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A Comparative Study of the Well-Being of Households in the Estate Sector in Sri Lanka

The case of Dambetanna and Totalagala Grama Niladari Divisions in Badulla District

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The well-being in modern society depends not only on traditional capital and labour but also on the knowledge based education, health and sanitation facilities, working condition, housing, place of residence, social network and others. Beyond the economic dimensions, the complete understanding of the well-being requires on certain dimensions of life, which have been neglected by traditional poverty measurements. Well-being is a broad concept engaged with several components as mentioned above.

The highest poor household ratio in Sri Lanka belongs to the Rural Sector in Monaragala District. After that it takes position of the estate sector Districts like NUvara Eliya, Badulla, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Matale and Kandy. The estate sector consists of both Tea and Rubber plantations at present. The British rulers introduced coffee as a commercial crop in Sri Lanka in mid 1830s and later on tea and rubber plantations. Then the British Colonial Government hired the labourers from South India for those plantations. The plantation sector, especially the tea and rubber plantations have a unique demographic and social history which makes them very different from other sectors in the country.

Restricted to the tea and rubber estates, the estate population did not have much opportunity of interacting or integrating with other communities. They have remained largely un-integrated with the rest of the population and subject to discrimination in many areas. However, that background could not change perfectly. With having special hereditary characteristics, it does not give clear picture of the estate households only through the discussion on income poverty of the estate households. Therefore this study shed light on the well-being of the estate sector households.

This study has stressed that well-being is a broader and richer concept than income per capita. It is thus possible for a household to get out of income poverty while remaining in well-being deprivation. Although the concept of income poverty may be helpful, it does not ensure the reduction of well-being deprivation. This study would discuss some important components of well-being of households in estate sector of Sri Lanka. Of special relevance is disclosing the implication of level of education, household expenditure pattern, household income, and housing characteristics towards to the well-being of the households.

It reveals that economic well-being of the estate sector is not as bad as the rural sector in Monaragala District, but it does not show much better situation either. The primary data shows majority of households are situated more close to the poverty line. Very small change of the economic conditions may seriously affect those households. Pattern of expenditure is highly associated with household well-being. Out of the non-food expenditures among the estate workers, the highest expenditure is for the cultural activities like wedding, funeral, and Hindu festivals. Estate workers spent all most all of their saving for these activities and also borrow money to celebrate them. Among the non food expenditure items liquor and tobacco and loan repayment also take higher place. Primary data shows up, when total income of the household is increasing, expenditure for liquor and tobacco also has increased. And statistical analysis in this study

indicates that there is an association with expenditure for liquor and monthly loan repayment.

Without ownership of the house most of the estate people do not like to improve their line rooms while spending their own money. On the other hand even though some people willing to improve their houses, according to the existing pattern of the line rooms, peoples who live in middle of the line cannot undertake it or expand their houses.

At the household level, cost of education has been identified as a downward trend while the need for education is widely acknowledged in the estate sector. But most of the parents are poorly educated and also they ignore deliberately their kids' education, because of the availability of job opportunity in the estate. There is no clear association between household income and level of the education of head of the household in the sample. The level of education of the children is above the average education of head of the household. Around 75 percent of children have not acquired the G.C.E. (O/L).

While enhancing the economic well-being of them, physical and social infrastructure must be provided. Due recognition to their contribution for the national economy should be given for the enhancement of well-being of the estate households. Not like urban and rural community, estate sector households have special barriers, which cannot be removed only through the economic measures. The achievement of social well-being is possible only if the effort of the estate household is made along with the assistance of Government, Plantation Companies and the entire society as a whole.