

Institutional and non-Institutional Constraints Confronting Local Governments in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Local government is the third tier of government in modern states and it is significant by the service it provides and important for the working of democracy at grassroots level. It is basically a decentralized political unit and expected to be a viable institution to deliver public services to ordinary citizens of their own constituencies. In Sri Lanka, modern local government system was introduced by the British colonial masters in the nineteenth century. Subsequently, several forms of local government institutions were established throughout the country. Presently, three types of local government institutions; Municipal Council, Urban Council and Pradeshiya Sabha are functioning under the government. The government has delegated several activities to these councils to ensure the better performance of local governance. However, these councils have become marginalized and insignificant in the public eye and they have failed to establish democracy at grassroots level. At this juncture, this study attempts to identify institutional and non-institutional constraints confronting local governments in Sri Lanka. The study was based on primarily qualitative method of data gathering and analysis. Primary data were gathered from the field survey using data triangulation techniques. Secondary data were collected from sources such as online and virtual archives and libraries. The finding of the study shows that lack of constitutional support, control from the central government, lack of finance, lack of people participation, lack of accountability, lack of accessibility, lack of human and physical resources, unnecessary political interference are institutional constraints and complex nature of social structure, attitudes of grassroots citizens, immature political culture, gap between voters and representatives, lack of civil society activism, rapid urbanization, lack of private partnership are the non-institutional constraints confronting local governments in Sri Lanka. The study concludes with the recommendations to address the above constraints.

Keywords: Local Government, Municipal Council, Urban Council, Pradeshiya Sabha