Public Service Delivery: Impact of Establishing an Administrative District in the Kalmunai Region, Sri Lanka

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Abstract: One of the key arguments expressed by many theorists and advocates of decentralization is that it allows for more channels to increase the outreach of public services. Greater institutional capacity and an enhanced mode of language for service delivery in a decentralized administrative model is believed to dramatically improve service delivery in plural societies. Many developing countries have thus initiated decentralization initiatives. This study examined service delivery limitations and impact of establishing a decentralized administrative district in the coastal belt of Amparai district, commonly known as the "Kalmunai region" of Sri Lanka's Eastern province. Qualitative data in this case study revealed that the residents of the region, the majority of whom are Tamil-speakers have long faced a number of problems and challenges accessing the public services offered by the district's secretariat and other decentralized government departments located in Amparai town. Those challenges were found to be mainly related to the location of the district's capital and the use of Sinhala rather than Tamil as the official language of the district administration. The situation was found to have resulted in a public demand for a separate administrative district for Kalmunai region. Overall, this study provided evidence to suggest that the establishment of the proposed administrative district would significantly facilitate the delivery of public services to the Tamil-speaking community in the Kalmunai region through properly and efficiently administered the district-level decentralized institutions.

Key words: Decentralization, public service delivery, tamil-speakers, Kalmunai administrative district, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Since Amparai was given district status in April 1961, the district administration has continued to be heavily contested. Most of the areas of the present Amparai district were a part of the Batticaloa district referred to as "Batticaloa-South." The region's population was mainly comprised of Tamil-speakers, the majority of who have settled along the coast. A few thousands of relatively new Sinhalese settlements were found more towards the interior parts of the region. Due to difficulties pertaining to the accessibility of the services offered by Batticaloa district secretariat (also known as Kachcheri) the Tamil-speaking community at Batticaloa-South demanded that a separate administrative district be established which was to be called Kalmunai district. In the early 1960s, the central government responded by proposing to open an ad-hock-based circuit Kachcheri in the region

which was to be made functional within a few days in a week. However, voices calling for the establishment of a new administrative district in the region became stronger and the central government, headed by Srimavo, ultimately gave in to public pressure and established Amparai district as the new administrative district of the Batticaloa-South region on 10th April 1960. A few areas which were under the jurisdiction of other districts were also annexed to the newly formed district (Jabbar, 2013; Sarjoon et al., 2015). The secretariat buildings of Amparai were also placed in the Sinhalese-majority interior area, namely at Amparai town.

After Amparai administrative district was established, the Tamil-speaking majority expressed concerns regarding quite a number of issues. Consequently, they demanded the following: establishing a Kalmunai district; shifting the district secretariat and other decentralized government departments to Kalmunai or to the coastal region of the

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existing Amparai district; appointing a Tamil-speaking Government Agent (GA) the district's secretary. The idea of establishing a separate administrative district in the Kalmunai region was well received by the Tamil-speaking community. Yet the demand for a separate district was repeatedly turned down by the government for over the last 30 year. In the past 15 year or so, the issue has started to receive political attention again. Initially, demands for a Kalmunai administrative district have been advocated by Tamils and Muslims alike with the slogan "facilitate Tamil-speakers in district administration" but as the ethnic conflict intensified in Sri Lanka, centred on political power-sharing between the majority and the minority groups, a civil war broke out in the mid 1980s. Later, the political leaders of the Muslim community of Amparai district became even more focused on establishing the proposed Kalmunai district. Unfortunately, despite a sound rationale behind their demands, central government authorities have continued to silence all cries for the district.

This study evaluates the causes of suboptimal service delivery at the Kalmunai region and the impact of establishing the proposed administrative district. Establishing the proposed administrative district may be warranted considering the limitations of the present service delivery functions in Amparai district secretariat and in other governmental offices. The proposal promises to improve public services delivery functions in the Kalmunai region. Yet no research has been conducted to examine the limitations of the delivery of public services or the possible impact of a district established at the Kalmunai region.

This study highlights key aspects pertaining to service delivery and predicts the outcome of establishing a Kalmunai administrative district. This study comprises six major sections. Following the introductory note our data collection and analysis methods are briefly described in the materials and methods section. The subsequent section conceptualizes service delivery drives and the effects of decentralization. It identifies the major ways in which administrative/institutional decentralization could facilitate the delivery of public services through central government ministries and departments at both the regional and the local levels. The 4th section analyses the aspects in which the existing service delivery methods have been lacking in the Kalmunai region. This study reveals that the major factors causing the people of this region to opt for a separate administrative district are the following: the great distance between the existing district secretariat and the services recipients; the lack of an official language policy; the lack of inclusive policies in terms of the ethnic background and language of the administrative officials selected for the Amparai district.

Therefore, the proposed administrative machinery is expected to allow the majority of the population of Kalmunai region to access public services feasibly.

The 5th section predicts the impact that a Kalmunai district would have on the delivery of public services in the region. It also addresses the challenges towards achieving a positive effect on public service delivery in the district. Lastly, the 6th section provides conclusions and recommendations that may prove useful to improve public service delivery functions in the region, even if the proposed administrative district was not established.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research followed a case study structure. Qualitative and quantitative data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and human subject observation. A total of 40 informants were invited to semi-structured interviews. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling and included political leaders and representatives (national and local), bureaucrats, academicians, journalists and civil activists. Hence, the data collected represented a range of varying perspectives. Discussions focused on aspects of public service delivery and the potential impact of a Kalmunai administrative district. To have a better understanding of difficulties pertaining to the accessibility of public services offered by the existing district administrative machinery in Amparai 2 focus-group discussions were conducted with civil activists and individuals of the general populace.

The discussions sought to clarify the rationale of establishing the proposed district. Moreover, multiple field visits were made to the existing administration at Amparai town, represented by the district secretariat and a number of governmental departments. Journal studies, newspaper articles, parliamentary speeches, government reports and other literary works were the major secondary sources for this study. The findings were presented as quotations, summaries, descriptions and interpretive arguments. Interpretive research betters one's understanding of people's reactions in different social circumstances and situations. Researchers attempting research of the sort must provide far more than simple descriptive and explanatory accounts of a phenomenon. They ought to identify the implications and the essence of the phenomenon because only by doing so, could they subjectively interpret social events and actions.

Service delivery limitations and impact of decentralization: a conceptual note: Decentralization has been defined in a number of ways. It has been defined as:

a delegation of decision-making power; the placement of authority with responsibility; the transfer of authority and responsibility from a higher level of government to lower tiers; an effort to allow a greater number of actions to be taken at the local level; the removal of functions from the centre; a mode of operations that permits wide participation of individuals of varying levels in the policy-making process (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983; Linder, 2009). According to Cheema and Rondinelli (1983), experts on decentralization studies decentralization may be defined as a transfer of authority, responsibility and resources through de-concentration, delegation or devolution of power from the centre and into a lower level of politics and administration. On the other hand, Conyers believed that decentralization describes a process of change in which functions previously assumed by governmental institutions on the national level become responsibilities of government or non-government institutions on a sub-national level.

Decentralization can be achieved in many ways. The structure of a decentralized government depends on the purpose of decentralization. The main types of decentralization are: political, fiscal and administrative. They differ primarily in terms of the purpose, reach and means of the decentralized power. Political decentralization, commonly referred to as democratic decentralization, describes a governmental structure in which power and authority devolve into lower-level governmental institutions such as provincial/regional councils and other local governmental bodies. This type of decentralization allows for power-sharing to be effective through the recognition of federal principles, autonomous regions and the like.

Fiscal decentralization on the other hand, entails power transition into local governmental institutions for the purpose of raising and retaining financial resources to fulfil the assigned responsibilities (Cabral, 2011). Fiscal decentralization forces local authorities to rely less on funds transferred from the central or the provincial government and more on extra-budgetary funds and creative accounting to fill the gaps in local budgets. Lastly, administrative decentralization involves a full or partial transfer of an array of functional responsibilities to local authorities such as districts and divisional administrative units and service delivery agencies. Administrative decentralization allows the people to participate in a whole range of decision-making activities, from plan formulation to plan implementation (Cheema and Rondinelli, 2007; Islam and Fujitha, 2012). Administrative decentralization is often considered as an integral part of civil service reforms as it distances bureaucratic structures from the central government and devolves

them into lower-level institutions without eliminating the accountability of the central government. Consequently as Smoke (2003) argues, administrative decentralization requires the creation of administrative bodies, systems and mechanisms at the local or the inter-governmental level.

In terms of improving or facilitating public service delivery in practice, decentralization may allow to form many administrative/political institutions such as as regional councils, districts, local governance bodies and administrative units that are either elected/appointed and empowered with devolved responsibilities to deliver specific services to the locals. When delivering necessary social and administrative services at the local level, the quality of service becomes a key aspect of any process of decentralization. The idea of bringing services closer to the clients is appealing but in many cases, local service delivery institutions can lack the basic skills and capacities to manage decentralization programs. When properly managed, decentralization efforts can improve service delivery processes and provisions by making overall assessment of the existing capacity and constraints at the local institutional level.

This often contributes to better support for basic training of local personnel and managers and provisions for ongoing skill-maintenance efforts. Consequently this results in better mechanisms to assess the quality of public service delivery. When forming an administrative district, the secretariat and other governmental offices and departments should be situated in an area that would allow for feasible delivery of major public services. Central ministries should provide all the necessary human and physical resources, facilities and training to deliver public services easily and effectively.

Decentralization is adopted in various forms in both developed and developing countries as a central public sector reform strategy. Administrative decentralization can reduce authority concentration in the central government and promote activity decongestion from the centre to the peripheral units. Furthermore, it contributes to a dissolution of bureaucracy by preventing the central government from getting involved in purely local issues. Hence, administrative decentralization positively influences public service delivery, minimizes excessive and straight-jacketed central directives, reduces the delay in processing and boosts the decision-making process (Tshukudu, 2014). Moreover, decentralization is credited with improving access to administrative agencies (Smith, 1993). It also enables efficient delivery of public service by reducing costs and exposing problems in delivery mechanisms (Cheema and Rondinelli, 1983). According to Smoke (2003) the anticipated improvement of service

delivery efficiency is one of the many factors that prompted nations to adopt decentralization models. It contributed to better governance, improved equity, more development and poverty reduction. As plural societies initiate decentralization efforts, many tend to establish small service delivery units such as districts and divisions. This is considered as one of the mechanisms to accommodate multiple factions in the populations in terms of the language they speak the locations they reside in and the issues they face when attempting to access public services. Many countries opt for provisions that establish specific service units, centres and offices to cater to the needs of the whole population.

Like many developing countries, Sri Lanka has also adopted decentralization policies in order to facilitate public service delivery and other governmental functions at the local level. Ministries, departments, agencies, service units as well as administrative districts and divisions have been established as parts of a procedural reform. Currently, public service delivery institutions carry on a large number of public service delivery functions. They mediate the relationship between the central government ministries and departments and the people. With the expansion of government services and the increase of public demands for these services, governments tend to increase the number of administrative districts and departments regularly. At the time of independence, Sri Lanka had 20 administrative districts only (Devendra, 2010; Yusoff *et al.*, 2015). As a response to public demands and to facilitate the development administrative functions, five more new administrative districts were established-Moneragala came to be in 1959; Amparai in 1961; Mullaitivu and Gampaha in 1978 and Kilinochchi in 1984. According to the constitution of 1978, the territory of Sri Lanka is divided into 25 administrative districts that may be subdivided or amalgamated via a resolution in the parliament (PS, 2015; Yusoff *et al.*, 2015).

Service delivery limitations justifying a Kalmunai administrative district: The Tamil-speaking communities in the coastal belt of Amparai district have long been calling for the establishment of a separate administrative machinery, an administrative district to be called Kalmunai. They believe that the new district will allow them to access public services easily and quickly. The proposed Kalmunai district will cover up to 14 divisional secretariat areas in the coastal belt of the present Amparai district. It is expected to facilitate the delivery of public services to the people of the coastal region and boosting the development along the coast. The proposed district will cover an area of 1967.7 km^2 and have a total population of 4,092,010 (DCS, 2014). Over the years, the

central government officials and members of the major political parties have often given promises and made agreements with the political forces of the region regarding the establishment of the proposed district. However, the issue has traditionally been side-tracked whenever a new government arrived in power. The establishment of the proposed Kalmunai district has largely been contested in political discussions and debates throughout the last 3 decades. This study identified a number of issues with the service delivery functions at Amparai district secretariat and at other decentralized governmental departments currently present. Those shortcomings may be the major factors contributing to the people's demand to establish the proposed administrative district in the Kalmunai region. The sub-sections examine those issues in depth.

Location of district secretariat and other governmental departments: Since the 1940s, residents of the Kalmunai region have demanded for the establishment of an administrative district in the region as a solution for many issues that they faced on daily basis. Before the Amparai district was established in order to access public services offered by the Batticaloa district secretariat, residents of the Kalmunai region had to travel far as the secretariat was located nearly 40-140 km away from the region. Residents of Kalmunai faced more challenges accessing public services because the region was so lacking with proper transportation, road networks and communication facilities. Upon the establishment of Amparai district in 1961, the central government established its secretariat and other public service delivery agencies (departments and centres) in Amparai town far (26-100 km) from settlement of Tamil-speaking communities-also formed the majority in the district. Although, the majority of Amparai district's population was concentrated in the coastal belt-the Kalmunai region but the region was highly underdeveloped with no road networks and transportation facilities. It became challenging for the people of Kalmunai region to access services offered by the district's secretariat and other service-delivery departments located at Amparai town. The people pleaded to the government to shift the secretariat and the departments to Kalmunai area to facilitate the majority of the district population to access public services easily and affectively.

The civil war which was started in the mid of 1980s has had a negative impact on the normalcy of the social life in the region. Traveling became heavily restricted and transportation facilities were also highly unfeasible. Using this war condition, authorities in the Amparai district secretariat also shifted the few government departments that had formally been located in the Kalmunai region to

the Amparai town. This further increased the difficulties and inconveniences of accessing public services in the Kalmunai region. Consequently calls for a separate administrative structure/machinery abounded. Early in the 1980s, the Kalmunai district demand received political attention from many central political players (Yusoff and Sarjoon, 2016a, b). Recently too, a number of attempts have been made to shift few public service delivery institutions locating in the Kalmunai region, including the District Vocational Training Centre in Nintavur and the Road Development Authority to Amparai town. However, the efforts were halted due to much criticism from the public and the politicians. A part from a few government offices and public facilities. Most of the public institutions in Amparai district including the General Hospital and the Nurse Training Centre are all located in Amparai town making it extremely difficult for Tamil-speakers to access the services provided.

To resolve problems pertaining to public service delivery the people and the politicians of Kalmunai region appealed to the government to establish an additional district secretariat and transfer some of the decentralized governmental departments to the coastal region. They justified the proposal by citing that most of those offices had earlier been functioning at Kalmunai town and that the town had sufficient institutional capacity (public buildings) to conduct full-scale administrative processes. Unfortunately, the proposal has been turned down repeatedly and the government has continued to shift almost all government offices to Amparai town with no regard to the fact that most of the services recipients are living in the coastal belt of the district, i.e., in Kalmunai region. The lack of satisfactory action from the government seems to have further intensified the calls for a separate administrative district for Kalmunai region.

Language barrier due to the violation of the official-language policy: This study has found that Tamil-speakers in Amparai district, especially those residing at the Kalmunai region found it unfeasible to access the services offered by the district secretariat and other governmental departments due to a language barrier. A violation of the official language policy of the country was evident as the policy did not seem to be implemented by the Amparai district administrative officials. Since 1957, Sri Lanka has had a bilingual official language policy. Sinhala and Tamil have been recognized as the official as well as the national languages of the country. Act No. 28 of 1958 established the Tamil language use through a special provision. Later, this was further authorized through the 13th and 16th Amendments of the present constitution which came into effect in 1987

and 1988, respectively and culminated in the Official Languages Commission Act (No. 18) of 1991 which dictated the government directives through gazette notifications and public administration circulars to ensure equal status of both Tamil and Sinhala. This act further stressed that Tamil was the primary official language, particularly in the North-Eastern region of Sri Lanka. Following these acts and amendments government authorities had to have the institutional and human capacity necessary to conduct administrative affairs in the Tamil language, especially in the North-Eastern region of Sri Lanka (Perera, 2008; MRGI, 2011; Yusoff *et al.*, 2015).

However, this study has found that the district administrative machinery at Amparai has continued to violate/refrain from implementing the official language policy of Sri Lanka which should make incorporate in all public administration affairs at Amparai district. Continuous appointment of Sinhalese bureaucrats to the district secretariat has encouraged the personnel to conduct day-to-day activities in Sinhala in an act of disrespect to the official language policy and to the language of the majority of public service recipients in the district. Although, the Amparai district was created in 1961, a few years after the Tamil Language Act (Special Provision) had passed, the central government and district authorities have failed to boost the institutional capacity to conduct administrative affairs in Tamil at Amparai district. From the inception of the district till now, no Tamil-speaking district secretary has come to office. The bureaucracy of the Amparai district secretariat and other government department has been dominated by Sinhalese (DSA, 2013, 2016; Sarjoon *et al.*, 2015; Yusoff *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the district's secretariat and other decentralized governmental offices at Amparai have been suffering from a shortage of human resources capable of Tamil-speaking. This situation has produced an unpleasant environment. Most of the authoritative positions are dominated by Sinhala-speaking bureaucrats and the officers are not only lacking expertise in the Tamil language but also are unwilling to learn it, even though they need to fulfil a Tamil proficiency requirement since it is the second official language according to the national language policy.

It is noteworthy that since interactions between Tamil-speakers (Muslims and Tamils) and Sinhala-speakers (Sinhalese) have historically been very limited in Amparai district, the district's population developed into a collection of 2 mono-linguistic groups. Hence, with the exception of a few areas at the boundaries, having linguistic harmony in Amparai district seems to be impossible. Limitations pertaining to the

language makes it very challenging for Tamil-speakers to access the services offered by the district's secretariat and the other government departments located in Amparai town. Their needs cannot be fulfilled properly. They are forced to hire translators to manage their affairs in government offices. Looking into the history of the Kalmunai administrative district movement, it is clear that the people initially only demanded to empower the district secretariat with sufficient Tamil-speaking officers.

They merely asked for a Tamil-speaking district secretary (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016). This study showed that the district secretariat in Amparai conducts the majority of its activities in Sinhala. Although, some attempts have been made to incorporate Tamil in official dealings most official communications between district secretariat and the divisional administrative units and the public are still conducted exclusively in the Sinhala language. This violation of the government's official language policy has been repeatedly voiced by advocates of the proposed Kalmunai district. They note that failure to implement the language policy clashes with fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. The lack of the use of the Tamil language in the district secretariat and the other service delivery institutions urged the Tamil-speakers to actively advocate the establishment of a separate administrative district in the Kalmunai region.

Ethnic domination and marginalization in service-delivery institutions: One of the major challenges cited by the advocates of the proposed Kalmunai district is the ethnic domination of the Sinhalese and the marginalization of Tamil-speakers in the district's administrative bodies. As stated earlier, the location of district administrative machinery in a Sinhalese-dominated town has resulted in a strong Sinhalese influence on district's bureaucracy. Sinhalese have thus occupied most of the administrative positions at the district secretariat and other governmental departments in Amparai town.

This situation has not only caused a violation of Tamil-language provisions as viewed earlier but has also resulted in a man-made delay of service delivery and policy implementation in the coastal belt. This study revealed that albeit the vast majority of Amparai district's population being Tamil-speakers (62%) a large number of the institutions and branches of the district administrative machinery tended to over-recruit Sinhalese officers (Sarjoon *et al.*, 2015). District bureaucracy has thus, made many policies favour the Sinhala-speaking population in Amparai District, especially the policies related to the selection of beneficiaries, the allocation of recourse loans/aid and public-service offering programs such as

disaster relief, rehabilitation and resettlement programs. Those discriminatory policies have had a negative impact on the Kalmunai region. When the tsunami of 2004 hit Sri Lanka, Kalmunai was one of the worst affected regions and most of the victims were Tamil-speakers. Yet, technical and human support offered by the district administration was staggeringly minimal. It took 3 days for the district secretary to visit the places affected by a tsunami that devastated the coastal belt of Amparai District (Yusoff *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, due to the inefficiency of the administrative elites at the district secretariat, the recovery process has been delayed for years. Following the disaster, Muslim politicians demanded the government to establish an additional district secretariat in Kalmunai to accelerate the implementation of the tsunami recovery programs and delivery of necessary disaster relief services.

Fortunately, the government decided that the request was justified and opened an additional district secretariat on ad-hoc basis in Kalmunai in 2005 (Amarasiri, 2009; Sarjoon *et al.*, 2015). However, political and civil activists found evidence indicating that the district administration had been rather unsupportive and purposely delayed the release of the funds necessary for the delivery of public services during that state of emergency.

Many Tamil-speakers were interviewed in this study revealed that officers in the district secretariat and other departments in Amparai town were deliberately delaying the delivery of public services to Tamil-speaking individuals. Ethnicity, religious affiliations and language differences are the major factors for this discriminatory treatment. Witnesses testified that officers offered different services or treatment in relation to the same request/issue for individuals of the ethnic majority and the ethnic minorities. Sinhalese were reportedly given priority in service delivery in many branches of the district's secretariat. To cite an example, an educationist (I/E/M/10, Personal Communication, 18 August 2014) expressed that his application was deliberately delayed to produce a voters-list certificate when he sought to get it at the district secretariat. We observed that officers at the district secretariat and other departments postponed decisions vital for emergency services during natural disasters at Kalmunai region and delayed to the official's visit to the affected areas in the coastal belt even though the region has suffered from a multitude of natural disasters such as a tsunami, heavy rainfall, floods and droughts (Amarasiri, 2009; Yusoff *et al.*, 2016). Tamil-speaker's marginalization in service delivery is one of the major reasons that have made the them insistent on a separate administrative machinery for Kalmunai region.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Establishing a separate Kalmunai administrative district to improve public service delivery: The major function of governmental departments and service delivery units, like regional and local district offices, divisions and agencies is to facilitate easy and efficient delivery of certain public services to the public. When ministries and departments located in the capital, they cannot deliver key services to certain groups in the community. Therefore, governments opt for decentralization as a mechanism to authoritatively transfer their service delivery functions to local public institutions. Consequently district offices and divisions are established and given decentralized power and authority. Offices and centres of the sort play a major role in facilitating the delivery of governmental services. Administrative districts and divisional offices are sought after primarily for this attribute.

In Sri Lanka, districts function as decentralized institutions and play a vital role in delivering a number of important public services at the district and the local levels. The office of the district secretary commonly referred to as district secretariat or Kachcheri has served as a decentralized agency of the central government in the district from the pre-independence days. The district secretariat coordinates, monitors and provides necessary human, physical and financial resources as well as consultation and training services and development plans to deliver quality public services to the general populace. District secretariats have primary and additional responsibilities. The district secretariat hands the following tasks: distribution and management of poverty reduction initiatives; administration of disaster relief and rehabilitation projects; planning and co-ordination of development projects; management of elections; district-level projects administration and direction; processing of national identity cards and passport applications referred by the DS offices; land distribution and settlement; revenue collection; management of disaster relief activities; human resources development (Leitan, 1979; Kruse, 2007; DSA, 2016).

The District Coordination Committee (DCC) is the main committee that discusses and takes policy decisions in the district. DCC consists of many sub-committees, including the District Planning Committee, the Divisional Coordination Committee, the Housing Committee, the Environment Committee, the Agricultural Committee, Samurdhi Committee, the Fisheries Committee, the Price Committee and the District Forest Committee. The chairman of DCC is mostly a cabinet minister representing the district. On some occasions, the provincial Chief Minister might co-chair DCC. After 2015 general election a district parliamentarian has been appointed as DCC chairman in many districts. Overall, DCC consists of members of the parliament, ministers of provincial councils, directors of local government institutions and the heads of all departments representing the district (Leitan, 2010; Kruse, 2007; DSA, 2016).

Like other district secretariats, the district secretariat and other decentralized government departments in Amparai facilitate the delivery of a large number of public services at the district and the divisional levels. However, the populations of the coastal belt of the district, Kalmunai region, demanded for the establishment of a separate administrative machinery, a separate district to eliminate certain limitations and improve the delivery of public services to the people of the Kalmunai region. Considering the potential impact of decentralization in Amparai district, this study has found that the establishment of the proposed Kalmunai administrative district may dramatically improve the efficiency and quality of public service delivery in the Kalmunai region as follows:

- Being much closer to the public in the physical sense and in terms of the usage of the Tamil language to conduct all the official affairs, the district secretariat and other governmental departments at the proposed Kalmunai district would offer better administrative and accountability mechanisms to cater to the needs of the Tamil-speaking communities and to hold officials accountable for the delivery of necessary public services
- It would allow the public to access the district secretariat and other governmental departments easily and quickly as they would be located in one of the major cities in the region. This would decrease the financial burden on accessing public services
- The district secretariat and the elected political representatives of the new district would be more responsive and accountable to the public. People's needs and preferences would be better considered when designing service provisions and allocating resources to deliver those services
- Having direct budget allocation and sources of income, the proposed district would have adequate financial resources to establish effective and excellent service delivery mechanisms, focusing on district-oriented developmental needs
- The newly established district secretariat and other government departments would be empowered with human resources and physical resources necessary to deliver essential and improved public services. This would further allow the people of Kalmunai region to easily communicate with the district bureaucrats in Tamil, their own language. Overall, this would dramatically improve the quality of public service delivery

However, the achievement/realization of the above noted prospective advantages of the proposed Kalmunai administrative district depends on a number of factors. Scott (2009) believed that the success of decentralization efforts and having efficient public service delivery mechanism were subject to the following: political incentives at the central government and the local levels; administrative capacity at the district and the divisional levels; the financial constraints involved. To improve public service delivery upon the establishment of the proposed Kalmunai district, we believe that number of issues need to be addressed in advance. Failure to resolve the problems discussed below would greatly undermine the ability of the administration of Kalmunai district to improve service delivery in the region in greater and different ways.

Deliver and access public services in official languages (Tamil and Sinhala): One of the major concerns of the people in the coastal belt of the Amparai district is that because of the domination of Sinhala language, they cannot feasibly access services offered by the district secretariat and other governmental departments using their own language. The present administration, as viewed earlier has failed to implement the official language policy. Government offices continue to issue forms, applications and communications intended for Tamil speakers solely in the Sinhala language. Yet, most of the local administrative and political institutions in the Kalmunai region lack translators and interpreters to cope up with these circulars and official letters in Sinhala.

Presently, a serious shortage of Tamil-speaking officers is evident in Amparai district secretariat and many local administrative institutions and local government bodies in the Kalmunai region lacks with sufficient Sinhala-speaking officers The situation may persist if the proposed Kalmunai district administrative is established. Basically, the population of the proposed district is made up of groups that speak distinct languages: Tamil and Sinhala. Were the proposed district administration to carry on activities solely in the Tamil language, it would become very difficult for Sinhalese to access public services using their own language, Sinhala.

In order to reconcile the language and communication issues pertaining to the delivery of public services and improve the quality of services in the Kalmunai region, there seems to be two possible courses of action should the government turn down the demands for the proposed administrative district: a compromise may be to improve the quality of the staff at the Amparai district secretariat by appointing a considerable number of Tamil-speaking officers and a Tamil-speaking district secretary; to establish an additional district secretariat in a suitable location in the Kalmunai region to bring public institutions closer to service recipients.

These 2 alternatives have been suggested by advocates of the proposed district and justified on administrative decentralization grounds as well. Unfortunately, the central government has continued to side-track the fulfilment of these public demands which has further popularized the idea of a separate Kalmunai administrative district. The establishment of the proposed Kalmunai district can increase the human capacity of the district's administration and the public-service delivery institutions on one hand and can improve the efficiency of service delivery on the other. However, if the proposed Kalmunai district is established a large number of bilingual officers would be vital to implement the official language policy. Moreover, it would be imperative to provide everything related to administrative procedures, including applications, forms, communications and reports in all official languages.

As Tshukudu (2014) stressed, human resources play a critical role in the implementation of decentralization initiatives as a strategy to improve service delivery functions of central government at the local level (where service delivery is needed most). Human and physical resources also determine the type of working environment at service delivery institutions. If daily administrative processes in the proposed district were entirely conducted in the Tamil language and the linguistic concerns of the Sinhalese were not considered, the administrative system in the proposed district would be bound to fail.

Reconcile distance and transport related issues in accessing public services: As discussed earlier, Tamil-speaking populations in Kalmunai region often face a number of challenges attempting to access public services offered by Amparai district secretariat and other government departments located in Amparai town. Due to the limited number of vehicles, transportation vessels and road networks, it is extremely difficult for the residents of the coastal belt to reach governmental offices on time. We estimate that distance and suboptimal public transportation would also pose serious challenges for the success of public service delivery in the proposed Kalmunai administrative district due to the proposed location for its capital and for the establishment of its secretariat.

The history of the political discourse regarding the Kalmunai district has shown conflicts pertaining to the location of the new district secretariat within the proposed district. The proposed Kalmunai district would span an

area of 1890 km^{-2}. Its North-South axis would be about 110 km. The leaders of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) a major political force advocating the proposed district have suggested that the secretariat be situated in Kalmunai a town in the northern end of the proposed district. If the district secretariat and other government departments of the Kalmunai district were built in Kalmunai most of the residents of the district would face inconveniences in terms of transportation to access the services obtainable through these offices. In 2003, an initiative was taken to establish the proposed Kalmunai district; however, the project was soon abandoned due to the lack of consensus among the Muslim politicians on the matter (Yusoff and Sarjoon, 2016). If the proposed district was formed government authorities and politicians especially Muslim leaders would find it difficult to determine where the secretariat and those institutions should be.

This study showed contested views among the public and the politicians in terms of what the name of the proposed district should be and where to establish the new district secretariat and governmental departments. So far the leaders of SLMC have failed to propose any suitable location. They believe that Kalmunai an old town promoted to Ist municipality status in 2001, should be the capital of the proposed administrative district. Politicians on the other side of the aisle have opposed SLMC's view of the future of the region. A.L.M. Athaullah, the leader of the National Congress (NC) has rather been in favour of having Akkaraippatthu as the capital of the proposed district (Yusoff and Sarjoon, 2016).

The public in the Kalmunai region do not seem to take a clear stance on this matter. Most of the residents of the region demand for the establishment of the new district with little concern as to where to have the secretariat and without attempting to forecast the potential challenges that may arise and prevent those in other parts of the proposed district from accessing public services offered by the new secretariat. Moderate voices have called for the establishment of the district secretariat and the other governmental departments in a suitable place which would be conveniently accessible to the majority of the population at Kalmunai district. Considering that Akkaraippatthu a town upgraded to Municipal Council status in 2011 is situated in the middle of the north-south axis of the proposed district and enjoys better transportation and public facilities than Kalmunai, we believe that to place the main governmental offices there would be a rational choice as they would be more accessible to majority of the general populace. Akkaraippatthu would be at the centre of the proposed

Kalmunai administrative district. Thus, residents in all parts of the proposed district would be able to reach it with ease.

We observed a range of opinions among the residents of Kalmunai region regarding the possible location of a Kalmunai district secretariat and departments. According to a former non-cabinet minister (I/P/M/01, Personal communication, 28 August 2014) Nintavur, a city located between Kalmunai and Akkaraippatthu would be a suitable and central place to build all of the necessary offices. A retired senior administrator (I/C/M/04, Personal communication, 21 March 2015) rather suggested that Oluvil, a newly emerging village with a national university and a newly-built harbour could serve as a suitable place to build these offices.

Considering that passage ways leading to the main highway are closed and these cities are accessible for the majority of the population, we reckon that to establish the proposed district secretariat in one of these areas would be a rational choice. Politicians, SLMC leaders in particular, should consider these areas as potential locations for the district secretariat and governmental departments of the proposed district because distance has had serious negative effects on the service delivery performance of Amparai district secretariat and became one of the drivers for public demands as shown earlier in this study.

Equality in service delivery: One of the factors that made Tamil-speakers in Amparai district experience an intensified need for a new administrative district at the Kalmunai region is the ethnic domination of the Sinhalese within the district secretariat and other government departments in Amparai town and the marginalization of Tamil-speakers. The ethnic dominance of the Sinhalese contributed to a phenomenon of planned delay of services allocated to the Tamil-speaking population. As mentioned earlier in section 4.3 public resources have traditionally been allocated in a manner favouring the Sinhalese of Amparai. Hence, the establishment of the proposed Kalmunai district is not only expected to boost the delivery of public services to Tamil-speakers but should also result in more involvement of the Tamil-speaking community in the decision-making process as Tamil-speakers, mostly Muslims get appointed in a range of bureaucratic positions in the new district. However, a good proportion of the non-Muslim population of Kalmunai, mainly made up of Tamils and Sinhalese has voiced out concerns regarding the administration of the proposed district being potentially dominated by Muslims which could result in the

marginalization of non-Muslims in terms of public service and resource sharing. It is noteworthy that Muslim politicians and activists have long been popularizing the idea of the proposed district as a district for Muslims. Establishing the district on such basis may result in another form of domination, leading to inequality in service delivery much like the case is now with the present district administration of Amparai.

Therefore, if the proposed Kalmunai district was established, it would be necessary to ensure equality in delivering service to the public without discrimination based on ethnicity, religion and language. Government authorities and politicians, especially the Muslim leaders should ensure a working environment at the district secretariat and other government departments that is conducive to equality between all the factions of the society, especially the minorities and backward groups. Recruiting administrative elites and other officers in a reasonable manner in these offices, facilitating the public to access the service in their own language and sharing available resources in a reasonable and equitable way shall benefit all ethnic groups. Good governance and inclusive policies are some of the important preconditions that can ensure equity in delivering and accessing public services in the proposed district. However, this requires well-structured planning and careful implementation of policies and programs. The mechanisms must be monitored and accountability must be stressed.

CONCLUSION

The management of a plural society is much more difficult than a homogenous one. A plural society consists of a population with distinct ethnicities, religions and languages with more expressed territorial lines. Failure to accommodate the interests of different groups would lead to the domination of one ethnic group. Consequently the language of that group and its aspirations would be characteristic of the administration. The dreams and goals of the other groups often the minorities would then be marginalized. Such a situation makes minorities seriously challenged and they end up voicing up their concerns and grievances in multiple forms. This is exactly the case with the district administration Amparai in the eastern part of Sri Lanka. Due to the complexity of the ethnic composition of the district, the segmentation of different communities, language differences and the location of the administrative machinery, political conflicts have been rampant in Amparai.

Although, the majority in the district are Tamil-speakers (Muslims and Tamils) they continue to experience many difficulties in accessing public services

offered by the district's secretariat and other governmental departments located in Amparai town. The distance between Amparai town and the homes of the Tamil-speaking populations; the domination of the ethnic majority of Amparai town in district administrative machinery; the exclusive usage of their language, Sinhala, in administrative affairs with no regard to the official language policy of Sri Lanka have been the major factors responsible for the disgrace of Tamil-speakers in the district administration.

This study revealed that the present district administrative machinery located at Amparai town was not supportive to Tamil-speakers. The delivery of public services was shown to be suboptimal in many areas. Although Tamil-speakers are the majority of the district's population and reside primarily in the coastal belt of the district, i.e., the Kalmunai region, the district secretariat and other governmental departments have been placed in a Sinhalese-dominated area-very far from the settlements of Tamil-speakers. This has posed challenges for Tamil-speakers in terms of accessing governmental offices on one hand and it has allowed Sinhalese and Sinhala language to dominate the district's administrative bodies on the other hand. The district secretariat continues to carry on all affairs in the Sinhala language, albeit being poorly understood by Tami-speakers, resulting in communication difficulties at these offices.

Policy provisions related to the official languages of the country have recognized Tamil and Sinhala as the official language and urged for the the inclusion of Tamil in public administrative processes, particularly in the north-eastern region. Yet, the central government has traditionally turned down all requests to appoint a district secretary and a considerable administrative officers capable of speaking the Tamil language or from the Tamil-speaking community. All these service delivery issues at Amparai district have made the Tamil-speakers of the Kalmunai region call for a new administrative district and administrative machinery in Kalmunai.

Decentralization can be realized in many ways. Basically, it involves the rearrangement of public institutions to accommodate ethnic and linguistic minorities and achieve equality in terms of public service delivery. Establishing administrative districts and divisions is one of such ways by which ethno-linguistic and regionally concentrated minorities could feasibly access public services. In this perspective, the Tamil-speaking residents of the Kalmunai region have called for a new administrative body with the objective of eliminating some or all of the challenges they face on daily basis when trying to access public services offered by the present district administrative machinery.

They have cited that the present district administration machinery is located too far from their settlements and dominated by the other ethno-linguistic group but minority in district's population. This study showed that the Kalmunai region is distinct compared to the rest of Amparai district in terms of its geographic, economical and socio-cultural attributes.

Evidence suggests that the establishment of Kalmunai administrative district may dramatically improve public service functions in the region. The new district would allow the majority of the population at Kalmunai region to communicate feasibly to fulfil their needs in their own language. The new district would also contribute to reduced public risk as it would allow people to access services offered by the district offices without having to travel long distances and facing communication barriers. District bureaucracy would work in a way that best improves the quality of life and socio-economic conditions of the residents of Kalmunai.

Political representatives would plan and implement region-oriented public policies, projects and programs. However, the success of the proposed administrative district and the realization of better service delivery mechanisms rather depends on careful management of resources, projects and programs. The district secretariat and the other governmental bodies in the proposed district must be managed effectively and efficiently. Central government officials and the political forces should focus on achieving justice and equality before and after the establishment of the proposed Kalmunai district. Public services should be delivered in a fair manner to all the ethno-linguistic groups, the Sinhalese and the Tamil-speakers. Moreover, the location of the district secretariat and other public-service delivery departments should be chosen to achieve maximum convenience for the majority of the district's population.

This study has also found that the Kalmunai region has suffered from a civil war and natural disasters over the years including a tsunami and multiple floods. Unfortunately, support from the governmental institutions has been lacking and insufficient to overcome all that. We observed a great number of service-delivery issues crippling the administrative machinery at Amparai town. Hence, to establish a new administrative district that covers the entire Kalmunai region should reconcile a number of administrative issues and would have a positive impact on public service delivery in the region. The Kalmunai region has special problems that require attention. Decisions regarding the delivery of a number of public services, development efforts and disaster-relief programs must be adequate and inclusive. The region seems to be in desperate need for a separate institutional

body capable of making important decisions and formulating and implementing much needed policies. According to Scott (2009) decentralization should enhance the efficiency of the public sector and improve public service delivery. Proper regulations would then create the necessary conditions for economic and regional development.

We conclude that the existing administrative setting at Kalmunai begs for a new district to be established in the region to manage a range of service delivery functions. Historically, Kalmunai had been treated as a special administrative area to facilitate special service-delivery functions in the region on 2 occasions: between the period of 1942-1946 and from 2005-2008. Until this very day the region continues to be be managed by the government of Sri Lanka as a separate administrative district in terms of education, judicial administration, telecommunication, heath care, etc. It is noteworthy that over the past 40 year or so, Sri Lanka's central government has not authorized the establishment of any new administrative district to improve public service-delivery functions to involve regional and ethnic minorities in administrative decisions or to facilitate development efforts. We urge Sri Lankan government authorities to consider the proposal of a Kalmunai administrative district on the above basis.

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