Executive Summary

This study investigates the stakeholder perceptions on the governance structures and procedures introduced in 2006 and facilitated for nearly six years thus far in 170 villages in Hambantota and Monaragala districts by CARE International Sri Lanka through its project, Local Efforts for Empowerment and Development (LEaD). CARE attempts to set up community level structures below the local government level and link them with the overall system of governance through the project in order to fill the gap of an absence of a governance structure for the people to participate at the village and Grama Niladari Division (GND) levels. The project introduced two additional governance structures, Village Organizing Committee (VOC) and Rural Coordinating Committee (RCC), in order to work with the existing system of governance in Sri Lanka. This study was conducted in order to comprehend the way people perceive or notice VOUs and RCCs and the things related to them in a systematic way.

The study first identified the different kinds of stakeholders related to the newly introduced governance structures and the facilitation process of CARE. Then, perceptions of these stakeholders, in the form of primary data, were surveyed using a semi-structured questionnaire and discussions on open-ended questions in three selected Divisional Secretariat Divisions in Hambantota, Suriyawewa and Tissamaharamaya. Analysis was of the two main forms, quantitative and qualitative, using a number of tools namely, descriptive statistics, ANOVA test, key-driver analysis, perception gap analysis and qualitative tabulation of perception summaries.

The study achieved the aim through the results with a number of major findings. First, it was found that it is generalizable that all stakeholder categories are in a highly positive perception regarding the newly introduced governance structures and the overall involvement of the project by way of facilitation. Second, both senior and junior government officials are the most satisfied regarding the facilitation provided by the project and the importance of the new

structures and procedures for filling the gaps. Third, women and poorest of the poor are the very satisfied among the marginalized groups compared to those of the youth. Fourth, the three main activities, improving governance and participation, promotion of sustainable development and resource mobilization and infrastructure development are the key drivers of satisfaction of the stakeholders while other sections are also highly positive. Fourth, respondents' satisfaction on the improvement of the network infrastructure such as telecommunication facilities is lower compared to that of point infrastructures. Fifth, respondents are less satisfied on the provision of adequate information on marketing and promotion of linkages. Sixth, respondents are not very satisfied with the participation of responsible males in the project related activities.

Finally, policy implications were drawn based on the major findings of the study. The consensus of the all stakeholders of the view that newly introduced governance structures are well suited to addressing the issues related to community participation, development and poverty alleviation, highlights the crucial need of restructuring the remaining local governance system by introducing lower level structures. It also highlights the need to prioritize the activities of development plans with the participation of local communities. Since there is a perception gap between some directly involved stakeholders and indirectly involved stakeholders, views of both of these categories should be incorporated when setting priorities in development plans. Since some human resources like 'youth' and responsible males in households are relatively reluctant, strategies should be introduced in mobilizing such resources. It also seems that the coordination mechanism among the existing regional governance bodies should be strengthened until new governance structures are introduced, restructured or corrected. Agriculture, being the main economic activity of the majority of people, attention should be given to address the marketing problems. However, since perceptions may differ from reality, the way of restructuring the remaining local governance system should be based not only on perceptions but also on proper impact assessments. A compromise between the two is necessary for sustainability.