

A PLACE FOR ALL

Community Development Forum
Plantation Community Empowerment Project



This project is funded by the **European Union**.



*Implemented by Care International Sri Lanka
and the Plantations Housing Development Trust*



The Community Development Forums (CDF)

set up by the European Union funded Plantation's Community Empowerment Project (PCEP) are in effect 'mini-parliaments' – or participatory spaces. Set up in each of the 13 estates PCEP works in, the CDFs have opened up new channels of communication between the various stakeholders in an estate. Here collective decisions are sought, negotiated, and decided on with regards to community development priorities and worker conditions. Practices and mechanism to enhance accountability, transparency and equity are also put in place so that development priorities reflect the needs of many and the most marginalized.

Chosen by community members, CDF members are answerable to their section of an estate, and are responsible for keeping them informed of decisions taken on their behalf. Just as important is their responsibility to consult their community members on issues and concerns. The CDF's have also played a critical role in providing a platform through which government and other service providers can connect with the community thus enhancing their accessibility to entitled services and other economic and social opportunities.

Responsible for the development of estate development plans, the CDF facilitate community consultations as part of designing these plans that are based on priorities found to be the most keenly felt by the estate communities. While mostly funded by the plantation companies and the PCEP project, CDF officers are increasingly taking the initiative to approach local NGO and charitable bodies in the area, to apply for funding to match estate managers' contributions. Since the project began a total of 130 micro project valued at Rs. 14,494,380 have been completed. These have benefited an estimated 2000 families.

The following are a collection of personal accounts of how the CDF has contributed to and inspired individual and collective change.

CDF meeting in Fetresso Estate. 2011.

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R. Rokyam Sagayamairi **CDF Secretary, Lonach Estate,** **Watawala Plantations PLC**

"I was working in a bookshop in Colombo when I came to the village and heard about a training programme on money management organised by the project. I used this training to save and get a sewing machine, I initially used to sew my own clothes, I then started to sew school uniforms for children in the community. Because of my work with the CDF and my own business, I feel respected in the community, since I have been able to provide solutions to some of their problems through the CDF. I used to be scared of talking to people, but now I feel I am one of the leaders for my community's development. Through these activities and the training, I have learned how to use my mind and my time productively. At 22 years old, this has given me a new purpose in life."



A. Kari Devi **Child Development Officer, Lonach** **Estate, Watawala Plantations**

"I was introduced by CARE to the estate community through participation in the CDF's activities. The CDF brought all the groups together including the estate management and outside stakeholders such as the GN and the police. We are able to now tell the managers our problems ourselves. This is especially important for the women. Decisions are taken at the CDF meetings and things get done. Earlier it was very difficult to get people to participate in a shramadana, but now this is not the case as people have a vision for their development."



J. Mathews **CDF Vice-President, Poyston** **Estate, Bogawantalawa Teas** **PLC.**

"The worker – management relationship is the most significant change. The old hierarchical system is no more on this estate. We are now partners for development and sit as equals at the table at CDF meetings. The table is deliberately round so that no party feels less or more important than the others."



Weeramuttu Sureshkumar **Small Enterprise Owner, Lonach** **Estate, Watawala Plantations PLC**

"The CDF brought a government officer who is dealing with the registration of persons to help obtaining ID cards and birth certificates. About half of those without these have now received them. Nobody knew the Grama Niladari and he hardly came to the estate. We could not get anything done if we went on our own. This has changed since he started attending the CDF meetings regularly and now he has become very responsive to our needs. The GN obtained Rs. 10,000 each for 13 people to start vegetable plots. The vegetables are sold in the co-op on the estate. A large number of people have started home gardens with training provided by the GN. He has also linked us to the police. The police helped educate the people on identifying and addressing issues before they get out of hand."



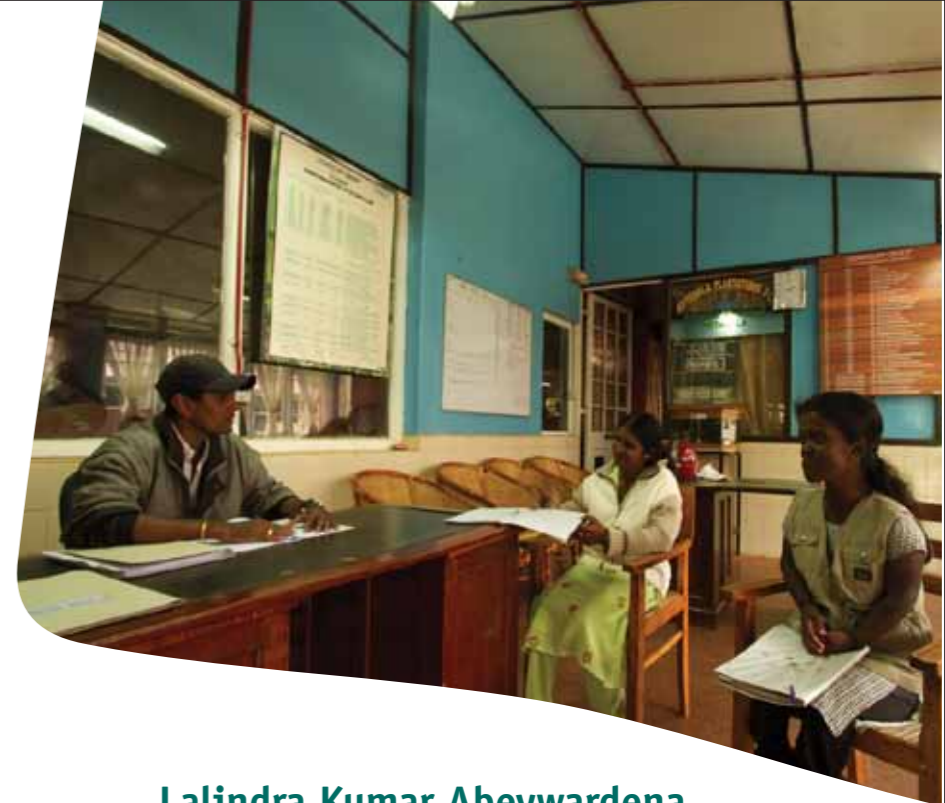
A. Jeyaram
Manager, Lonach Estate.
Watawala Plantation PLC

"I was the Senior Assistant Manager in Carolina Estate's Agra Division. I've seen a significant change in the way the labour force behave and think as a result of the CDF. The changes in attitudes all round in Lonak are very clear. When the government recently agreed to the increase in the daily wage, we discussed the implications for the estate with the workers. In this way we were able to understand the perspective of both sides. They could then appreciate that the cost of production will increase in the face of fluctuating tea prices. The CDF therefore provides a forum to address difficult issues related to production."



Kelum Samaratunga
Manager, Poyston Estate,
Bogawantalawa Teas PLC.

"Worker – management relations have improved as most issues are now openly discussed in the CDF. Through this dialogue I also get an insider's perspective on the problems of the estate community which I could never get from interacting only with the TU leaders under the old system. The CDF has humanized the workers in our eyes and I feel I deal with real issues of real people. Having come from an estate that does not have the CDF system, I see these differences very clearly. Although it is not possible to completely ignore strikes called by the trade unions, there is now a good understanding on the issues between the management and the workers on this estate, and these are generally peaceful events."



Lalindra Kumar Abeywardena
Manager, Stonycliff Estate,
Kotagala Plantations Ltd.

"The most important thing is that all members are treated equally. We sit in a circle so we are all on the same level. This has been well received by the workers. This process has been supported by continuous training provided by project to my staff and the workers. Before disputes were handled by the Trade Unions and the managers in closed door discussions. Opening this dialogue out to the entire workforce has helped avoid unnecessary misunderstandings."

J. Nalini
Animator, Poyston Estate,
Bogawantalawa Teas PLC.

"As a young woman, I think that one of the most important changes brought about by the CDF has been the emancipation of women in the estate community by changing the worker-management relationship to such an extent that women workers and non-workers are no longer scared to speak directly with them about their needs. We as women have been encouraged to participate fully in our community's development and have assumed leadership roles through which we are working for the benefit of our community."



S. Roshanthini
Stonycliff Estate, Kotagala
Plantations Ltd.

"I was supported by the CDF when I faced problems in my community which did not accept my role. The CDF stood by me and helped me to continue. Now I am confident to work anywhere and with anyone. I have won the respect of my community and the respect of my family. Unlike before, we can be equal with men. We work with them and we are no longer seen as inferior, and our roles in society are no longer seen in a restricted way."

S. Nagaranam
Elders' Society President and
not a CDF member, Poyston
Estate, Bogawantalawa Teas PLC.

"One of the biggest changes I see resulting from the project work has been the creation of a collective consciousness amongst the estate community. Previous attempts to get the community acting together failed due to a lack of interest as people did not feel their efforts will lead to results. There was a sense of hopelessness and that a positive change was beyond their reach. I now see many changes and a difference in the people's attitudes. They are more cooperative and confident."



S. Nishanthini
Worker, CDF Treasurer, Creche
Committee Leader, Small Scale
Entrepreneur, Drayton Estate, Kotagala
Plantations Ltd.

"I used to be dependent on my husband who took decisions. Now I am independent and confident in my own abilities, and am seen as an equal by my husband, especially after the married couples training. My small business activity is in making incense sticks has enabled me to buy a machine to make candles also. Many other organizations do not address the gender differences. PCEP and CDF recognized the importance of gender, and enabled women to be exposed beyond the estate, and to take leadership positions in the community."



K.D.N. Kelum **Estate Medical Assistant, Poyston** **Estate, Bogawantalawa Teas PLC.**

"I have seen several positive impacts of the CDF on people's health. One is a higher level of hygiene, and especially amongst pregnant women as a result of the training they have received. People take more responsibility for the cleanliness of their homes whereas they earlier expected others to do things for them such as cleaning drains. There is now an attitude of self-help and ownership. This is a big change and has led to a reduction in illness especially of measles, chickenpox and other communicable diseases. One reason is a greater awareness of how these diseases spread. Hardly anyone now is admitted to hospital compared to when I joined five years ago when about 50 people were admitted a month. This number is now about five or six. Household nutrition has also improved, and the training provided especially on child nutrition has helped. Alcohol consumption has also reduced. There is no longer loud shouting and fights in the evenings, and even if people drink, they do so mostly in their own houses and consume less. This change has even been noticed by the police who used to visit the estate regularly."



K. Armugam **Estate Medical Assistant, Drayton** **Estate, Kotagala Plantations Ltd.**

"People were stuck in the estate, but now they are confident and are able to seek additional medical help when this is needed. Now there is a voice on behalf of groups such as new mothers who need specific food. Women have access to meat or fish about twice a week compared to once a month what they had earlier. Alcoholism and related violence has also reduced. The death of mothers at childbirth and the death of babies has significantly reduced due to better nutrition and awareness. Husbands are also more involved in the wives and child's health. I and the health officer are like a bridge between the people and the CDF in health matters, and have been able to explain the needs of the people so that necessary actions are taken."





P. Indralagini
Previously an animator and
now a mobiliser with World
Vision, Loinorn Estate,
Bogawantalawa Teas PLC.

"I was at home without a job after my A' Levels when I got the opportunity to work as an animator for the CDF. I owe my present job to the experience and training that I received during the one and a half years I worked as an animator. My role as an animator introduced me to working with different people to solve problems. Now that the CDF includes several external organizations, I see it as the best tool to work in the estate."

R. Sellamma
Tea Plucker, NUW Union
Leader and CDF Member,
Yulliefield Estate, Kotagala
Plantations Ltd.

"I used to be scared to talk with management. I joined the PCEP project in 2004 and have had many types of training. I am now confident to deal with management. After each training, I get my children to write down what I have learnt so I can refresh myself and teach others. One of my children has got a scholarship of Rs 5000 per month. This was possible due to my participation in the project and the good relations I have with the estate management. The scholarship is from the estate company. My son studies law in Colombo."



“ The European Union funded Plantation’s Community Empowerment Project is implemented by CARE International Sri Lanka and its partner the Plantations Human Development Trust (PHDT) in 13 estates managed by the Regional Plantations Companies of Bogawantalawa, Kotagala and Watawala. The 13 estates are located in the Central Province district of Nuwara Eliya. A core element of PCEP is to change the way different stakeholders relate to each other, by setting up CDFs. PCEP also equips the community and stakeholders with the skills and information required to alter traditionally tense relationships with those that are constructive and collaborative. The project also places a strong emphasis on industry and state efforts to enhance community wellbeing and worker rights by strengthening responsiveness, outreach and ethical management practices that will contribute to social wellbeing and productivity. ”



Plantation’s Community Empowerment Project (PCEP)

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