

Status of Social Citizenship and Access to Public: The Case of the Plantation Community in Sri Lanka Service*

R. Ramesh and Istiaq Jamil

Department of Administration & Organization Theory, University of Bergen, Norway

It is essential that public service provision carried out through government administrative machinery be performed on the basis of equality and non-discrimination. However, the case is different in the plantation community in Sri Lanka, where people have been encountering issues and problems in exercising equal right to public service. Against this backdrop, the study explores the current status of access to public service in the plantation community from a human rights perspective in general, and a social citizenship rights perspective in particular. The study is based on secondary data and utilized content analysis to analyse different published and unpublished material. The study found that there is a lack of trust between officials and the community in selected locations due to prolonged ethnic strife, statelessness, exclusions from the national development process and Sinhalization of the national bureaucracy. Further, the national languages policy has not been implemented properly in the above institutions and most public servants working in them are incapable of functioning in the Tamil language. Human Rights treaties ratified by the government of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lankan Constitution clearly stipulate the equal right to public service, but such rights are not exercised by the plantation people. Services such as obtaining civic documents, benefits of poverty alleviation programs, rural development, voter registration, pre-school education, special payments for vulnerable groups, and disaster relief are not reaching the plantation community fully since the estates are considered separate and private entities; therefore public servants are reluctant to serve this community from a citizenship perspective. Notably, problems and discriminations in the service delivery have led to poverty, social marginalization, and a non-economic form of poverty. The study concludes that there is no institutional mechanism available in the country to ensure equal opportunity for all in accessing government service delivery.

Keywords: Plantation community, Access, Public service, Social citizenship

**Financial assistance given by the NORAD is acknowledged.*