unit in Sarvodaya has been reducing its scale since other public services have sufficiently provided technical/medical supports. Hence, Sarvodaya now cooperates with these providers in seeking for an integrated development for community health.

The holistic approach is a critical strategy when considering the well-being of the people with mental-illness, such as depression or other mental disorders which cannot be solved by mere provision of self-care to an individual patient. The approach should harness family understanding and community assistance as well as social and financial stability (such as education on human-rights and securing employment). One dimensional measure does not guarantee any meaningful development and improvement in the community.

In the Sarvodaya administration, a community councillor (volunteer) provides a referential service to various public services in accordance with the needs of those requiring assistance. Such a flexible approach is called 'Tailor-made Solution'.

Sarvodaya also adopts the group formation strategy with several types of support groups to tackle a particular issue among the vulnerable population. The group consisting of five to thirty people becomes a domain for holistic development which includes economic development through micro-finance and Income Generating Activities (IGA) such as agriculture, handy-craft and community tourism.

The following situational description in Cambodia, on the other hand, provided by Ven. Som Chea in this study is thought-provoking. In spite of the great number of donor-driven projects in the name of 'HIV' support, the NGOs and CBOs (Community-Based Organizations) form a chain of 'peer-support groups' spontaneously and hold a cross-sectional forum to overcome the fragmentation (as depicted in Figure 2).

- (a) The issue (HIV in this case), contains various facets of problem-support, ranging from medical to spiritual care, vocational training, education, child-rearing, IGA and saving activity, etc.
- (b) SHGs are an interior domain where the people voice their needs and advocates.
- (c) Support agents, such as NGOs and CBOs cooperate in sharing the ultimate purpose of securing people's survivability and incrementally improving quality of life.

It is noteworthy that the projects funded by different donors and agencies are fragmented in nature unless (c) Support agents share the information and advantages in providing supports. The horizontal combination of (c) Support agents play a crucial role in coordinating demands and provisions, but most of time, the combination is derived from fragile spontaneous efforts: currently this type of forum tends to be stagnant due to an absence of external support funds. However, this is one type of 'self-help' development ought to be counted as an initiative taken by NGOs and CBOs (Ven. Chea names (c) 'a peer groups' since it is 'peer' for the SHGs). However, there still can be a risk of dismissing the needs of the communities unless there is a collective-thinking practice among the community at the initial stage.

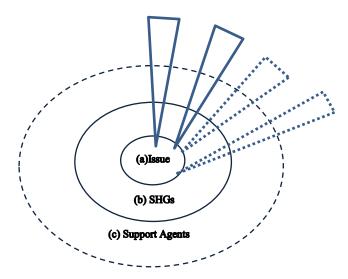


Figure 2: Peer-support groups in self-help development.

Action and community building

At the Trincomalie and Batincaloa districts, the Sarvodaya officers commonly emphasised the impact of collective volunteer action of *Shramadana*. 'Shramadana' means 'gifting or donation of one's labour, effort, and services'. Shramadana is one method of translating Sarvodaya thinking into action'. The participants come from various communities, regardless of religious or ethnic background (Shinhara/Buddhism, Tamiru/Hindie, Muslims), and participants cooperatively join in the community practice, such as building school, improving road, cleaning environment, just name a few.

The reputation of Sarvodaya is generally positive according to our field interviews. The remarkable comment from a 47 years old Tamil male who used to work in the district government was; 'an instant image on the name of 'Sarvodaya' for villagers is 'volunteer' and we have a good impression on their activity even among the Tamils. Because their philosophy is universal'. One female villager, who once participated in the community volunteer also comments 'it was fun to chat with neighbours during the volunteer. We could make many

friendships there'. The comment resonates with an answer given by V, Jeevaraj, a Provincial Coordinator at Sarvodaya North Operational Centre in Trincomalie in response to the author's question (why the people can enjoy the volunteer activities even when many people have less time in their daily work?); 'I think it is enjoyable to do something together with others and it gradually creates a sense of unity among the participants. The common purpose of the activities is to mobilize the people. It is fun simply, not like labour'.

The remarks remind the interviewees of the philosophy shared in the Sarvodaya community, 'we build the road and the road will build us' in that any material building and installation do not only provide its functional utility, but also create a spiritual bond among participants through the process of development; It builds the community (us).

DISCUSSION

The results endorse the fact that the core tradition has not been crumbling away since the beginning of Sarvodaya's organizational development. Dr. A.T Ariyaratne, a founder of the Sarvodaya once accentuated that self-awareness should be harnessed to 'non-fragmentary' with 'integrated idea' in discovering 'own indigenous character both in thought and action'. The following theoretical discussion focuses on the two prominent roles of 'thinking' and 'integrated idea' as key features of self-help development learned from the interviews.

'Thinking' in self-awareness

Self-awareness is catalysed by 'self-denial' which brings "a two-fold liberation objective" in both 'one's own mind or thinking process' and 'unjust and immoral socioeconomic chains which keep the vast majority of people enslaved'. In this sense, there are paradoxical identities between the terms, self-help/mutual-help as well as thinking/ practice.

This durability of self-awareness (liberation) is surely tied to the Sarvodaya's coherent strategy, of integrated (holistic) development. The word 'Sarvodaya' is composed of 'Sarva' which means 'all' and 'Udaya' meaning 'awakening', and 'liberation'. The key is that 'the individual should have a clear integrated idea as what he has to liberate from, why he must do this and how he is to liberate himself and non-fragmentary/ 'integrated harmoniously one's own welfare with the welfare of others'. Thus, individual 'thinking' process needs to be secured to understand the aforementioned 'why' and 'how' and to harness collective thinking with others along with collective action to participate in decision-making processes in the community.

'You cannot imagine a division of labour between thought and action in development or vice-versa - they should go together... In thinking of our own culture,

human being is at the centre, not the pyramidal structure we have today in our society'.8

During the process of self-help development, thinking and action (practice) 'should go together' in both individual and community development.

The term 'development' is redefined by Ariyaratne as a combination of 'self-awareness' and 'self-determination' in such that; 'self-realization combined with selfdetermination. I believe has to be the foundation on which Asian rural development programmes have to be built'.8 And the remark is consistently combined with the comment given by Dr V. Ariyaratne, 'Self-help starts from yourself' in this study. Ariyaratne clearly mentioned that 'self-help' is 'to better their conditions' and 'development begins from where they are and with that they have'. 8 The most significant implication is that the process of self-determination must be secured through collective thinking in the community when eliciting selfhelp spirit because 'the first thing we have to do is to lay a psychological infrastructure in the village which will enable us to transcend all man-made barriers and try to think together'.8 The spiritual awareness, hence, can start from 'thinking'. So how is 'thinking' linked to 'action' or 'practice' in the community?

The hidden aspects of this philosophy can be detailed, as originally this study indicates, according to the comments obtained in the districts, that 'encountering' others in collective action. Any identification of issues and project-purpose should not be predetermined by an ideal thought or blue-print proposed by outsiders of the community without any *encountering*. The story below, described by Ariyaratne tells clearly the continuum of thinking and action in addition to how the people reflect themselves through encountering others in the collective action.

'To bring about change we have to change the methods and techniques of how we do things. For example, if you tell the people; you had better use toilets instead of using the jungle, they will not believe it. They will say; for generations, we used our jungle. We do not want toilets. On the other hand, when we live in a project and they *see* us using toilets, even temporary sanitary toilets, then *they begin to think* and we get a chance to explain to them'.⁸

In the citation, the people first 'see' something new (other who temporary sanitary toilets in this case) for them, then 'begin to think', which enables them to be ready to listen. The collective practice is to be 'with others' in this sense, uses this is the rationale for how Shramadana successfully brings about self-help in the people. The comments shown in the interviews in the provincial areas endorse the logic of linking collective thinking and practice. The people are coming and going between thinking and practice during the development, so they can realize a chance to 'change' themselves from inside their minds through a trigger of 'encountering' others.

Ariyaratne clearly defines education as 'a dynamic process of change' in this sense.⁸

Thus, should the philosophy of 'self-help' exclude all the external supports? As a matter of fact, several remarks made by A.T. Ariyaratne may sound full of skepticism towards professionalism; experts (elites) who attempt to help the people in 'their helplessness or disorganization and confusion, and amidst the busy day to day struggle to eke out an existence at semi-starvation level place' and most of time, such experts 'set the values and standards for' their model outside of the place. The elites 'are seen as the representatives of masses of the Third World, for it is they who *think for* them'. Furthermore, in any case they 'give away the "decision making role" they played on behalf of the poor ignorant masses'. 8

Despite of the above critical remarks towards the external experts who hinder the people's 'thinking', Sarvodaya does not deny the external supports and experts. Instead, it attempts to internalize these external efforts into self-help development as it follows.

'On the contrary, in the very unsophisticated simplified thinking of the rural people may lie the very path to the much needed integration of the "elite" with the real life of the people, not as their masters but *as an integral part of their culture*'.8

Starting from personal thinking to collective thinking with self-denial, the Sarvodaya strategy expands the scope of self-awareness from the community to external societies including experts. Thodok investigates the Sarvodaya's 'awakening' through classification into four levels; the personal, the village, the nation, and the world along with the six dimensions, which consist of; spiritual, moral, cultural, social, economic and political. The dynamism of self-help development here is to be illustrated in the Figure 3 below as an original description in this exploration.

A personal consciousness (a), depicted as a small circle, deepens his or her self-awareness to the community (b) as a bigger circle. The collective thinking, then, deepens their awareness into more wider society (National/World).

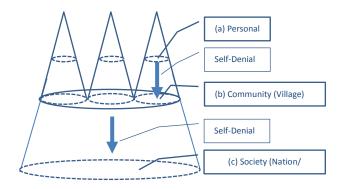


Figure 3: Dynamism of self-help development.

'Self-denial' is, thus, a catalyst for the individual to deepen into the wider relationship and social interaction, enabling holistic, integrated and inclusive development.

When considering 'self-denial', we can interpret the term through 'self-surrender' which once Gandhi remarked, "God demands nothing less than self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of God's creation". 10 'Self-surrender' connotes with 'Shedding of self' in the context of A. T. Ariyaratne, which 'means working collectively without overshadowing other by particular person's personality'. In this sense, 'self-denial' is the spiritual stance of humility to *respect* others and *listen* to others, and by accepting the limitation of 'self'. 'Self-denial' can be known to occur in encountering others during community practice and thinking together through reflection between 'self' and 'other'.

Integrated idea of development

'What makes the Sarvodaya characteristic is its integrated approach in practice, derived from the concept 'awakening' of all nested existence, of spiritual, moral, cultural, social, economic and political'. Ariyaratne indicated that 'all the problems in village life have a strong inter-relationship' and we need to 'look at the problems sympathetically'. Also, 'reality for people lies in the action and in the integrity of the people who act'. The integral development is envisaged to unlock the transformative potential of individuals, by 'starting from yourself'.

According to the SCC, the emerging problem in Cambodia is an increasing number of immigrant workers among SHGs; however, none of the development agencies have substantially approached the issue to date. The term 'HIV' is a domain determined by external donors as a representation of the issue, but HIV patients are also suffered a problem of 'unemployment'; being at risk of becoming illegal immigrant workers. There is an acute demand to establish an integrated/holistic perspective development Cambodia. in The fragmentation of the policies has exacerbated the situation on HIV prevention as seen in "Social Mobilisation Strategy (2011-2015)" compiled by UNAIDS which elucidates a vicious effect derived from a and communication coordination 'professionals'. According to the document, while HIV law clearly denotes a mandate for government to provide primary health care to the people living with HIVs (PLHIV) free of charge, it has not been implemented meaningfully. For instance, the law on suppression of human trafficking and sexual exploitation (LSHTSE), issued in 2008, which aims to crack down on acts of human trafficking and sexual exploitation has a conflict with the HIV law. The LSHTSE law was established to respond to growing criticisms on human/sexual exploitation and trafficking within neighbouring

countries, such as Thailand, Lao and Vietnam. In the phase of the implementation of the law, sexual-entertainment workers were continuously arrested and 'the possession of condoms is often used as evidence for the solicitation of sex services'. A large number of women have gradually scattered into different sexual service industries like Karaoke bars, beer garden, and massage parlours. This demographic shift makes it more difficult to find the population and to promulgate safe use of condom and advocacy on the risk of HIVs. The primary treatment, thus, has been thwarted in the nation, missing the domain of vulnerable population.

NGOs, not free from their prejudice on HIV either, are inclined to neglect improving their quality of service and efforts to mobilize community members. This tendency discourages communities from voicing their opinions and needs. PLHIVs are afraid of the risk of NGO's withdrawal of their support if the network insists on their true needs and advocacy that possibly degrade NGO performances and outcomes; NGOs themselves are reluctant to accept any critical comments made by the communities for better service delivery. These NGOs often occupy a space to discuss concerns, to share experiences and to produce decision-making/ programming.

"Currently, their [HIV patient's] poor capacity to think strategically and to appropriately use evidence in their identification of priorities has resulted in their passive acceptance of traditional programmes, which are *externally-designed*, not based on evidence and inconsistent with emerging needs". 11

The discussion above details an absence of self-determination and thinking process *among* the vulnerable population. It also concerns NGOs that do not encourage the self-help development of the communities in this case.

It is difficult to achieve self-help development without any external support. SHGs need external agencies as 'peers' as shown in the results of the cross-cultural discussion. However, 'freedom to participate in decision-making' in identifying the issues for the communities themselves must be secured before a provision of support from outside of the community.⁸ In other words, 'self-help' progresses only when the communities exert their 'local thinking' and experience a process of self-programming for designing their own project: the result should not be prioritized before the process of 'thinking' and self-determination among the community.⁷

Integrated ideas based on such self-help development are supposed to lead the holistic approach toward the sustainable development. The holistic perspective exists in the people's thinking as this paper results show;

'Now what is the change in thinking we have to bring about? As I mentioned at the onset, when you talk of

development, or the development philosophy, when you think of development, those values have to be changed .8

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