

**EMPOWERMENT OF MARGINALIZED YOUTH: A COMPARATIVE
ANALYSIS OF THALAWAKALE ESTATE
IN THE PLANTATION SECTOR AND HALGASWATHA SLUM
IN URBAN SECTOR IN BORELLA**

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ABSTRACT

The post independent youth in Sri Lanka face many challenges posed by socio economic and cultural factors. The 1971 and 1989 youth riots in Sri Lanka reflect such pressures faced by them. This situation has changed considerably due to various factors. It is often assumed that high rates of unemployment among the youth lead to frustrations that in turn persuade to join rebel movements. However the study aims to understand the issues of the marginalized youth beyond this context. The lack of proper understanding of the young population in terms of their grievances, ideas, experiences, world view, attitudes, values, cultural orientations , aspirations, and needs also have to be considered.

Everyone seems to be talking about empowerment these days, female empowerment, worker's empowerment, and youth empowerment are just some of the phrases that are flying around. Therefore it is important to examine what exactly does that empowerment mean, and how can one apply the concept to their own life?

The concept of social development and empowerment of marginalized groups acquired new connotations in recent years among social scientists, policy planers, development activists and also politicians in the context of globalization and paradigm shift in the development strategy of the sate. On the one hand, the resurgence of grassroots mobilization and new collective identity formation of these groups had remarkable impact on this concept. In the last couple of decades these concepts as catch words of the emergent social development paradigm, have got a special coinage in the Non Governmental Organization's activism, and have received the patronage of various international bodies and donor agencies. However when we look at from Sri Lankan context, the full ramifications and reasons for such a shift in the development strategy vis-à-vis the issues such as, stagnation of a vast mass of people in abject poverty, illiteracy, ill health, ignorance, unemployment, uncertainty, powerlessness and social segregation and the resurgence of the culture of resistance of the marginalized groups have not been adequately examined. This study endeavors to put some of the crucial issues and perspectives relating to social development and empowerment together reflecting upon the initiatives of selected scholars.

Marginalization was defined in the sociological literature of the mid sixties as the situation in which people sat on the borders of two cultures existing within a society but were fully members

of neither culture. This clearly refers to what we might call cultural marginalization¹. More recently, people have written of the phenomenon of social exclusion, where the socially excluded are persons who ostensibly have no significant role in a society. They tend to be excluded from the regular productive systems within society and are problem consumers of the benefits of society as a result largely of their economic situation, while they may also belong to some minority group within society.

One strategy for encouraging this type of environment is to foster opportunities for youth to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Youth participation encourages healthy development for several reasons. Involving them in decision-making can build skills, mastery, and competence. When decisions are made in a group, young people are exposed to different ways of thinking, problem solving and strategizing which strengthens cognitive and social development. Subsequently, seeing the result of their contributions can build confidence, self-efficacy and self-esteem. In addition, youth who are involved with decisions that affect their communities may develop a stronger sense of responsibility to others. Thus, youth participation has potential to promote individual and community health by satisfying developmental needs in a positive manner while also enhancing the relevance of research, policy and practice to lived experiences of young people.

While the contributions of youth may be an under-utilized resource. The study does not suggest they should carry the full burden of adolescent social responsibility. Study suggest that there is a need to be increased egalitarian relations between young people and adults is optimal for healthy youth development (Camino, 2005; Camino, 2000; Fauth, Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Fogel, 2004; Larson et al., 2005; Whitlock, 2007). Yet, few empirical assessments of shared control in youth-adult partnerships exist and therefore, the field still requires careful observation, identification, categorization and labeling (Zeldin et al., 2005). Thus, the objective of this study is to offer a typology that identifies degrees of youth-adult participation while considering development potential within each type. To support the developmental possibilities, The study consider youth needs and use an empowerment framework rooted in evidence-based findings. The typology is constructed with the intention of providing researchers, practitioners and policy-makers with a common language for articulating degrees of youth participation for development.

To start, the study begins with review of the literature on youth marginalization, positive youth development, empowerment and participation to provide a context for the typology