

POVERTY DIMENSIONS (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SRI LANKA)

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INTRODUCTION

Over 1.3 billion people in developing countries live on 1.26 \$ a day or less. Based on World Bank figures which are used for official global poverty statistics the number of people living below the international poverty line of 1.25 \$ per day fell from 1.82 billion to 1.37 billion between 1990 and 2005. Expressing poverty as a percentage provides more favourable results due to rising population in the last few decades, particularly in the developing countries. In sub - Saharan Africa, for example poverty fell slightly from 58% to 51 % between 1990 and 2005. Similarly the efforts taken between 1990 and 2008 to reduce the number of poor people were highly successful and the amount of people living in poverty decreased by nearly half from 48 to 26 percent. According to the latest United Nations Report, however food prices are back on the rise causing an increase in global poverty for the first time in nearly two decades (United Nations 2010)

Some special features have been identified by the researchers in relations to poverty within the last two three decades. They are

- The wealth of new Millennium has tended to increase inequality rather than reduce poverty. UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) has reported that in 2009 richest 500 people in the world earned more than the poorest 416 million
- The trend of migration in the developing countries particularly in Africa and Latin American world has raised the incidence of urban poverty in the slum zone of the world major cities.
- Rural poverty rates as in India and Bangladesh are more the double than those in cities.
- The most persisting poverty is found among the ethnic minorities expressing discrimination. For instance the minority groups in the Central African countries are more vulnerable than the major ethnic groups.

In this paper an attempt is made to bring out some salient features of poverty with specific examples from Sri Lanka. Secondary data derived from several sources including United Nations Reports, World Bank Reports and household income and

expenditure survey, 2006-7, 2009-10 are applied to support the text in relevant sections with suitable diagrams.

HISTORICAL RECORDS OF POVERTY

Poverty studies are not a new phenomenon confirmed to the near past. From an analytical perspective, thinking about poverty can be traced back in England, through the pioneering empirical studies, at the turn of the last century by Booth in London and by Roundtree in York. Roundtree's study published in 1901 was the first to develop a poverty standard for individual families based on estimates of nutritional and other requirements.

The macro- economic indicators like Gross National Product per head was the main focus of poverty in 1960s. Poverty became prominent in the 1970's, after Robert MacNamara's celebrated speech to the World Bank Board of Governors in Nairobi in 1973. Two other factors also played a part in poverty studies

- 1) Emphasis on relative deprivation
- 2) Broaden the concept of income poverty, to a wider set of basic needs.

The in co-operation of non -monitory aspects, a new interest in vulnerability and the impacts of shock notably drought were the new layers of complex city added for the studies of poverty in the 1980's.

The turn of the century saw the development of poverty concept. The idea of well being came to act as a metaphor for absence of poverty. Almost at the same time the idea of human development, developed by UNDP came into the main focus of poverty studies, which over the years are widely used by researchers with minor changes suitable for their study area.

DEFINITION OF POVERTY

Poverty can be defined in many different ways. Today most economists and sociologists use two ways to define poverty

- a) Social definitions of poverty
- b) Statistical definitions of poverty

Under social definitions poverty is described as a lack of essential items- such as food, clothing, water and shelter needed for proper living.

The Copemhagan Declaration at the World Summit on social development described poverty " A condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education & information.

When people are unable to eat, go to school or no access to health care, they can be considered to be in poverty regardless of their income".

Under statistical definitions of poverty there are various numerically defined methods to measure and quantify poverty. But the relative poverty measurement and absolute poverty measurement are the two simple measures that are often used to define poverty. While relative poverty assist to determine the extent of poverty in individual countries, the absolute poverty measures set a 'poverty line' at a certain income amount or consumption amount per year based on the estimated value of a 'basket of goods' necessary for proper living.

The entire population is ranked in order of income per capita under the relative poverty method. The bottom 10 percentage or whatever percentage the government

chooses to use is considered poor or impoverished. This can be fine for country-wide measurement but it has some major drawbacks in global use.

The most commonly used definition of global poverty is the absolute poverty line set by the World Bank. According to this line poverty is set at an income of 2 \$ a day or less and extreme poverty is set at 1 \$ a day or less. The line first created in 1990, found that most developing countries set their poverty line at 1 \$ per day. More developed countries are permitted to set their poverty lines elsewhere.

One other factor many experts on poverty talk about when they talk about defining poverty is empowerment which refers to the ability of an individual to make choices regarding his or her life. Often the poor are not empowered. when people are disempowered they are in poverty.

The problem of defining poverty is further compounded when new non-economic connotations are acquired by the word poverty. Whatever definitions one uses authorities and laypersons alike commonly assume that the effects of poverty are harmful to both individuals and society

Definition Of Poverty –United Nations

Fundamentally poverty is a denial of choices and opportunities a violation of human dignity. It means lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society. It means not having enough to feed and clothe a family, not having a school or clinic to go to not having the land on which to grow one's food or a job to earn one's living, not having access to credit. It means insecurity and powerlessness. It means susceptibility to violence and it offers a living in marginal or fragile environments without access to clean water or sanitation.

POVERTY THRESHOLD

The minimum level of income necessary to maintain an adequate standard of living in a given country is commonly considered the poverty threshold or poverty line which is significantly higher in first world countries than in third world countries.

The international poverty line in the 1990's and in the first half of the 2000's has been roughly \$ 1 a day which came out with a reversed figure of \$ 1.25 in 2008 at 2005 purchasing-power parity, with the advice of the World Bank.

The poverty line is determined by using the total cost of all the essential resources that an average human adult consumes in one year. The minimum expenditure needed to maintain a tolerable life is considered the basic concept in this approach. Anyhow the poverty threshold may be adjusted each year.

Two different poverty thresholds are used to distinguish the absolute poverty from relative poverty. However some measurements combine certain aspects of absolute and relative measures. Basic needs poverty measures for Canada published by the Fraser Institute is a good example for this measure. According to the Fraser Institute's list of necessities not only food, shelter, clothing and health care but also personal care, furniture, transportation, communication ,laundry & home insurance are included for living creditably in Canada.

Definition of the poverty line may vary considerably among nations. Since rich nations generally employ more generous standards of poverty than poor nations the numbers are not comparable among countries. For example in 2009, in the United States of America the poverty threshold for a single person under 65 was USD 11,161 whereas in India it was USD 12 per month for urban dwellers and approximately USD

7.50 per month for rural dwellers. Accordingly the poverty rate in United States of America & India was 15.1 % and 27.5 % respectively.

Several criticisms come out different corners very often in using poverty threshold to measure poverty. They are summarized as follows

- Having an income marginally above the poverty line is not substantially different from having an income marginally below it.
- A poverty line which basically relies on a quantitative or purely number based measure of income. At the same time other human based indicators such as health and education are not quantified ,they must be quantified but not a simple task to find out real situation of poverty

Not counting kind gifts when calculating the poverty threshold is one of the criticisms came out recently from sociologists. Rea Hederman of Heritage Foundations as a critic refers that the official poverty measure counts only monetary income, it considers anti poverty programmes such as food stamps, housing assistance, school lunches & medic aid as “In-kind benefits” and hence not income .As such, studies have found that without the measurement of ‘In-kind benefits’ in monetary terms poverty would be roughly 30 % - 40 % higher than the official poverty line indicates.

POVERTY AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM

All over the world the money is referred as a measure of wealth so that lack of cash can be a measure of lack of wealth. Anyhow it is a economic problem of poverty, but not a social problem.

As a social problem poverty may be considered as a “Deeply embedded wound” .This social wound makes harm every dimension of culture and society. This social stigma incorporates the following salient features in this particular social group specially in developing countries. They are :

1. sustained low levels of incomes for members of a community
2. Lack of access to services such as education, markets & health care.
3. Lack of decision making ability
4. Lack of communal facilities like water, sanitation, roads, transportation & communication.
5. Members of poverty community are allowed because of “poverty of spirit” to believe in & share despair, hopelessness ,apathy & timidity.

Ignorance, disease, apathy, dishonesty & dependency are main factors of the above situation as a social problem. These big five factors, in turn , contribute to secondary factors such as lack of markets, poor infrastructure, poor leadership ,bad governance, underemployment ,lack of skills & lack of capitals. Each of these are social problems, each of them are caused by one or more of the big five factors and each of them contribute to the perpetuation of poverty and their eradication is necessary for the removal of poverty.

FACTORS OF POVERTY BRIEF EXPLANATION

Five main factors have been identified for poverty as a social problem. Among them ignorance means having a lack of information or lack of knowledge .Many planners who want to help a community become stronger think that proper education is the solution to remove ignorance from a community. Unlike a general education a specific educational system should provide empowerment to the community to eradicate poverty gradually

When a community has a high disease rate absenteeism is high, productivity is low & less wealth is created. The economy is much healthier if the population of a country is always healthy. Health contributes to the eradication of poverty more in terms of access to safe & clean drinking water, separation of sanitation from water supply, knowledge of hygiene and disease prevention.

Apathy is when people do not care or when they feel so powerless that makes them not to try to change things or to improve conditions. Sometimes apathy is justified by religious precepts.

“Accept what exist because God had decided your fate”. This fatalism may be misused as an excuse if a community totally accept this fatalism then they will not be motivated to improve themselves.

When resources that are intended to be used for community services are diverted into the private pockets of someone in a position of power then the community is left for suffering from poverty as happened in the recent history of some powerful African and Middle East countries .For example when investment money is taken out of circulation the amount of wealth by which the community is deprived is greater than the amount gained by the embezzler. For example when a government official takes a 100 dollar bribe, social investment is decreased by as much as a 400 dollar decrease in the wealth of the society.

Dependency results from being on the receiving end of charity. In the short run, after a disaster such as a Tsunami charity may be essential for survival .Anyhow in the long run that charity can contribute to the possible of the recipient and can certainly help for an ongoing poverty. It is argued that some non-governmental organizations make people for depending for everything to run their normal life. Among the five major factors of poverty the dependency syndrome is the one closest to the concerns of the community mobilize.

These five factors are not independent of one another. For example, disease contributes to ignorance and apathy and dishonesty contributes to disease and dependency. They each contribute to each other.

The social solution of removing the factors of poverty may be the solution to the social problem of poverty.

POVERTY IN SRI LANKA

“The rapid growth of Srilanka’s economy since the war ended in May 2009,has given many people an unprecedented sense of optimism about the future” (Micheal Hardy,2010).According to a 2009 estimate by the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2009) Srilanka’s GDP per capita is US Dollars 2041,which makes the country the 119 th wealthiest in the world out of total of 180 countries, while its GDP per capita places Srilanka well ahead of India (US Dollars 1,033)and Pakistan (US Dollars 1,017),it still means that the country ranks in the bottom third of all countries literally the “Third world”. But GDP per capita doesn’t give the whole picture of a country, because it doesn’t show how wealth is distributed within a country. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey -2006/07 (HIES) 15 % of Srilankans live below the official poverty line of RS 3,087 a month. The World Bank puts the figure higher at 23 %.Anyhow the latest calculation of poverty indices shows (HIES 2009/10)that poverty level of the country has further declined 15.2% reported in 2006/07 to 8.9 % in 2009/10.The HIES 2009/10 indicates that the 41 % reduction reported in first three years is the highest drop ever witnessed and the previous highest

was exactly one third drop from 22.7% to 15.2% reported over the 4 years and six months period from 2002 to 2006/07 survey periods.

Moreover the country stunningly unequal ,with the richest 10 percent of the people holding nearly 40 percent of the wealth and the poorest 10 % holding barely over 1 percent. Based on the Gini index of wealth distribution Srilanka is the 27th most unequal country in the world.

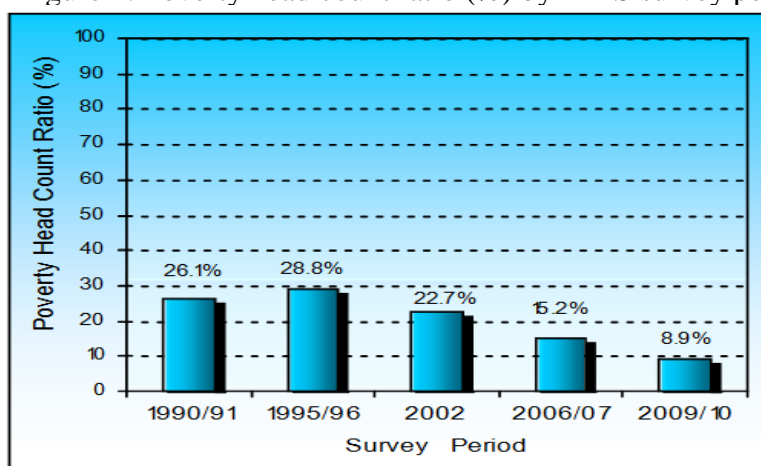
The poverty level is measured in Srilanka by Poverty Head Count Index.This poverty Head Count Index refers the proportion of poor population to total population and it is generally represented as a percentage. The value of the official poverty line (OPL) of Srilanka was Rs 3,028 real total expenditure per person per month for the 2009/10 survey period.(HIES- 2009/2010) The poverty line should change over time because of changes in prices. For instance for the base year 2002, the official poverty line was estimated as Rs 1423 and it was updated in 2006/07.

TRENDS IN POVERTY

Figure 1 shows the poverty head count ratio (%) by HIES Survey period. The national poverty head count for Srilanka which increased from 26.1 percent in 1990/91 to 28.8 percent in 1995/96,Anyhow during the 2006/07 survey period the percentage of poverty head count has declined to 15.2 which clearly indicates that poverty has declined by 42 percent between 1990/91 and 2006/07 survey periods. It is observed a further decline in poverty between 2006/07 to 2009/10 survey periods. It took nearly 15 years to reduce the poverty rate by 42 percent between 1990/91 and 2006/07 periods. But almost the same percentage of reduction in poverty has been achieved within three years between 2006/07 and 2009/10 survey period.When compared provinces it is evident that poverty incidence declined in all provinces from 1990/91 to 2006/07 period.

According to the survey results shown in the above Table it is revealed that the poverty in terms of Head count Index in urban sector is the lowest and the estate sector is the highest. While in rural sector it records 15.7 percent. This shows that 32 people out of 100 in estate sector are below the OPL while 7 people out of 100 in Urban Sector are below the OPL. The poverty incidence in estate sector is 4 times more than that of urban sectors in Srilanka In the survey period. Further it is revealed that the biggest contributor to the poverty come from the rural sector (82 percent).

Figure 1: Poverty head count ratio (%) by HIES survey period



Source : Household income and expenditure survey 2009/ 10, Dept. of Census & Mgt.

SPATIAL VARIATION IN POVERTY

Wealth in Srilanka is stratified geographically .The Table 1 shows the incidence of poverty by provinces and sector in 2006/07 period.

Table 1: Incidence of Poverty by Provinces and Sectors 2006/07

Sectors And Provinces	Headcount Index
Srilanka	15.2
Sector	
Urban	6.7
Rural	15.7
Estate	32
Provinces	
Western	8.2
Central	22.3
Southern	13.8
Eastern	10.8
North Western	14.6
North Central	14.2
Uva	27
Sabragamuwa	24.2

Source : Household Income & Expenditure Survey Dept. Of . Cencus and Statistics 2006/07

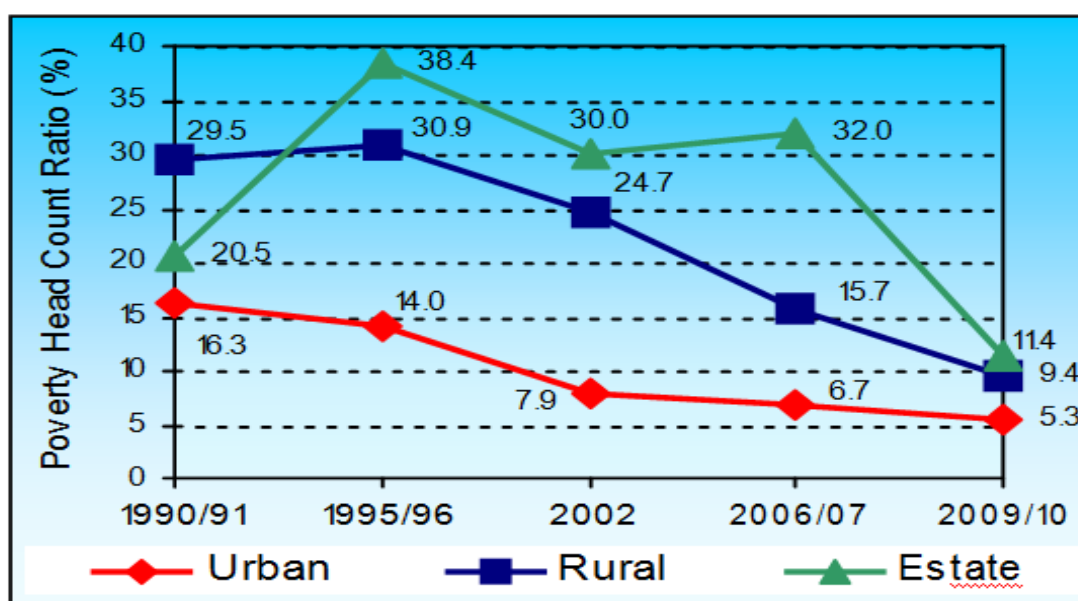


Figure 2; Poverty head count ratio (%) by sector and HIES period

Source : Household Expenditure and Income Survey 2009/ 10, Dept. of Census and Statistics, Ministry of Finance and Planning

In Contrast to 2006/07 survey the HFES 2009/10 reports a two third drop poverty in estate sector which almost equals the poverty HCR (Head Count Ratio) reported by the rural sector. The poverty HCR which was 32.0 in 2006/07 period in the estate sector dropped to 11.4 in 2009/10 period. About 64% reduction reported in just three years is the highest drop witnessed in the estate sector. This poverty drop in the estate

sector is justified by the significant drops in relative prices in food items and an increase of employment and wages in this sector since 2006/07 .(Figure 2). In 2006/07 survey period in forms of OPL, the poverty in UVA province was the highest among all the provinces in Srilanka. Sabragamuwa and Central provinces take second and third places respectively where between a quarter and a third of all people lived below the poverty line. In contrast ,according to the centre for poverty analyzes the more urbanized western province has poverty rates below 10 percent. There are no accurate statistics on the Northern and the Eastern provinces because of the war during the survey period. HIES 2009/10 also reveals that the survey failed to cover Mullaitivu, Mannar and Killinochi districts of the Northern province due to the massive mine clearance and resettling existed aftermath the rescue operations however the Vavuniya district and entire eastern province were covered In final 10 months of the 12 months long survey and Jaffna district was also surveyed for the final 7 months starting from December 2009 to June 2010.According to the table almost all the districts except the districts belong to the Northern and Eastern Provinces where no accurate statistics on poverty are not available due to the 30 years long war, show 3 to 5 decline in poverty between 1990 and 2010.Colombo, Gampaha, and Kalutara districts that averagely 5 out of 100 live in poverty whereas averagely 5-10 out of 100 live under the poverty line in NuwaraEliya ,Hambantota ,Anuradhapura and Pollonrauwa districts in the 2009/10 survey period.

Table 02 The poverty head count rate by District and HIES period from 1990 to 2010.

District	HIES survey period				
	1990/91	1995/96	2002	2006/07	2009/10
Colombo	16.2	12.0	6.4	5.4	3.6
Gampaha	14.7	14.1	10.7	8.7	3.9
Kalutara	32.3	29.5	20.0	13.0	6.0
Kandy	35.9	36.7	24.9	17.0	10.3
Matale	28.7	41.9	29.6	18.9	11.5
Nuwara-eliya	20.1	32.1	22.6	33.8	7.6
Galle	29.7	31.6	25.8	13.7	10.3
Matara	29.2	35.0	27.5	14.7	11.2
Hambantota	32.4	31.0	32.2	12.7	6.9
Jaffna					16.1
Vavuniya					2.3
Batticaloa				10.7	20.3
Ampara				10.9	11.8
Trincomalee					11.7
Kurunegala	27.2	26.2	25.4	15.4	11.7
Puttalama	22.3	31.1	31.3	13.1	10.5
Anuradhapura	24.4	27.0	20.4	14.9	5.7
Polonnaruwa	24.9	20.1	23.7	12.7	5.8
Badulla	31.0	41.0	37.3	23.7	13.3
Moneragala	33.7	56.2	37.2	33.2	14.5
Ratnapura	30.8	46.4	34.4	26.6	10.5

Source : Poverty Indicators, Household income and Expenditure Survey 2009/10.Ministry of Finance and planning .Dept.Of.Census and Statistics – Srilanka)

In parallel to National poverty Statistics, all the districts except Batticalo and Ampara report significant poverty reduction since 2006/07. It is observed that 3 out of every 4 in the Nuwara Eliya district escaped from poverty due to the estate sector relief measures. The Hambantota district which showed a 60 % drop of poverty from 2002 to 2006/07 is reporting a 46 % drop since 2006/07. Badulla, Moneragala and Ratnapura considered the poorest districts in 2006/07 survey report around 50 % reduction in poverty since the survey period. It means that 2 out of 4 persons escape from poverty in those districts. Yet Moneragala district is the poorest among districts other than Northern and Eastern Districts where the survey was covered partially. The Batticalo district with that partial coverage shows the highest deprivation among all the districts. The deprivation in the Jaffna district where the coverage was 7 months out of 12 months was calculated as 16 %, a high poverty existence.

SPATIAL INEQUALITY AND POVERTY

Table 3: Poverty and inequality province 2006/2007 and 2009/2010

Province	Poverty HCR (%)		Gini		Quintile Ratio	
	2006/07	2009/10	2006/07	2009/10	2006/07	2009/10
Sri Lanka	15.2	8.9	0.40	0.36	6.7	5.7
Western	8.2	4.2	0.41	0.38	7.2	6.2
Central	22.3	9.7	0.38	0.35	6.2	5.3
Southern	13.8	9.8	0.37	0.33	6.0	5.2
Northern		12.8		0.28		3.8
Eastern	10.8	14.8	0.33	0.30	4.9	4.3
North-western	14.6	11.3	0.36	0.34	5.7	5.2
North-central	14.2	5.7	0.40	0.33	6.8	5.0
Uva	27.0	13.7	0.35	0.32	5.4	4.6
Sabaragamuwa	24.2	10.6	0.34	0.32	5.0	4.7

(Source :Household income and expenditure survey 2009/Dept.of Cencus and Statistics

Economist calculate the inequality in poverty by using the Gini coefficient the most popular inequality indicator. The Lower the Gini coefficient means lower the inequality .Table 3 shows poverty and Inequality by province -2006/07 and 2009/10.

According to the table the North Central province records the highest drop in inequality since 2006/07.

In terms of income inequality, the relative position of the poor has fallen over the past few decades – Statistics from 2002 reveals that the lowest decile earned only 1.7 of total income where the highest decile earned 37.4% (DSC,HIES : 2002) Based on the Gini coefficient of wealth distribution, Srilanka is the most unequal country in the world-More unequal than India(79).

POVERTY BY CHARACTERISTICS

Srilanka's recent history attests to the economy's resilience to adverse shocks. In the 1990's economic growth rate averaged 5.2 percent despite a 30 year long conflict In North and East. In 2009,the economy sustained this pace registering averagely 6-8 percent growth and reached a per capita income level of US \$ 2041.However Srilanka's growth pattern has not been adequate for significantly reducing poverty in the rural and plantation economy of some districts.

Srilanka's social indicators, such as life expectancy, literacy and mortality rates are well above those in comparable developing countries and are on par with many developed countries. In terms of the Human Development Index Srilanka is ranked 96th with an index of 0.740 among 177 countries in 2004. But According to the latest report of United Nation Srilanka is ranked 87th among the 193 countries in 2010.

Education, Household size and few housing characteristics are analysed briefly here to understand poverty as a social problem in Srilanka using the 2006/07 HIES database. Educational attainment universally considered a pre condition for better living or wellbeing is inversely correlated poverty in Srilanka. The HIES 2006/07 report reveals that the incidence of poverty is highest amongst the population living in household with little or no education and the lowest in household with a high level attainment. For example in 2006/07 period when level of education of two heads of households was no schooling and passed G.C.E Advanced level the poverty Head Count Index was 13.0 and 0.9 respectively.

Poverty incidence is strongly associated with the household size. 2006/07 HIES reveals that the average size for poor households is 4.9, which is noticeably larger than the average household size for non poor households (3.9 at national level). When a household has more than 3 persons the contribution to the poverty is relatively high at Srilankan level. For example, when only one person is occupied in a household the poverty level was 4.0 whereas it was 21.0 when there are 3 persons in a household (HIES 2006/07).

In Srilanka the better living conditions are associated with some factors particularly using electricity for lighting, use safe drinking water and availability of water seal sanitation. Nearly 84.8 % of people in Srilanka use safe water, which in urban sector was 97.7 % in 2006/07 survey period. It is reported that 53.8 % people in the estate sector use unsafe water which is only 15% in the rural sector.

Further the survey reveals about 80% of households in Srilanka use electricity as their lighting purposes. Among the poor households only 55.1% use electricity as their lighting purposes.

Srilankan New Development Strategy and Poverty Reduction

The economic policy framework 2004 states that the new development strategy is premised on pro-poor income improvement with complementary participation of a socially responsible private sector and a strong public sector. Higher economic growth alone is not sufficient to reduce poverty, instead it should focus on pro-poor growth strategies.

The National Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (NPRGS) is the major policy approach to navigate pro-poor, pre-growth, income and redistribution strategies. The main objectives of the NGPRS are as follows which have been implemented pace by pace during the last couple of years.

1. Facilitate poor groups to engage in productive economic activities.
2. Reduce the poverty gap between different social strata.
3. Minimize regional variations in the incidence of poverty.

Accordingly the major strategies that are being implemented for the different categories of the poor are as follows

1. Mobilization of poor people through capacity building by formal and informal organizations.
2. Improvement and reorientation of public sector delivery mechanism.

3. Effective targeting of public assistance programmes and expanding employment and income opportunities.

These approaches have helped to promote the participation of the poor in development projects and thereby empower them economically during the last five years.

The new government came into power in 2005 has been working to reduce poverty level having mind the following targets.

- Power and hunger

Reduce half between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day.

- Education

Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere in the country will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.

- Health

Reduce by two-thirds between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate.

- Water supply and Sanitation

Reduce half by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinkable water and sanitation.

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve these targets a pro-poor policy framework have been designed by the ruling government under which increasing the income of poor is a principle objective of the economic growth strategy of the government.

Under all these strategies, the government's principal poverty- alleviation programme Samurdhi, which was founded by former president Ranasinghe Premadasa as Jayasuriya programme, still plays a crucial role in helping the poorest people in the country, meet their basic needs. The Samurdhi benefit is multiple. It is not just the grant- there is a saving component and a loan component.

The consequences of widespread poverty can be seen everywhere in Srilanka until recently though massive poverty alleviation programmes are implemented at national level. However there is reason to believe that with the war over Srilanka has already begun to pull itself out of the poverty that has shadowed its history. The government should give more attention to eradicate the rural poverty.

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