

# FAITH AS A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION & PARTICIPATORY TRANSFORMATION: THE CASE OF GALE DEWALAYA, MINUWANGODA, SRI LANKA

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**Abstract:** Scholars argue that faith groups often lead and drive urban regeneration and local development. However, the knowledge in this regard is seemingly limited to western church-based faith groups, and the global south experience has often been overlooked. This paper explores the role of faith in community organization and participatory community transformation, focusing on the case Gale Dewalaya, a community-centered shrine in Minuwangoda, Sri Lanka. Drawing upon the conceptual framework, on Mancini and Bowen's Community Resilience, Social Organization, and Change Model (2009) and Chaskin's Community Capacity Framework (2001), the research examines how faith-centered communities organize and transform spatial, economic, and socio-political structures towards local community development. The research is a qualitative case study, and focus-group discussions, semi-structured interviews have been used for the data collection. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis. Findings of the study reveal that faith-centered communities participate in community transformation, enhancing community capacity, social capital, and resilience, with spatial, economic and socio-political outcomes. The study also highlights the importance of community-led spatial planning associated with faith-centered community networks to foster inclusive and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *Community Capacity; Community Organization; Community Resilience; Participatory Planning; Social Organization.*

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## 1. Introduction

Faith is one influential factor that communities are organized around. According to De Beer, "Faith groups are the drivers of urban regeneration from below, or from within" (2018, p. 4). De Beer further states that faith communities comprise of local neighbourhoods, while faith-centered actions refer to responses of such communities to urban transitions. Freestanding faith groups have the potential to transform communities. The strategic intervention of Trinity Church Wall Street US for urban challenges in New York City (Queenan et al., 2021), the urban development led by US Christian Community Development Association (2018), the community support system by the local church community in Rocinha (the largest slum in Rio de Janeiro) are a few examples from the global context.

"Cities have been profoundly shaped by religious ideas and practices" (Day & Edwards, 2021, as cited in Ives and Baker, 2024, p. 5). Faith influences physical environments, institutional structures, and the lives of citizens, showing that these faith actions concerning urban development. As Hague (2006) mentioned in *New Urban Planning*, planning with partners is one of the ten core principles of *New Urban Planning*, Planners should plan with them rather than for them.

It has concerned that planners need to understand the underlying civil society, networks, community conditions, community desires, and goals to shift the planning perspective from government-focused (inside-out) to citizen-focused (outside-in) (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011). For that, 'how communities are organized to participate' should be understood with its length and depth.'

As spirituality is one influential factor for community actions, it contributes to people-engaged, successive outcomes. Therefore, planners need to understand these kinds of faith-centered community empowerment and their formal and informal community ties to enhance the productivity of planning outcomes. Accordingly, this study's objectives specifically focus on understanding how the Gale Dewalaya – a faith-centered local shrine-based community located in Minuwangoda, Sri Lanka – is organized and how it has been contributing to participatory community transformation.

## 2. Literature Review

Boonstra and Boelens (2011) argue that participatory spatial planning attempts are criticized for producing disappointing results (Boonstra & Boelens, 2011) and explain the concept of self-organization. It describes initiatives within civil society from autonomous community-based networks, which are part of the urban system but independent of government procedures. According to study on 'When Self-Organization Intersects with Urban Planning: Two Cases from Helsinki (2015) by Horelli et al (2015), self-organized initiatives significantly impact urban transformations by fostering community

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engagement. This study also highlights the role of citizens shaping public spaces through self-organization to influence policy decisions.

Asset-Based Community Development or ABCD approach is based on developing communities through available community assets and mobilizing individuals and communities to jointly develop their strengths. As an approach to participatory community-based development, this is the opposite of the Deficit-based method or the Top-down method (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

A study on ‘Power, Conflict, and Spirituality – Qualitative Study of Faith-centered Community Organizing (2008)’ done by Christens et al. (2008) was focused on the collective action of faith-centered community groups and their ability to influence the societal systems against existing power structures. The findings of the research reveal connections between power, strategy, and spirituality in faith organizations.

## 2.1. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Social Organization theory was originally developed to examine the root causes of crime rates in neighbourhoods by Show and McKay (1942, 1969). Contemporary researchers have expanded the theory by exploring subjects like, societal value systems, civility and mutual trust.

From explaining risk reduction to looking at community capacity enhancement efforts, the theory of social organization has shifted to community social organization. It explains values, norms, and performance in a community that organizes and facilitates its members, including networks of people, reciprocity, social support, and control. The Processes primarily focus on Networks, Social Capital & Community capacity

### 2.1.1 Mancini and Bowen’s Community Resilience, Social Organization, and Change Model

Jay A. Mancini and Gary L. Bowen introduced community resilience, social organization, and change model based on community social organization in 2009 (Figure 1). According to their studies, social organization is the process by which communities achieve goals through networks, and reciprocity in relationships, social norms, and standards that control actions and collaboration (Mancini, Martin and Bowen, 2003, as cited in Mancini & Bowen, 2009).

As per the model, key elements are placed in a pyramid within three main sections. They are analysing the network structures, community conditions and characteristics in the base section, community action processes of social capital and community capacity in the mid-section, and community results associated with resilience in the top section.

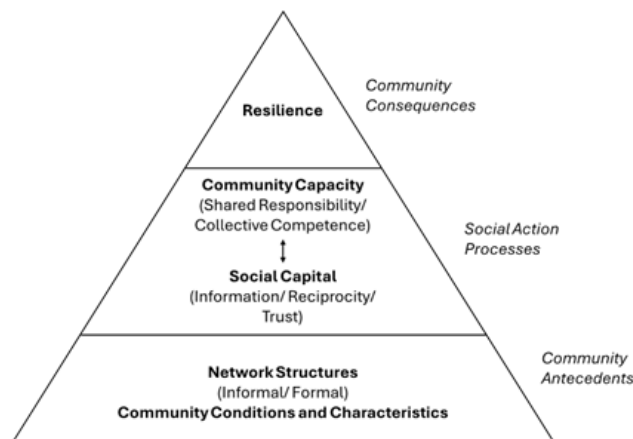


Figure 1: Mancini and Bowen’s Social Organization and Change Model (2009) (Source: Mancini & Bowen)

## 2.2. COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND CAPACITY BUILDING FRAMEWORK

Robert J. Chaskin has developed a community capacity and capacity-building definitional framework (Figure 2) through his study, ‘Building Community Capacity: A Definitional Framework and Case Studies from a Comprehensive Community Initiative (2001).’ The author explored community capacity-building agenda through two case studies (Milwaukee and Hartford, Chicago, US) within a multisite comprehensive community (CCI).

He presented the framework with six dimensions on community capacity and capacity building.

1. Community capacity fundamental characteristics
2. Level of social agency
3. Functions of community capacity
4. Strategies for building community capacity
5. Conditioning influences

6. Outcomes

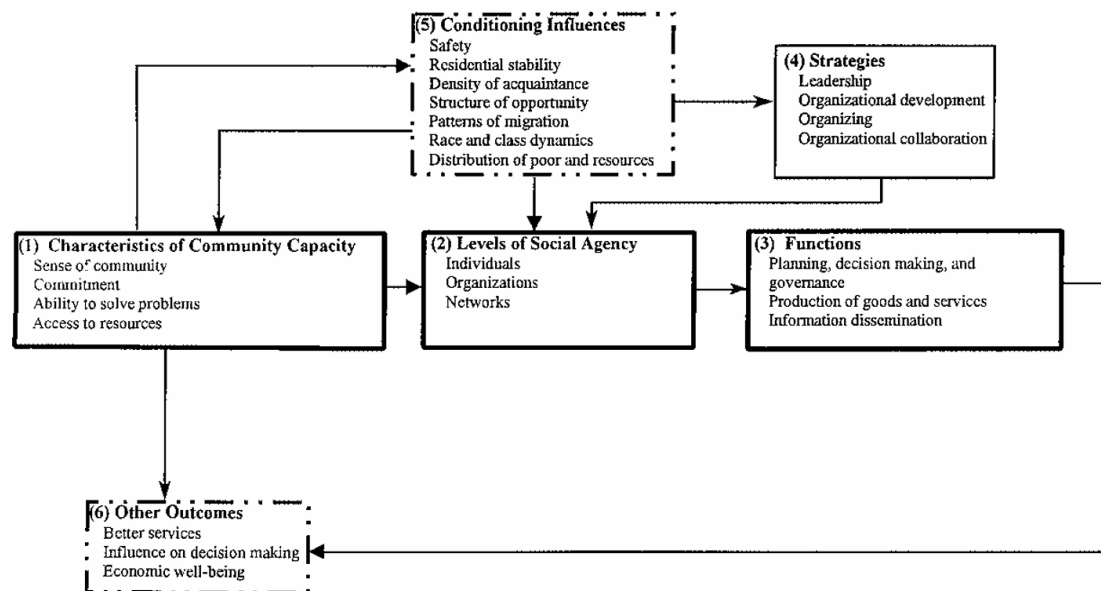


Figure 2: Chaskin’s Community Capacity and Capacity Building Relational Framework (2001)

Through this framework, the author stated that capacity-building efforts may differ with structural background, community engagement, and responsiveness of communities.

Most preceding studies are focused on exploring how communities are organized based on secular structures and the role of planning in such communities, but less clarification on community organizing rooted in faith or spiritual values. Therefore, there is a need for further investigation on how moral values like faith might motivate community participation, build legitimacy, and reinforce collective identity in transformative ways. Given that a country like Sri Lanka, located in the global south, which relies heavily on faith and related actions, this absence of knowledge is notable.

3. Methodology

Guided by Mancini and Bowen’s (2009) Community Resilience, Social Organization, and Change Model, and supported by Chaskin’s (2001) Community Capacity Framework, the study explores community organization and the resulting participatory community transformation in following themes, using mentioned parameters under three main sections as illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1: Sections and Parameters of the Conceptual Framework  
(Source: Author)

Section	Main Parameters	Sub-parameters 1	Sub-parameters 2
<b>BASE SECTION</b> <i>Network Structures and Effect Levels</i>	Network structures and social agency	Informal networks	
		Formal networks	
		Levels of network effects	First-order effects
			Second-order effects
	Third-order effects		
<b>MID SECTION</b> <i>Social Action Processes: Community Capacity and Social Capital</i>	Social capital	Information and shared belief	
		Reciprocity	
		Trust and solidarity	
	Community capacity	Shared Responsibility	Sense of community
			Community commitment
		Collective Competence	Problem-solving ability
		Access to community resources	
<b>TOP SECTION</b> <i>Community Results: Community Resilience through Spatial,</i>	Spatial Outcomes	Neighborhood revitalization	Infrastructure improvements
			Spatial transformations
	Economic Outcomes	Employment opportunities	

<b>Economic, and Socio-Political outcomes</b>	Socio-Political Outcomes	Entrepreneurial ventures	
		Responsive governance	
		Capacity to influence policy and systems	
	Resident empowerment and cohesion	Sense of belonging	
		Mutual accountability	
		Civic skills	

The framework consists of three sections: base, mid, and top. In the base section, it includes *Community Antecedents*, which explain community network structures and effect levels. The mid-section includes *Social Action Processes*, which explain Social Capital and Community capacity. And the top section details *Community Consequences*, which explain the Community Resilience in spatial, economic, and socio-political outcomes.

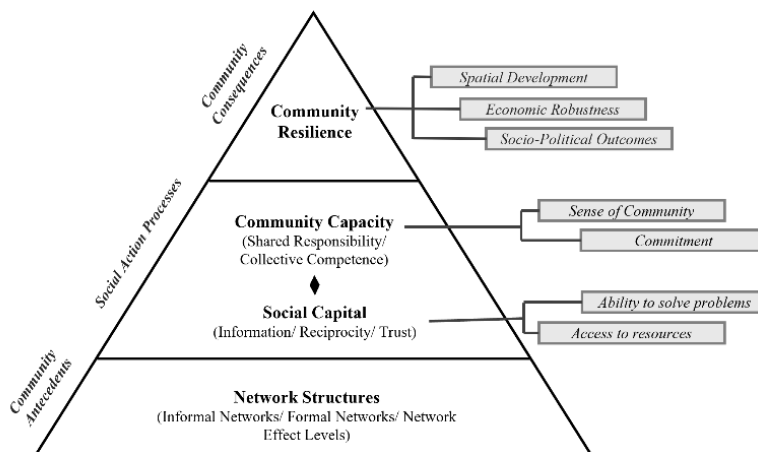


Figure 3: Visual Interpretation of the Conceptual Framework (Source: Author)

This study took an exploratory nature as it explored the case in the sacred shrine of Gale Dewalaya faith-centered community in Minuwangoda, Sri Lanka. This sacred shrine is located at the Gampaha District, Minuwangoda Divisional Secretariat Division. This shrine is led through a community faith organization named ‘Siduhath Samithiya’, and the community has been organized and shaped under the guidance of that organization. This shrine-based community is located at Minuwangoda city’s downtown from 2.5km from the city centre as shown in Figure 4.

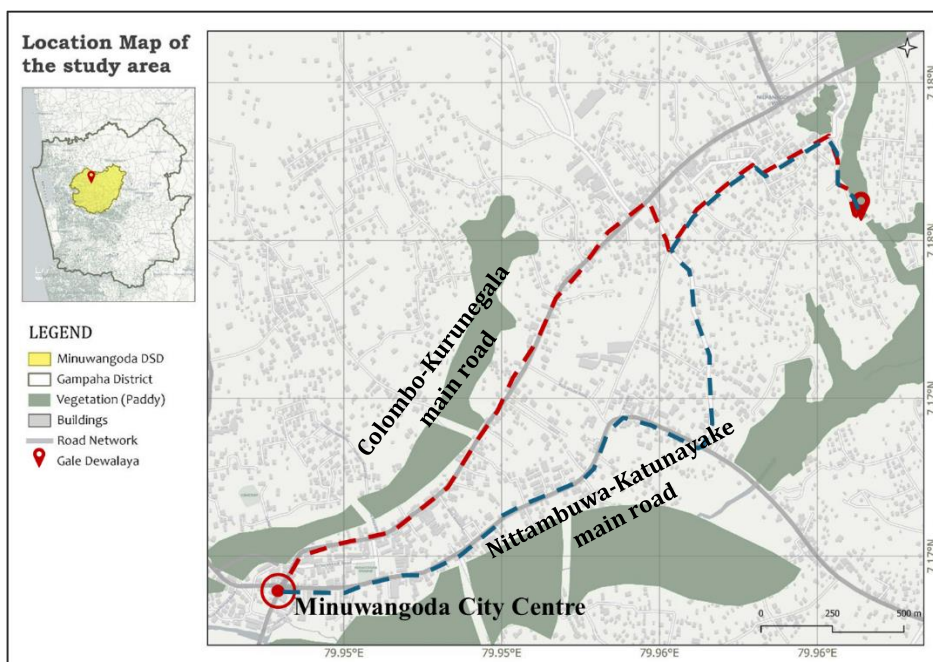


Figure 4: Location of the study area (Source: Author)

This sacred shrine is dedicated to the local deity, ‘God Gambara Sri Siddha Suniyam’, who is devoted to prosperity and goodwill and has been worshiped by locals of the country for decades. Because of this sacred shrine has no dedicated priest, this shrine has become famous among the pilgrims within a considerably shorter period.

‘Siduhath Samithiya’ is the community faith organization that is playing its dual role as managing the shrine-related work and leading the community. The organization’s leadership structure consists of a head committee comprising a president, secretary, treasurer, and several subcommittee members, and 20 additional staff members who assist with operations. The faith community consists of around 70 families in the locality and spread across the area adjacent to the paddy lands as shown in Figure 5. The community itself plays a role in supporting and shaping around shrine’s activities.

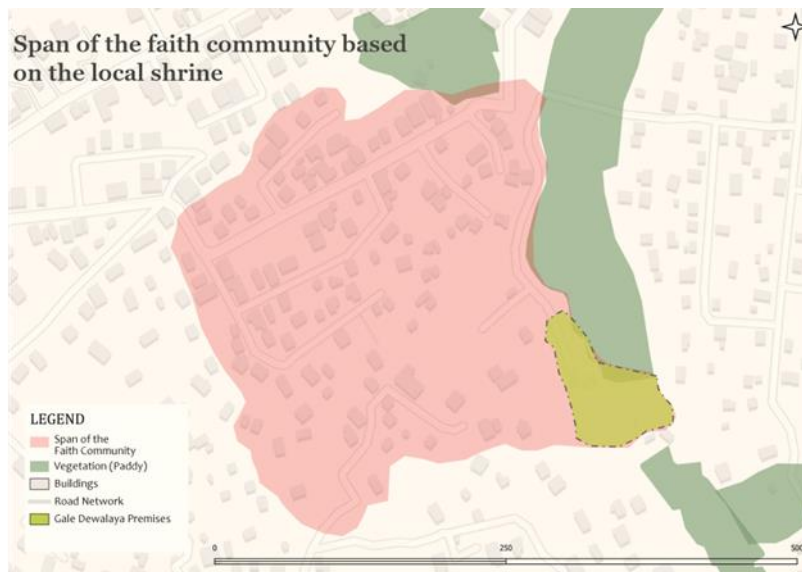


Figure 5: Faith-centered Community Span (Source: Information from Community Organization)

As this case serves as a lens to understand the transformative power of faith-centred organization of communities and the emerging results of community resilience, this study will focus on this specific case to respond to the below-mentioned research questions.

1. How Gale Dewalaya Faith centered community is organized?
2. How it has been contributing to participatory community transformation?

Scope of the study will be limited to this case as per the time constraints and availability of data.



Figure 6: Case study area (Source: Author)

With the qualitative nature of the study, Focused Group Discussions and key-informant semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the main data collection methods (Table 2). Specified semi-structured questionnaire guides were utilized for all data collections allowing both specific responses and individual perceptions to draw out broad themes and

interpretations. While FGD were conducted mainly to understand and evaluate the role of community organization in community transformation, Key informant interviews were to evaluate the results of the faith-based organizing.

Table 2: Main Data Collection methods and Sampling

<b>Data Collection Method</b>	<b>Sampling Method &amp; Sample Size</b>	<b>Selection criteria of participants</b>
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	Sampling Method: Purposeful Sampling Sample Size: Three representatives of Community Organization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretariat</li> <li>• Vice-secretariat</li> <li>• Vice-Treasurer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members of the community organization</li> <li>• Having a strong understanding of the community proceedings</li> <li>• Availability and consent for participation</li> </ul>
Key-informant semi-structured in-depth interviews	Sampling Method: Snowball Sampling Sample Size: Seven Key-informant Interviewees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three residents</li> <li>• Three local vendors</li> <li>• An officer from Minuwangoda Divisional Secretariat Office</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having initial understanding of the proceedings and outcomes of faith-based community organization</li> <li>• Direct/ indirect participation in community proceedings</li> <li>• Directly/ indirectly have an influence on community organization</li> <li>• Directly/ indirectly affected by the outcomes of community organization</li> </ul>
	<b>Interviewee Profile</b>	
	Resident 1	Age: 65y Gender: Female Unemployed Lived in the community over 40 years
	Resident 2	Age: 28y Gender: Male Employed as a community facilitator Born and raised in the community and actively participating in the faith community work
	Resident 3	Age: 46y Gender: Male Employed in government sector Lived in the community over 20 years and benefitted through shrine activities – renting out the lands for parking and vending
	Local Vendor 1	Age: 50y Gender: Female Items selling: Religious Offerings Period of sales activities: Over 20 years
	Local Vendor 2	Age: 38y Gender: Female Items selling: Local snacks and beverages Period of sales activities: 10-15 years
	Local Vendor 3	Age: 42y Gender: Male Items selling: Religious souvenirs and handicrafts Period of sales activities: Over 15 years
	Officer – Minuwangoda DS office	Local Authority officer-in-charge for Welfare and Development

As the second data collection method, non-participant observations were done to observe resulting community resilience (such as resulted spatial developments and economic vibrancy in the community), mainly to analyze how faith-centered organizing contributing to participatory community transformation. Observations were conducted on two weekdays and one day of weekends from 9am to 6pm. Free-form notes generated through FGD and interviews were assisted in the observations.

Secondary data collections through websites, social media posts and newspaper articles were also used to analyses the resulting community resilience in terms of spatial developments, economic robustness and socio-political outcomes. This involved publically available digital texts, photographs and content writings related to the study. Relevant digital content was located using purposive sampling and keyword searches across platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and relevant webpages. Newspaper articles collected through secondary sources were also reviewed. Only publicly accessible content was included, and user identities were anonymized to meet ethical standards.

Depending on the nature of the study and the data collection, Code book Thematic Analysis was used to analyze large bodies of subjective data. This analysis method aims to interpret the meanings of subjective experiences, views, and opinions of the interview participants with the research objectives. Deductive coding was used to determine the codes from the conceptual framework to code the dataset. Data was analyzed manually using MS Word and Excel software, deriving the underlying meanings of subjective narratives.

Table 3: Codes and Themes used for the Thematic Analysis  
(Source: Author)

Ref	Code	Meaning	Themes
1	Group Organization	The way of organization of the community, their initiation, proceedings, and maintenance	Network Structures and Effect Levels
2	Formal Networks	The nature of formal connections with internal & external parties	
3	Informal Networks	The nature of informal connections with internal & external parties	
4	Members' positions and responsibilities	Participation of community members for organization and execution of work to achieve desired goals	
5	Networks with other groups	How the community bridges with external parties	
6	Connections with authorities	How the community links with the dissimilar networks of the community like government agencies	
7	Flow of information and communication	How information is shared within the community and how it enhances the social capital to achieve results	Social Action Processes: Social Capital and Community Capacity
8	Trust and solidarity among community	How trust and solidarity have formed within community	
9	Trust, Solidarity between community and external parties	How trust and solidarity have formed between the community and the other parties	
10	Reciprocal relationships	Actions of the community organizing that illustrate reciprocal relationships and their results	
11	Opportunities and instrumental support	What are the extra opportunities achieved by community organization with the networks and social capital, and how do they affect achieving results	
12	Sense of community	Feeling of community members as one group and the feeling of belonging to the same	
13	Commitment	Work towards the collective well-being of community	
14	Ability to solve problems	Effective action of the community against challenges	
15	Access to resources	Availability of resources	
16	Spatial Developments	Neighborhood revitalization through infrastructure improvement and physical transformations	Community Results: Resilience in Spatial, Economic, and Political Dimensions
17	Economic Robustness	Outcomes of employment opportunities, entrepreneurial ventures	
18	Socio-political outcomes	Level of governance and capacity of the community to engage in policy making and resident empowerment, and social cohesion	

Limitations of the research method may include stereotypical limits associated with data collection methods. Since the data gathered led to a state of data saturation, this study only derives the responses of above-mentioned parties.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Answering the study's main objectives; how Gale Dewalaya faith-based community is organized and how it has been contributing to participatory community transformation, the results of the study revealed with three main sections according to the conceptual framework (figure 3). While the first (base) and second (mid) sections answer how this faith-based community is organized, third (top) section answers how it has been contributing to community transformation.

**Section 1** - Community Antecedents: Network Structures and Effect Levels

**Section 2** -

**Section 3** - Social Action Processes: Social Capital and Community Capacity

**Section 4** - Community Consequences: Community Resilience through Spatial, Economic, and Socio-Political outcomes

Each part interprets with interviewee narratives, secondary data, and site observations as qualitative interpretation of data.

#### 4.1. NETWORK STRUCTURES AND EFFECT LEVELS

Community organization is rooted in network structures, both informal and formal, which determine the scope of mobilization (Mancini & Bowen, 2009). Initially, "a set of farmers" established Gale Dewalaya as an informal ritual space, which evolved into a sanctuary, particularly during the 1988–1989 conflict period. These early networks led by faith laid the foundation for deeper community ties.

The formalization process began in 2005 with the establishment of a community faith group. Members were given roles and responsibilities, enhancing structure and devoting to god's work. As noted,

"This [community organization] has allowed us to directly participate in community work, assigning us formal responsibilities." (Resident 2)

"Earlier, there were no proper rules, and vendors used to set up wherever they wanted. But now, there is an organized system." (Local vendor 2)

These formal structures did not replace informal ones but strengthened and nourished them with spiritual ties. According to the framework, there are levels of Network effects.

##### 4.1.1 First-order (Bonding):

Formal responsibilities which are assigned through the community organization, make relationships and connections within the same network. As the representatives of the community organization clearly state,

"Here in our group, we have around 60 representatives, and all of us are community members with normal financial statuses. We are engaging in different services related to the community. Our shrine brings us all together."

"...we have President, Secretariat, Treasurer, and other organizational positions within the group."

"Every fourth Sunday of the month, all community members participate in the monthly meeting to discuss proceedings." (FGD)

##### 4.1.2 Second-order (Bridging):

This faith community serves as a platform and the leading force in shared community responsibility, bridging similar community networks with informal ties.

"There are no formal connections with other community groups in the area. But we build up informal connections in demanding times. Imagine if there is an occasion that a funeral aid society needs some help in a difficult situation, then upon their formal request, we present our help." (FGD)

##### 4.1.3 Third-order (Linking):

The community connects to dissimilar external networks and authorities. They collectively stand to acquire the rightful resources and opportunities with third-order networking.

"This faith-based community group is formally registered under the Divisional Secretariat office as a recognized community organization, and they operate under our guidance. They are maintaining their independence in managing shrine-related and community-related affairs, while collaborating with us on administrative and developmental matters." (Officer – Minuwangoda DS Office)

This illustrates the leadership and negotiated autonomy of this faith-based community. This manner the community is being organized around the faith-led values and the faith community organization act as a connector of networks within and between similar and dissimilar platforms where levels of networking coexist, and resources flow not in an extractive but in a circular manner.

#### 4.2. SOCIAL ACTION PROCESSES: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Social action processes in the Gale Dewalaya faith-centered community fosters Social Capital – resources built from reciprocal relationships in formal and informal networks. This capital grows through shared information, trust, and reciprocal relationships, enhancing community resilience.

Information exchange is the key. The organization conducts monthly meetings to align collective community goals. As the representatives of the community organization stated,

"We arranged group meetings every month. Our community members present the suggestions and second them accordingly... [In our discussions] we consider the common interest and proceed accordingly." (FGD)

Reciprocal relationships form the foundation of community support systems.

"Through organizing, we help the sick, support struggling families, and ensure no one is left behind in our community." (Resident 1)

"We supported the community when there was a need, such as to provide with instrumental support to hospitals, repairing school buildings, temples, and offering help to the poor and disabled in our community." (FGD)

These relationships, along with transparency and community interaction, generate trust and solidarity.

"[With the support of community organizing for local economic activities] we have this unity among us, which was missing before." (Local Vendor 2)

"Our organization acts as a bridge between us (community) and government officials, making it easier for us to address issues." (Resident 2)

Through gathered social capital, it affects Community Capacity. As Chaskin (2001) explains, the community-based faith organization (human capital), their organizational resources (tangible and intangible), trust and reciprocal relationships (social capital) is itself called community capacity and this faith-led community leverage these to face collective problems and maintain the community well-being.

Two key dimensions of community capacity emerge: one being Shared responsibility, seen in voluntary efforts and collective care:

"There's a stronger sense of community responsibility. More people offer their help voluntarily...This [the gathering of the community led by faith] is like a platform for us to be accountable." (Resident 2)

second being, Collective competence, demonstrated by practical outcomes and local problem-solving:

"But now, the community organization is taking the lead to encourage people to get involved... Collectively, we engage in community work, which leads to the results we achieved over time, like the proper road system, waste disposal, helping the struggling families of the community, and even improving the public infrastructure of the area...Our neighbourhood is gathered as one with the leading of our community organization." (Resident 1)

By leveraging internal assets and building through interactions, the community is leveraged through faith-led values and responsibilities to adopt an asset-based approach while enhancing community social action process.

#### 4.3. COMMUNITY RESULTS: RESILIENCE IN SPATIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS

According to Mancini & Bowen (2009), communities achieve resilience through their ability to adapt to events, hardships, and opportunities. Here in the study, this Gale Dewalaya faith community's resilience is selected to be measured through outcomes of spatial developments, economic robustness, and socio-political transformations.

##### 4.3.1 Community Resilience through Spatial Development

Faith-centered organizing led to significant spatial transformation guided by collective and spiritual values. As representatives noted:

"[In 2005] By collecting Rs. 2000 from the pilgrims, we bought this paddy field and nearby land for the shrine... [previously, the shrine had only 2 purchases of land extent]. Also, people lived nearby lands donate some of the lands to the shrine. Now it's 80 purchases of land. After that, we built the access way to the shrine... Then we created another shrine room..." (FGD)

Infrastructure improvements also extended beyond the shrine. Residents highlighted:

"...the area has improved a lot. We worked alongside the local authorities to repair broken pavements and provide us with street lighting, water and electricity facilities... These improvements have made the area more structured, and people respect the public space more now." (Resident 2)

"Through this organization, we repaired almost all the access ways of the area and put way-finding boards." (Resident 3)

As shown in Figure 7, spatial changes of the community are centered around faith activities.

These efforts reflect how Networks and Social Action Processes sustained the spatial developments.

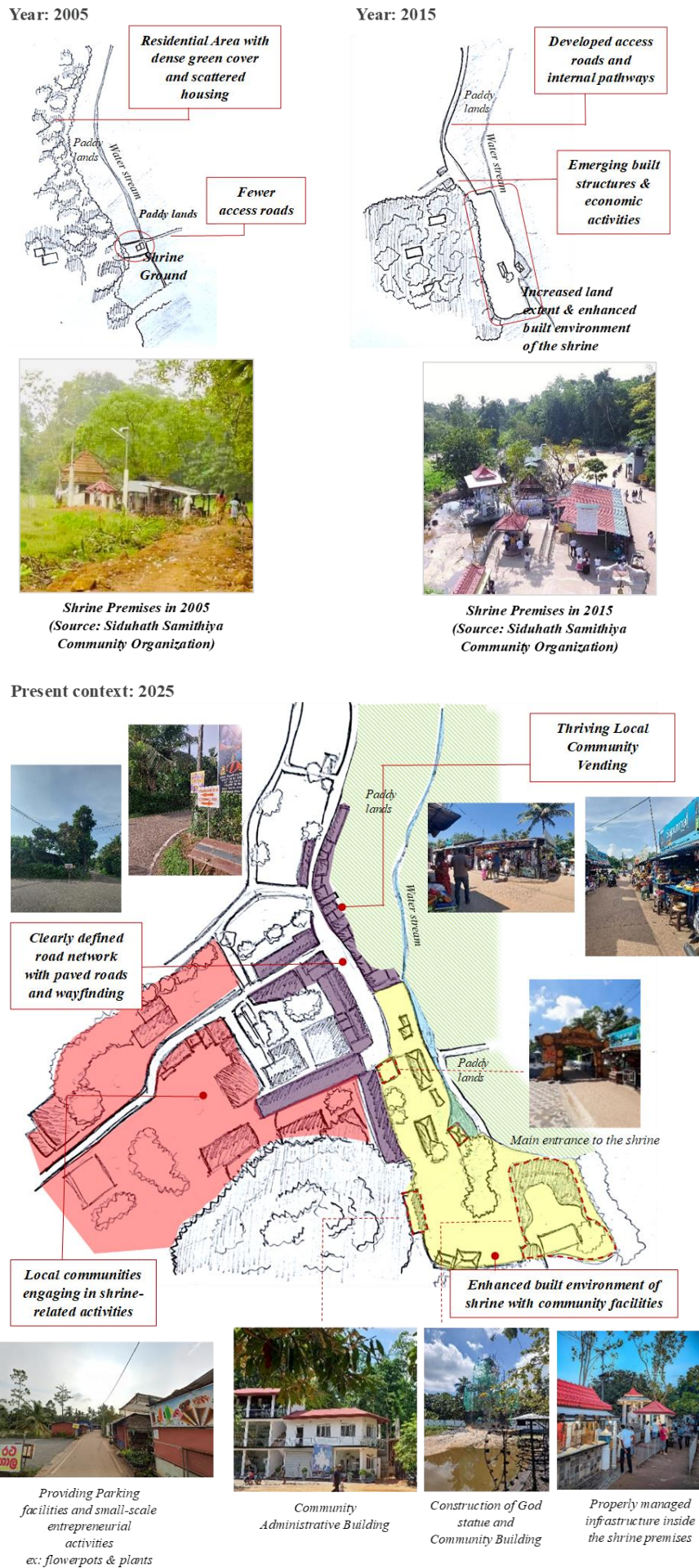


Figure 7: Spatial Transformation of the community from 2005 to 2025 (Source: Author)

### 4.3.2 Community Resilience through Economic Robustness

Through the faith-centered organization of the community, it also fostered economic resilience in the community through direct and indirect opportunities.

“...we have around 60 members... We provide them with wages. Also, we have some people to work for the shrine, and we also pay them a wage... [As committee members] we also are given an income through the shrine...” (FGD)

It supported the emergence of local entrepreneurship:

“...a considerable number of people find their livelihoods central to this shrine work. Most of the people started selling goods and providing services to the pilgrims... Circularly, we provide economic benefits to people in the neighbourhood...” (FGD)

“...we started these commercial activities because of this organization. They are the ones who properly organize this place.” (Local Vendor 1)

“I started with just a few items... but I developed my business over time... [through community organizing] local crafts are promoted... which helps preserve traditional skills.” (Local Vendor 3)

Service-related sectors are also thriving:

“Circular indirect commercial activities are happening [like transportation of row goods/ Organic waste buying and selling]. It is like an urban system here; people find different ways to survive, and we are the facilitators to all these service networks.” (FGD)

### 4.3.3 Community Resilience through Socio-political Outcomes

Resilience is also evident in socio-political dimensions, where participation builds governance and empowerment. Inside the mechanism of faith-based organizing, it enables residents to engage in planning through monthly meetings and maintains independent operation.

“...we make sure to get the acceptance of the Divisional Secretary... we are not registered [under the Buddhist Temporalities Act] ... The government does not intervene as we are engaging in such communal services. Handling the power of community work is under our supervision.” (FGD)

Their ability to negotiate with authorities brought benefits.

“...their consistent community welfare efforts justify their freestanding community authority... they work fairly with the formal proceedings.” (Officer – Minuwangoda DS Office)

This built resident empowerment resulting self-resilient community that act together in challenging times.

“Our community has been building confidence and a sense of responsibility through engaging with community work.” (FGD)

“There’s a much stronger sense of community responsibility now... we take matters into our own hands... more people get involved.” (Resident 2)

Through this mechanism of faith-based organizing, the community transitioned from passive recipients to active agents, reinforcing responsive governance, autonomy, and resident empowerment.

## 5. Conclusion

The case of Gale Dewalaya illustrates how spiritual belief systems mobilize both formal and informal networks to produce social capital and build community capacity. These efforts result in spatial improvements, economic vitality, and political empowerment. Therefore, this study concludes that the process of faith-centered community organizing is a powerful driver for participatory community transformation, particularly in semi-urban contexts of the Global South.

Forces like faith continues to motivate collective action in communities, positioning the faith-centered community organizations as important centre points in community development. However, they often operate outside formal recognition. Rather imposing top-down planning frameworks, authorities can collaborate with such grassroots faith groups to co-identify community needs and their strengths. These communities, guided by spiritual intent and internal networks, organize autonomously to address their own challenges. In such cases, government roles should shift from directive to facilitative, supportive while enabling local efforts.

Though some view religious involvement in planning as contentious due to differing power structures and priorities, this study shows that faith-centered communities and their community organizations are not obstructive, but rather collaborative when given space and respect. Therefore, integrating faith communities, secular groups, and government actors in planning, funding, and implementation can result in resilient and sustainable development.

Concluding, it is recommended to expand studies on different local community contexts to build a more comprehensive understanding of how certain secular and spiritual influences cause community organization, participatory community transformation, and their engagement in formal planning.

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