Strong Together: Social Networks of Rural Women in Dry Zone Agriculture with Special Reference to the Anuradhapura District ¹

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Abstract

Rural women's footing within the rural social network structure is vital and inevitable. It creates collective value, social capital and satisfaction. In the South Asian context the extent of social support networks as an element of happiness was highest among Sri Lankan women during 2006 - 2009. This study examines social footing of rural women in Thirappane in the North Central Province of Sri Lanka. It covered seventy five rural women involved in agriculture. The respondents were strong together as they were strongly associated with rural social networks and highly satisfied with their social engagements.

Keywords: Agriculture; Dry Zone; Rural Women; Social Networks, Social Relationships

1. *This paper has been developed to **Discourse about social footing of rural women in dry zone agriculture in the selected villages in Anuradhapura District**. Results were obtained through a household survey done in 2011.*

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Introduction

A social network structure is a result of relationships and interactions that individuals maintain with one another. Rural women's role within rural network structures is vital and inevitable. They are well established in the social sphere of rural settings. Therefore, they are blessed with social capital in a wide array of informal and formal social networks which creates collective value and satisfaction for them. Social capital is embodied in social networks. 'Social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor's social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence and solidarity it makes available to the actor' (adler & Kwon, 2002). Although ample research is being done on social capital, there exists a research gap with regard to social networks of rural women in agriculture, which is a form of wealth that rural women are bestowed with and if supported and further enhanced they can be utilized for the betterment of domestic and economic spheres of their rural-social life. This paper is an attempt to examine social footing of rural women within their social networks in the context of dry zone agriculture, with special reference to selected rural villages in Anuradhpura District.

Women, Agriculture and Sri Lanka

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Sri Lankan economy. In most South Asian countries the share of female agricultural workers as a percentage of total employed females exceeds the ratio of male agricultural workers as a percentage of total employed men (Haq, 2002) and it is the case in Sri Lanka too - it is about 37.9% for females and 29.1% for males (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2007). Compared to urban sector in which women labour force participation rate is about 26.2%, the rural sector has higher women labour force participation rate which is about 33.7% (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010). According to occupational categorization, agriculture has the highest employment ratio which is about 32.5% (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2010). Further, 54.5% of the total agricultural households derive the highest share of income from agricultural activities (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2002). Female participation in skilled agricultural and fishery work is 24.8% whereas male participation is 21%. Highest percentage contribution of females to the total employment is about 38.2% and it is from the

skilled agricultural and fishery workers category (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2008). Around 80% of the country's population live in the rural sector and secure their livelihood from agricultural activities (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2001).

Women in Dry Zone Agriculture

Sri Lanka comprises of three main climatic zones namely: Dry Zone, Wet Zone and Intermediate Zone. Agriculture is characterized by sector-wise dualism as plantation agriculture and non-plantation agriculture. Spices, tea, rubber, coconut, vegetables and potatoes are grown in the wet zone while paddy, *chena* and other field crop cultivations are predominantly established in the dry zone². Paddy and other field crops are largely under irrigation. 'Dry zone is confined to the low country a predominantly covers the northern and western parts and confined to the Low-country. Dry zone receives an annual precipitation of 1,250mm-1,750mm and its average temperature ranges between 27-30°C. Rainfall pattern in Sri Lanka gives rise to two main cultivation seasons the *Yala* and *Maha*³ and highly impacts Sri Lankan agriculture especially in crop cultivation. During the *Yala* season the contrast of the precipitation distribution is best developed leading to in 1,500-2,000mm rainfall in the wet zone and 250mm rainfall in the dry zone. Therefore, the wet zone has year-round dependable supply of rainfall water whereas the dry zone depends on irrigation for most of the year (Sirinanda, 1983). Subsistence agriculture is more widespread in its distribution with 57% of the land devoted to paddy and temporary crops located in the dry zone (Sirinanda, 1983). Especially in the rainy season, in the dry zone, range of crops are grown under the 'slash and burn' or '*chena*' farming whereas in the dry season some crops which demands less water are still grown in *chena* lands, but more emphasis is on lowland paddy cultivation

2. *Chena* fields are usually encroached lands in jungle area which belong to the State (Lands under the Crown Lands Ordinance) and cleared by 'slash and burn' method and used for cultivation (Gelbert, 1988), *chena* cultivations are not irrigated and different crops are grown in these lands.

3. Sri Lanka is blessed with two types of main monsoons namely North-East monsoons from November to March and South-West monsoons from end of May to end of September. The former is called '*Maha*' and latter is called '*Yala*' (Yoshino et al, 1983).

(Sirinanda, 1983). In addition, livestock⁴ farming is spread throughout the country irrespective of the zonal differences. Rural women's involvement in rural-social life is more complex and diverse than it is perceived. It is also essential to sustain rural economies. In general, attending to all sorts of household work such as food preparation, child rearing and participation in exchange labour and assisting men in farm operations are considered as rural women's work (Sirisena, 1986) It stretches through to fetching water and fuel, cooking, cleaning, maintaining the house and taking care of the young, old and their spouses while involved in crop cultivation practices, animal husbandry and other community based activities.

The importance of their role can be determined not only by high female participation rates in household activities, farm activities, and non-farm activities, but also by their intimate connection with the rural society. This reveals that, unlike their male counterparts, rural women's role performances are not only limited to agriculture related livelihood activities but it also encompasses household chores and social responsibilities which are of multifaceted nature.

Social Networks of Women in Agriculture

The core of 'social capital' is that the 'goodwill' that individuals have towards one another, which is a valuable resource. 'Social capital is complexly conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust. These are essential for civil society and produces collective action or goods, in the manner of other forms of capital' (Farr,2004). Though it is not mainly in economic terms, like any other form of capital such as physical or human capital, social capital also serves towards future productivity of individuals and groups in civil society (Farr,2004). The central basis of social capital is that 'social networks have value'. Therefore, social networks create value for the people who are connected. Social capital also refers to the collective value of all 'social networks', who people know, the inclinations that arise from the networks to do things for one another, or norms of reciprocity. Emphasis of the concept social capital is not limited to warm and cuddly feelings, it also encompasses a wide variety of specific benefits that emerge from trust and solidarity, information and communication, groups and net-

4. Livestock is referred to cattle, buffalo, goat and sheep, swine, chicken, and other chicken (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2002)

work and collective action and cooperation, social cohesion and inclusion cooperation associated with social networks (Grootaert et al., 2004). Direct benefit of social capital is information. It broadens the access to information sources, improves quality of information, relevance and timeliness. In addition, influence, control, power and solidarity are other key benefits of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Social capital is a blessing for any community and it is similar for rural agrarian settings in Sri Lanka as well. In Sri Lanka during the period 2006-2009, social support networks as an element of happiness of females was 84%. It was the highest among other South Asian countries (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2010).

Rural agricultural communities largely depend on rural social capital. The advantage of solidarity to rural women transcends from credit supply, provision of material support, psychological comfort and assistance at times of crisis. It enables women to overcome the constraints imposed by isolation as well as receive cooperation in other relevant activities and furthering of skills in collective decision making and leadership (Tilakaratna, 1996). In the case of traditional villages, group excursions to fetch firewood, collect water or bathe were occasions of enjoyment and interaction of rural women (Jayaweera, 1995). During peak cultivation periods labour teams called as *kaiya / attam*⁵ in local language were formed on the basis of mutual help between relatives of different households and is an example of usage of social capital of rural network structure in agriculture. In times of excessive household work, during life cycle ritual ceremonies connected with birth, puberty, marriage, death and other temple rites, women helped each other according to the principles of mutual help (Schrijvers, 1983). Women's groups and participation in local organizations is a strategy to expand women's access to information, increase comparative bargaining power and create opportunities for collective action by them (Balakrishnan, 2005). Downside of rural women's participation in social networks is attached with formal community level engagements. Excessive workload that occupies multiple tasks of household work, unpaid work in family farms and care giving responsibilities leave little time and space for women to actively and effectively participate in local organizations. Women are visible numerically in the local organizations. However, they have

5. *Kaiya / attam* is shared labor or 'the reciprocal exchange of labor by which one person works in another's field and then other reciprocate when the first person requires his/her assistance (Siriweera, 2009)

limited opportunities to articulate their requirements in the planning process which is a dominant sphere of men (Balakrishnan, 2005).

Objective

The key purpose of this paper is to discuss social footing of rural women in the agricultural Dry Zones within the frames of purpose and role of social networks, sources of social relationships and perceived satisfaction of social networks with special reference to selected rural villages in Thirappane of the Anuradhapura District.

Methodology

The study area is Anuradhapura, one of the two districts located in the North-Central province in the dry zone of Sri Lanka. According to Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka (2007) it has the highest women labour force participation which is 40.7%. Anuradhapura District is not characterized by climatic and physical diversity and hence there is no great diversity in farming systems. However, there are social diversities such as different ethnic groups, new and old settlements and varied economic status, which may influence the gender roles. The study is based on a sample of 75 rural Sinhalese women involved in dry zone agriculture in Thirappane divisional secretariat. The Thirappane divisional secretariat was one of the divisional secretariats having high total paddy cultivations under minor irrigation and rain fed agriculture; and high percentage of total paddy cultivated lands under minor irrigation and rain fed agriculture of the total of paddy cultivated lands under major irrigation, minor irrigation and rain fed agriculture in each of the divisional secretariats (Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka, 2011). Three *Grama Niladhari* divisions namely Puliyankulama, Mawathawewa and Periyakulama were selected for the study from Thirappane agrarian service centre, one of the two agrarian service centres of Thirappane divisional secretariat. The sample of respondents consisting of rural women were drawn from total of three villages, which were selected on the basis of one village from each of the selected *Grama Niladhari* divisions. Study incorporated both primary and secondary data collection techniques. Primary data collection techniques consisted of both anthropological field work and sociological data collection. Anthropological field work was done through household and individual case studies, in-depth interviews, key informant discussions

and participatory observations whereas sociological data collection techniques were household survey and time-use diary. Secondary data sources were available literature and reports. Descriptive statistics supported by expressions which revealed what social network does mean to them were used for data analysis and interpretation. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was also used for data analysis.

Results and Discussion

All the respondents were fulltime cultivators. None of them were found to be in part time non-farm activities. Their spouses were involved also fulltime farmers. They owned 0.1 ha to 2.8 ha of upland *chena* lands and 0.2 ha to 4 ha of paddy lands. Respondents' age was distributed between 17 years to 69 years, while mean age was 36 years. All the respondents were economically active. About 29% was between 30-39 years, About 31% were below 30 years, and About 40% above 39 years. 90% of the respondents were married, 3% unmarried and 7% widowed. Average family size was four. In terms of formal school education 1% had no education at all, 11% had education up to Grade 1-5 primary level, 88% Grade 6 to secondary level General Certificate of Education - Advance Level and none of them had above secondary level such as a Diploma or Degree. About 48% of respondents had General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Level education. About 60% of the respondents were reported to engage in *attam*. Following case study of Kanthi represents overall picture of social footing of rural women in agriculture within the rural social network structure in the researched areas.

Kanthi in Her Rural Social Network

'Kanthi' is 35 years old. Both she and her husband are full time cultivators. She is blessed with two children. Altogether there are four members in the family. In her social network structure, she is a dependable mother, wife, relative, friend and neighbour. Her household owns 1.2 ha of *chena* and 0.8 ha of paddy. Both of their *chena* and paddy cultivations are located within the village. They grow chili, big onion, paddy, and sesame in *yala* season and paddy and maize in *maha* season. Kanthi is active in all three spheres of rural-social life: domestic, economic and social.

Kanthi is a constituent of a wide array of relationships of rural social network structure in her village. She has strong intimate association with informal social networks of family members, kinship/relatives and neighbourhood. Further, Kanthi has formal social contacts with distant village/outside farming communities excluding neighbourhood, community based organizations such as death benevolence society, women's society, farmer organizations and other outside institutes. Religious institution such as the village temple, provides both informal and formal social networking to Kanthi and her family. All these relationships are based upon trust, reciprocity, information purposes, groups, networks and cooperation.

Kanthi reaps a number of benefits through her social engagements. Obtaining information of *attam*, life cycle rituals, issues related to cultivation aspects and children's education are key benefit. Established social solidarity are immensely useful in social protection in times of shocks, as a mode of risk aversion in livelihoods, for social aggregation, in support of life cycle rituals, as shared labour or *attam* for agriculture purposes and to take care of children, sick, and old.

Kanthi performs complex and diverse social roles. She is a regular member of *attam* and familiar face in village temple activities. Kanthi never neglects or misses any of the important social functions of the villagers such as funerals, weddings, puberty ceremonies, *sh-ramadhana*, etc. Her active participation in meal preparations, coordinating rituals, labour in pre-preparation work is immeasurable. Her contribution in the reciprocal rural network structure is cost free. Unfortunately, Kanthi's involvement in provision of leadership and articulation of her voice in community level decision making is not strong. Her husband is the household representative in number of village organizations. Hence, he bears official membership in those organizations. She represents him in village organization when only her husband has other important engagements and not in a position to attend those meetings. Therefore, Kanthi has a passive involvement in formal social networks. Because of the mutual trust and dependability, social status, perceived contentedness and recognition she benefit from social networks; Kanthi is satisfied of her standing in rural network structure.

Explanation given below provides a detailed sketch of the prevailing situation portrayed through the story of Kanthi.

Rural Women and Social Networks: Purpose and Role

As reported by the respondents, key purposes of different social networks were: information, social protection in times of shocks, mode of risk aversion in livelihoods, for social aggregation, in support of life cycle rituals, for shared agriculture labour or *attam* and to take care of children, sick, and old. Around 60% of the respondents reported that they depended on social networks for all of the above purposes while the remaining 40% for purposes except for *attam*. It was reported by all the respondents that, they relied on family, neighbourhood and networks with kin/relatives for social protection in times of shocks and for taking care of children, sick and old. As revealed by majority, support for life cycle rituals interactions they had with family, neighbourhood, kinship/relatives and village the temple was the most useful and used. For information purposes, as reported by majority it was again family, neighbourhood, kin/relatives and in addition community based organizations (CBOs) were highly used. Whereas for social aggregation, family, neighbourhood, kin/ relatives village religious institutions and CBOs were highly used. As revealed by more than 50% of the respondents they depended on family, neighbourhood, and kin/relatives networks for livelihood risk aversion while social networks with family, neighbourhood, kin/relatives, and other village farmers for shared labour purposes. As made clear by either, all or majority of the respondents they had strong and frequent contacts with informal sources of social relationships for all of the above purposes. In addition, as revealed by majority, information needs and social aggregation purposes were met by formal sources of social relationships through moderate and occasional contacts. Further, according to the view of either all and majority - 97.3% of the total number of respondents, social aggregation and life cycle ritual were largely depended on moderate and occasional contacts with the village religious institutions such as temple respectively. Why they were so embedded in social networks and what was their role in it was well evident from the expressions of respondents.

'To take care of children, sick or old without a second thought kin, /relatives and neighbors support one another. We even take the children to the field for *attam* and there also everyone keeps eye on them. (Female, age 25, individual case study, 2011)

We never miss the helping hand of kin/relatives and neighbors in support of taking care of children, sick and old. When we participate in *attam* kids who come to the field with their parents are looked after by all of us. (Female, age 38, time-use diary & individual case study, 2011)

Farmer organization and other villagers are very useful in terms of obtaining information about cultivations and water distribution. Village officials such as village administrator, agriculture research and production assistant, agriculture instructor, and *Sammurdhi* officer also play a supportive role in this regard. External institutes such as agrarian service centre, divisional secretariat, and banks are located outside the village, when necessary we can always go there and seek for assistance. (Female, age 48-household survey, 2011)

Life cycle rituals are another area where social wealth is immensely used in our village. Whether it is a death of a villager, puberty, child birth, or wedding rural women play a leading role in fulfilling life cycle rituals such as meal preparation, cleaning, attending ritualistic ceremonies, etc. Men also do support in their capacity with regard to life cycle rituals. (Female, age 51-household case study, 2011)

We own 0.8ha of paddy and 0.6ha of *chena*. Crops grown are paddy, maize, chili and big onion. Harvesting of maize and chili largely dependent on shared labour or *attam* whereas somewhat for big onion. Plucking chili and maize and harvesting big onion are occasions where *attam* are mostly useful. Enough people can be found as shared labour and we are blessed with power of people at agricultural activities. It is also economical. Both men and women equally involve in *attam*. As needs arise villagers rotationally go to one another's cultivation for *attam*. We are strong together. (Female, age 31 - household survey, 2011)

Understanding we have about one another is very high. We gather at *kanna*⁶ meetings to decide on water distribution and crop cultivation. Through collective discussion we have always been able to negotiate compromises on the requirements. (Female, age 37-individual case study, 2011)

6. *Kanna* is cultivation season

We do not have our own paddy threshing machine. But, it is convenient to use it for threshing purpose when paddy harvesting is done. My father who lives separately has his own one. We share it with him. (Female, age 29-household survey, 2011)

Women's role within rural social structures ranged from provision of leadership, community level decision making, assisting activities of CBOs, building social wealth, friendship, helping the needy and helping those in difficulty.

Table 1: Women's Role within Rural Social Structure

Women's Role	Involvement Percentage of Respondents
Leadership	13.0
Community Decision Making	28.0
Assisting Activities of CBOs	16.0
Except Leadership, Community Decision Making And Assisting Activities of CBOs	37.0
All the Roles Identified in the Study	6.0

Source : Household survey, 2011 Conducted by the Authors

As indicated in Table 1, 6% were involved with all the roles identified in the study. Leadership role was played by 13% of the respondents. Thirty seven percent performed all the informal roles identified in the study. As revealed by majority of the respondents -76%, with respect to involvement in informal decision making in the context of community involvements and other friendly social engagements was done together with spouse where as revealed by 53% of the respondents in performing formal decision making roles was accomplished jointly with family and other community members. Following expressions revealed what their role within their social structure did mean to them.

I am married to a person who is from another village. He is here as a result of *binna*⁷ marriage. We built a house next to my mother's place. Villagers around my place are kin/relatives or close neighbors. It is the social wealth which has made our lives and livelihood easy in this less resourceful

7. Binna is essentially matriarchal and groom comes to live with bride's family (Bulankulame, 2006)

environment. This social wealth at times is an asset for agricultural activities at other times provide and friendship or emotional security. As a young woman I do benefit from the social wealth I have and vice versa, I am an integral component of the social wealth of others in the village. (Female, age 23- individual case study, 2011)

Every villager flock together for life cycle rituals. Their helping hand support almost all the needs of the community in such occasions. Without a second thought everyone contributes in their capacity. It comes from their inner soul. It's a trait of true villagers as well. We women are in the forefront of such occasions. (Female, age 25- individual case study, 2011)

I am an office bearer in several village based organizations and member of some other village based organizations. In association with those social organizations in some occasions I play a leadership role and involve in decision making which benefits the whole membership. As a woman I consider being able to lead others in the village a privilege. (Female, age 41- individual case study, 2011)

Rural Women and Sources of Social Relationships in Social Networks

In the study area respondents were embedded in different types of formal and informal relationships. The formal relationships are characterized by division of labour, delegation of authority, channeled communication and coordination via rigid rules and regulations while the informal relationships are characterized by impersonality, generality of rules and face-to-face free flow of communication.

As shown in Table 2, family ties, ties with kin/relatives and neighbourhood ties were the most commonly used sources of informal social relationships. Distant and neighbouring village community excluding neighbourhood within the village, CBOs, other outside institutes were the most commonly used sources of formal social relationships. Religious institutions have been supporting both informal and formal social networking. Though there are outside institutes providing services to the villages, the rural woman's direct contacts with them were very poor. It was also evident that, she depended more on her own village neighbourhood than distant or neighbouring village communities for various purposes such as *attam*.

With respect to informal social relationships, all respondents stated that the family was the most depended social relation and one with strong and frequent contacts, followed by neighbourhood and kinship/relatives. With regard to formal social relationships the majority reported that CBOs provided them with formal social networks through either moderate or weak occasional contacts. It was also revealed by all that they had moderate and occasional contacts with the village temple. This reinforced respondents' continuation of traditional rural values of close association with village temple. Their participation at community level decision making was not significant.

Table 2: Involvement with Different Sources of Social Relationships

Sources of Social Relationship	Involvement Percentage of Respondents	Occurrence and Strength Percentage of Respondents					
		Strong & Frequent	Strong & Occasional	Moderate & Frequent	Moderate & Occasional	Weak & Occasional	Not at all
Family	100.0	100	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Kin/Relatives	98.7	74.7	24.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
Neighbours	100.0	69.3	28.0	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Distant and Neighbouring Village Community	40.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	33.3	60.0
CBOs	85.3	8.0	6.7	9.3	30.7	30.7	14.7
Outside Institutes	18.7	1.3	0.0	0.0	4.0	13.3	81.3
Religious Institutions	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Household survey, 2011 Conducted by the Authors

As shown in Table 3, the highest individual level active community participation of respondents was found in community based women's societies. In the study area about 31% had ordinary membership and 8% were office bearers in women's societies. Many women had informal representation of the male member/s in the family who

was the official member in CBOs. As disclosed by respondents, this representative type of behavior was highest in the death benevolent society and accounted for 68% followed by farmer organizations and Buddhist society -*bouddha samithiya* or *vihara wardhana samithiya* 38.7% and 29.3% respectively. In fact, the researchers observed it as 'on behalf syndrome' that rural women embedded in with respect to participation in formal community based organizations.

Table 3: Respondents' Involvement in Formal Social Networks

CBO/Meetings	Type of Involvement - Percentage of Respondents			
	Office Bearer	Membership Only	Representative of the Membership	No Membership
Death Benevolence Society	0.0	17.3	68.0	14.7
Kanna Meeting (Farmer Organization)	1.3	8.0	38.7	52.0
Women's Society	8.0	30.7	1.3	60.0
Buddhist Society	1.3	18.7	29.3	50.7
Sammurdhi Society	2.7	16.0	5.3	76.0
Non-Government Organization (NGO) /Participatory Rural Development Program (PRDP)	1.3	0.0	0.0	98.7
Rural Development Society	5.3	10.7	6.7	77.3

Source: Household survey, 2011 Conducted by the Authors

As the head of the household my husband is the official representative of our home at village level involvements. He works as the *Welvidane* of *Maha Wewa* and President of the farmer organization of the village too. He has membership in village death benevolence society, rural development society, agricultural cooperative society, *Vihara Wardhana* society as well. Whenever he is not in a position to attend those meetings I attend. This is on behalf of him and there too I do not engage in any decision making, just be representing him. (Female, age 55-household survey, 2011)

I have a representative role in village death benevolence society and farmer organization as my husband is the official member in those societies. But, when necessary I represent him in meetings. I mean just be there for attendance. (Female, age 51-household case study, 2011)

I represent my husband in village death benevolence society and farmer organization in his absence. It is a passive work. He does not want me to officially be attached with village organizations. My engagement with village level formal social network is negligible. Though I like it a lot, I regret that I do not have an opportunity to contribute to betterment of my village in some proper way and get some use of my education. (Female, age 30-household case study, 2011)

All three village communities studied were blessed with CBOs - death benevolence society, farmer organization, women's society, ect. It was observed that their community level participation in decision making was at a very poor level. Only 4% responded that, they were involved in formal decision making attached with formal positional powers such as office bearers. But, either as ordinary members or as representatives of official members or in both instances irrespective of the context respondents were involved in formal decision making as disclosed by almost one fourth of the respondents. In addition, importantly there were few-personalities with real upcoming leadership and organization skills to work at community level and thereby involved in village level decision making in all three communities which were subjected to this study.

I am an office bearer and member in several CBOs such as Vishaka women's society and village death benevolence society. In those village organizations in some occasions I provide leadership and get involved in decision making which benefit the whole membership. As a woman it's a privilege for me to lead others in the village. (Female, age 41-individual case study, 2011)

I am just 30 years old. I am member of several community level organizations. I do have membership in village death benevolence society, farmer organization, cooperative society, religious society and agriculture society. Further to this I am the president of women's society, treasurer of the *Sam-murdhi* society and secretary of the rural development foun-

dation in the village. Because of my involvement in these village based organizations I have a say in the village and villagers are also in good terms with me. Further, I could contribute lot to the development of the society as well. (Female, age 39-household case study, 2011)

When the International Fund for Agricultural Development dry zone project was implemented in our area I worked as the secretary for village programs. It was a nice experience. I worked in the Assistant Government Agent's (AGA's) office before my first child was born then I resigned. The experience I got while working at the AGA's office was really helpful in doing all the secretariat work I had to do in the project. I am very happy that I could serve our village using my knowledge and skills through the project. (Female, age 36-household case study, 2011)

Since rural women's social capital was at their vicinity, they regularly met one another at cultivation fields and at seldom events such as life cycle rituals. However, due to rural socio-cultural context hindering formal community participation of rural women, respondents' engagement in formal social networks naturally were at a minimum level. In the study area, according to respondents and observations made, it was explicit that face-to-face interactions with social network have declined with the increased trend of usage of telephones for communication.

Perceived work satisfaction of social sphere by women was studied at four levels: highly satisfied, moderately satisfied, less satisfied and not at all satisfied. The general image of perceived work satisfaction of social roles revealed that, 96% respondents were highly satisfied and 4% respondents were moderately satisfied of their societal engagements. Further, as shown in Table 4 despite the differences in age and formal education level, the respondents were highly satisfied with their social role. Their satisfaction was attached with self-contentedness, interest, recognition and self-esteem and was explicit from their expressions.

Attam, life cycle rituals, community based organizations provide good platform of social aggregation for villagers. We cannot afford much on labour thus family labour and *attam* are the only possible economical solutions, for which the village fully depend on kinship/relatives networks, neighbour-

hood and other villagers' labour. Power of people is important for *attam*. Both men and women participate in *attam* but, women are inevitable. I am highly satisfied with my contribution to *attam*. (Female, age 41-household survey, 2011)

Life cycle rituals are another area where social wealth becomes indispensable in our village. It is the case in surrounding villages as well. Irrespective of the ritual whether it is a death of a villager, puberty, child birth, or wedding villagers get together to help one another. Rural women play a leading role in fulfilling life cycle rituals. I too do not think twice when it comes to a life cycle ritual and contribute in any capacity. It is this social wealth which becomes useful as a survival strategy of villagers in moments like this. It is again power of being together: kinship/relatives networks and neighbourhood. I am a valuable input there. Thus, I am highly satisfied with these society oriented work carried out by me and the self satisfaction I receive is great. (Female, age 49-household survey, 2011)

Not only for life cycle rituals but also for other rituals attached with agricultural practices villagers work as one. It is through this social capital, rituals pertaining to agriculture—such as *mutti mangalya* and *kiri ithirima*⁸ are accomplished periodically through the collective action of villagers. These practices assure survival of farm families and cultivations. Though men perform the rituals, pre-preparations or afterward practices are attended to by women. This reveals aggregation of villagers for what is good for them all. It's a great pleasure to be a partner in these types of community based activities which is aimed at betterment and long life of our agrarian lives. It is we who define our path for survival. (Female, age 36-household case study, 2011)

8. *Mutti mangalya* (pot ceremony) and *kiri ithirima* (boiling of milk) are traditional rituals adopted by cultivators of rural agricultural communities. *Mutti mangalya* is performed invoke the blessings of guardian deities to protect the reservoirs and the cultivations. *Kiri ithirima* is performed to appease deities to assure protection and well-being of reservoirs, crops and cattle (Siriweera, 2009).

Table 4: Perceived Work Satisfaction, Age and Education

Attribute		Level of Perceived Work Satisfaction Percentage of Responses			
		High	Moderate	Low	Not at All
Age	< 30 Years	87.0	13.0	0.0	0.0
	30-39 Years	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	>39 Years	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Formal Education Level	Secondary : Grade 6- General Certificate of Education - Advanced Level	95.5	4.5	0.0	0.0
	Primary : Grade 1-5	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	No Formal Education / No Schooling	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Household Survey - 2011 Conducted by the Authors

Conclusions

In the study area, domestic, livelihood and social arena of the respondents were blessed with social capital. Social networks of rural households meant lot to rural women in the study area. They were strong together. They were blessed with social wealth of family, kin / relatives, neighbourhood, CBOs, religious institutions, outside institutes and outside villagers enriched with mechanical and organic solidarity. Their role performance in the social sphere was an integral component of survival of rural community and its members. Especially, their role associated with informal social networks. However, rural women's involvement in organized formal social networks were found to be passive. This was because, except for few exceptional cases the household head who was the husband or father, or any other adult male were found to have official membership in CBOs thus, resulting rural women to significantly show 'on behalf syndrome' or behavior of representing the male membership in CBOs. Irrespective of age differences and level of formal education, all the respondents were of high satisfaction regarding their social roles. Establishment of procedures to have adequate women representation in CBOs through the intervention of local authorities and village level officers and thereby sustaining their footing in social sphere is impor-

tant to improve the prevailing situation. Socio-cultural issues in which gender stereotypes sprout from rural value system and patriarchal norms predominantly hinder the involvements of rural women and in social sphere, thereby thwart their social footing. To overcome these constraints prevailing gender insensitive socio-cultural issues need to be mainstreamed into basic formal education systems to enable rural subjects to learn the correct and effective way of managing it from sensitivity to diversity point of view.

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