

IMPACT OF RURAL POVERTY ON SCHOOL EDUCATION

A CASE STUDY: WALAPANE DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT DIVISION, NUWARA ELIYA

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Background

Sri Lanka attained independence from Great Britain in 1948 and enshrined the right to free education in the constitution. Despite the ravages of 27 years civil war between 1983 and 2009, Sri Lanka continuously maintains the highest literacy rate in South Asia while the previous studies have shown a disparity between rural and urban sectors. Sri Lanka has followed a mix of growth-oriented and welfare policies over the last three decades. Amidst those policies average per capita income is increasing and many people are in middle- and higher-income ranges than ever before (Gunatilaka, 2006). Rural urban disparity has been one of the major concerns for the policy makers. The extent of these disparities differs from country to country (Das and Pathak, 2012).

Education is an essential factor for both economic development and to eradicate poverty. Economic development in a country wouldn't be achievable without better education performances. A universal education system in a country promotes not only economic development but also the productivity, and increases per capita income. The influence of an education system can be measured at the micro level of an individual family; which assists to build up the nation. It builds the foundation on which most of the economic and social well-being of a citizen. Education is the key to increase economic efficiency and social consistency, by growth of the value and efficiency of the labor force in order to upgrade poor from poverty. Education increases the overall productivity and intellectual flexibility of the labor force and ensures the competitiveness of a country in the world market and also characterized by changing technologies and production methods.

Despite of various poverty alleviation programs, poverty continues to be a major problem in Sri Lanka. "Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not

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knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time" (World Bank, 2008). According to the Asian Development Bank, the population of Sri Lanka was 20.8 million in 2017. As at 2015, 6.7% of the country lived below the national poverty line.

Education is one of the important factors in regional development that supported by the central government. Despite of, Sri Lanka has named as one of the fastest growing economics in the region, it ranks extremely poor in educational spending as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, Sri Lanka spends only 2.1% of GDP on education, ranking as the sixth lowest in the world (World Bank, 2017). Within this background, the purpose of this study is to see the relationship between poverty and education in rural areas.

Methodology

According to Department of Census and Statistics (2015), Central province has reported the highest proportion of the poorest in total poverty value in the country (16.8%) and Nuwara Eliya is the lowest district in terms of GDP per capita. This information leads to conduct this research based on poverty and education in Walapane Divisional Secretariat Division (DSD). The objective of this study is to explore the impact of rural poverty on school education. This study was mainly based on qualitative approach while supplemented by quantitative approach as well. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) which is suitable to generate data from a rural setting was the main method used. The interview method, discussion method and observation method were adopted within PRA. Ten Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions were selected to consider the sequence of total population in Walapane DSD. One PRA was done in each GN division. A sample of 120 households divided according to the proportion of the total population of each GN division was selected for the questionnaire survey. The households in each GN division were randomly selected using the GN reports as the sample frame. The administrative records of the six schools located within the selected ten GN divisions were also used as a secondary source of information. Ten teachers representing the selected schools were interviewed. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Results and Discussion

Poverty was directly and indirectly affected on school education in this area. There were only three schools had teachers to teach Mathematics and English. As a result, 80% of the students failed from above subjects in Ordinary Level (O/L) examination. The percentage of school attendance was at a low level. Average percentage of attendance per student was 54%. In addition, the geographical location is also crucial where there is no proper road system to reach to the schools. Thirty percent of students had to reach school on foot by passing more than 5km from their houses. According to the information most of the students face for the O/L examination with many difficulties. But after the O/L examination 80% of them give up their education and migrate to Colombo or any other urban areas in order to find jobs to support their families. Insufficient physical resources also one of the major problems in education. Only two schools have sufficient laboratory and library facilities. Lack of sports equipment and building facilities were also found as problems related to physical resources. These insufficient facilities directly affect the education performance of the students. Limited number of students enter to the Advanced Level (A/L) classes. In general, one or two students belong to poor households get the chance to enter the to the university level in each year. The existence of poverty was high among the population living in households with a head with having low level education and it reduce, when the head has a higher level educational attainment. According to the study, poor people belong to the households whose heads had no quality school education. The percentage can be show as 13%. While only had 42% which obtained education up to grade 5. On the other hand, such persons belong to the households whose heads had completed G.C.E. (A/L) and above were only 2%. Thus, the education level of the parents has definitely affects to the poverty level of the family which flows to the next generation as well.

In this study area, there were many children who dropped their education without completing the compulsory education level. One of the highlighted issues was young marriages. Specially there were pregnant mothers who were less than 18 years. So it can be pointed out that poverty has obstructed the children's world as well as the children's education. In addition to that, according to the collected information there were students who had showed their performance at the national level, but unfortunately

have no opportunity to continue their skills. According to the survey the villagers had no positive attitude regarding school education of their children.

Conclusion

This study mainly based on qualitative approach and supplemented quantitative approach. According to the study, poverty has affected school education in several ways. Not only the individual poverty but also the poverty in the society also affected the school education too. A proper transport system that is not compatible with the geographical difficulties also affect to the children as they had to reach the school on foot. Lack of resources, facilities and lack of teachers have also effected the school education of the poor villagers since they are unable to seek additional educational resources. The relevant authorities have a great responsibility to assist these schools which suffer from poverty.

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