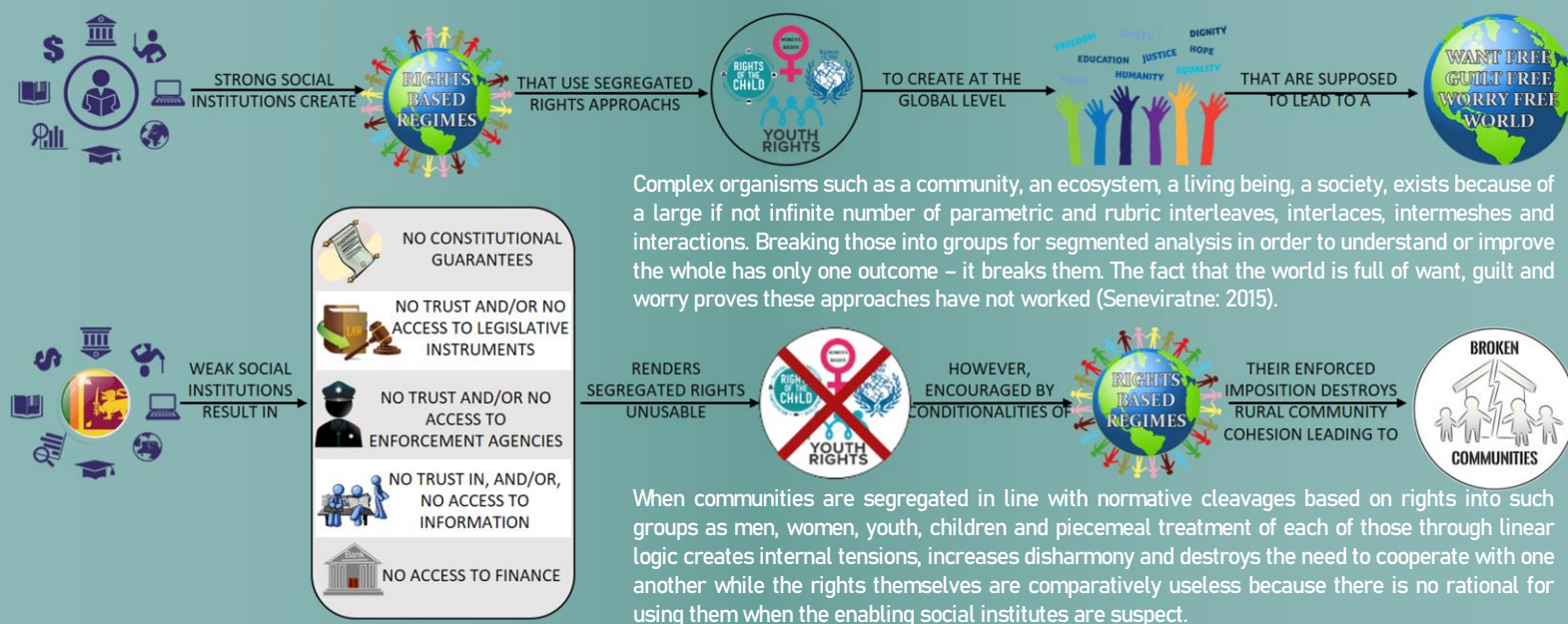




## The GMSL sees that unnatural administrative and rights based cleavages lead to fractured communities

Through COLIBRI, the GMSL was tasked with improving both the biodiversity of the KCF as well as the livelihoods of those living adjacent to it. In its original design, the GMSL had, perhaps naively, designed its intervention through convention sectoral thinking. It used an approach that had for decades targeted specific components of a community based largely on treating people living within administrative boundaries and via desegregated selection such as youth, women, environment, water etc. and/or their vulnerabilities with respect to various rights rubrics - especially groups such as women, children and disabled. While these approaches may yield temporary positives, as shown by Doucouliagos and Paldam

(2007, 2010), such efforts driven by various forms of tied-aid have yielded zero accumulation and zero growth and in fact the GMSL had already proved (Seneviratne:2011) that these types of initiatives had the opposite effect to the one intended because it alienated community members from one another when only parts of that community became the beneficiaries of a civil society development initiative. Furthermore, it has been seen that rights regimes such as the one that nominally exists in Sri Lanka do not work very well due to the issues outlined in the diagram below (Seneviratne:2013).



## The GMSL redefines how it should approach rural development as a whole of community effort



It became obvious to the GMSL that a different approach was needed if its efforts were to yield lasting results and for this it took a deeper look at what gives communities strength and resilience while ensuring social wellbeing. As seen in the figure at left, the factors that impact the cohesion of a community, although many, share the one all-encompassing, all-founding trait of “commonality”. That is why we call it a “commune”. In the context of development that means that if one individual member of the community wins it is a victory for the whole community and vice versa. Every thought, word and action of every individual must serve to increase strength, mutuality of purpose, agreement on goals of the entire group. This is where the GMSL saw the folly of the ways it (and most others) have attempted to intercede or treat these groups. It was erroneously thought that servicing each need separately would feed the needs of the whole but this is not so simply because linear approaches that segment say a household, a GN, a group violates the base premise of commonality. It was then no small wonder why these types of development initiatives had a very limited lifespan and despite earnest claims of sustainability, resulted in the sad outcomes of aid driven development that Doucouliagos and Paldam identified. Therefore the GMSL saw one key, one foundation principle, one driver for any and all efforts within a community. That is, that if a development initiative is to succeed, then the entire community must be treated as a whole – not through segregated treatment leading to the innovative new rule it created for itself.

For any rural development effort to succeed it must be a holistic exercise that treats all of the community, not any specific part of it.

## The GMSL reimagines the constituent components of a community when many share large commons such as a forest or river as was the case in the KCF

When the GMSL research team initially commenced its study of the treatment area, two factors stood out immediately. The first was that all settlements in the Knuckles Conservation Forest area were along the various river banks and the second was that those river banks had been excluded from the conservation forest itself. Combined, they indicated that when considering large forests or entire rivers, the dynamics of a community were not in line with administrative boundaries or legally demarcated protected areas but followed natural ordering and settling as has been the case historically. These people had used both the forest and the river for centuries and created their own unique intracommunal and intercommunal balances while they also contributed substantially to the health of their own environments. Through enforced disenfranchisement that was no longer possible. However, it was critical to recognize that their use of their environment created a common set of torques and tensions that were mixed and, in most cases inseparable such as water use upstream and downstream. Therefore, the GMSL saw first that the “community” it must treat cannot be piecemeal or focused on administrative boundaries or segmented groups and next it saw that every single human being living in the area must substantially take part in harmonizing the dynamics of the human-environment interface vis-à-vis the KCF and its surrounds. Therefore, the GMSL concluded that when treating areas whose peoples used very large commons, they must include all of them across those commons as “its” “treatment community”.

## The GMSL took all the communities living across 7 basins as its treatment group



When considering managing the human-environment dynamics of large natural commons, the “community” that must be treated is everyone who uses them



# LEAVE NOTHING AND

**NO ONE BEHIND**  
GMSL's whole-of-community approach to treating the KCF



Optimizing the human-environment interface of large natural commons by blanket covering its entire community

## THE OUTCOME

*"It has to be through the rivers that we can make sense of all of this"* - Arjuna

*"If we can't get them to work together, this will fail"* - Amal

*"They have been spoiled by NGOs. We must clean out their heads"* - Suranjan

*"Death to rural communes come in many forms. Donor funds is one of them if those are not used well"* - Arjuna

Sans flexibility and understanding on the part of the EU who said "OK! They cannot really see how to program this well until and unless a quality research exercise was done", this could never have happened.

This?

This would have died in a dream world of honest and hardworking women, tired and worried men, threatened and crazed animals, beaten up and destroyed trees and a sad RIP for the idea of collectivized engagement of life for life's sake.

We?

We are so fortunate. As one. As all.. This juxtaposition of everything good for everyone's good.

RARE

To the GMSL, this lens rationalized the baseline claim that "Community" was everything that moves within a given space, lives by it, lives through it, enhances it, and destroys it. This knowledge, as an outcome, was fundamental to all that followed.

With the new approach, donor funds started to work harder, more holistically, more efficiently and more impactfully than if those funds had been utilized in line with mainstream thinking in CSO driven development

It was never about numbers. Or adherence to Indicators. Or Budget lines. Or checkboxes. Or tastefully presented reports. Or lessons learned. Or best practices. Or job savers. Or missions accomplished for no other purpose than to say "onward to the next project". This was simply and powerfully, an assertion that everyone involved decided that they will individually and collectively be able to say, quietly and never proudly, "we left nothing and no one behind".

Whole-of-community efforts as a best practice

"We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The river that waters us is our brother. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our relatives. The rocky crests, the dew in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man all belong to the same family." – Chief Seattle

The GMSL, using this adjusted view of things saw everyone and everything within and around the KCF as their treatment group and as such there was no requirement for targeting discreet entities within it such as a household, a state official, a species, a river etc. The action resultant of this lensing was that everyone became involved in everything – regardless of whether or not they personally benefited from it as long as the "community" benefited from it. By default then, this approach prevented delineation and massively improved ownership because the effort was not seen as something that was advantageous to the plants, the animals, the people and the earth. Most importantly, it also meant that individual profit was organically subsumed in communal gain and gave a real, concrete, "can hold on to" meaning to the phrase "community livelihood, community biodiversity shall both be improved".

"Many people have come here and worked with us but we never saw so much drive or commitment on the part of the communities nor did we see the type of training we were given. Anyone can come here and see that there is something very different and very lasting happening here" – W.G. Dingiri Banda of Laggala-Pallegama

The GMSL has earmarked specific funds for specific tasks at the design stage but the change in approach meant that internal efficiencies could be leveraged to reduce the overall costs of the exercise. For example, when considering the entire community of farmers in a given area, the "cost per household" was dramatically reduced allowing for an increase in the total number of families that could be treated. Another example, when links were to be established between the communities and other stakeholders, those other stakeholders came in without too much persuasion on the part of the GMSL and volunteered their services increasing the tightness of the bonds between the people and the regulatory institutions.

Most importantly, with everyone literally and figuratively inside each other's lives, the desire and/or need and/or opportunity to short-change the effort or cause it to falter or fail never arose while the level of triangulation of effort significantly increased the validity of the findings of internal monitoring.



Some of the things GMSL managed because of the changed approach
Breaking from the norm of allowing people to opt-in to a program, defaulted every member of the entire community as part of the program and gave them each a chance to opt-out. In the end, opt-outs were just 3%
Increased the number of GNs from 18 to 27
Increased the beneficiaries from 1560 to 2250
Created active Children's Societies for no additional cost
Created a socio-environmental "army" of 60 trainers and environmental monitors for no extra cost but who committed to work voluntarily beyond project life cycle
Increased the number of links between communities and other stakeholders from 5 to 42
Expanded its target livelihood sectors beyond agriculture into tourism and waste management at no extra cost
Obtained the consent and commitment of the people to create at least one "garbage free village" at no extra cost
Expanded its target work to include digging agro-wells, repairing transit structures such as anicuts and improving localized green cover work to water body catchments
Obtained free plants and manpower to improve green cover beyond the funds allocated for it through COLIBRI
True meaning was given to the phrase "learning and sharing" with every single member of the community contributing with whatever skills they had to make the overall effort successful



The reason why living things band together despite disparities and differences is to increase safety, reduce their life-footprint, maximize resource usage, reduce waste and improve their overall health, wellbeing and continuity. This is true of everything be it human, animal or plant. The wise know this and how individual needs play, manage, support and damage every other and also realize that even things that our life experiences call inanimate or dead have lives of their own and that the assurance of their health and wellbeing is mandatory to the overall wellbeing of the entire community. The whole-of-community approach of the GMSL proved this and it hopes that when there are future projects where the requirement is to manage both human settlements and environments, this is the approach that everyone takes.