

# *Some Aspects of Settlement Policy of the Mahaweli Development Scheme at the Initial Stage of Settlement\**

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When the Mahaweli Development Scheme is completed in five or six years time, the regulated flow from the Mahaweli river and its tributaries will provide irrigation facilities to about 900,000 acres in the Mahaweli and Maduru Oya basins and the North Central Province. Of these lands, about 246,000 acres are presently under irrigation and will receive supplementary water supply for the continuous cultivation of two crops a year. The other 654,000 acres are new lands presently in jungle. After completion of the scheme 225,000 peasant farmer families are expected to be settled on the new lands<sup>1</sup>.

According to project plans in the North Central Province, 2187 families were expected to be settled by 1975. The programme envisaged further settlements: 1976 - 7342; 1977 - 6381; 1978 - 11,220; a total of 27,113 families. Due to various delays, apparently in construction work as well as settlement programming, only the first batch of 2189 families had been settled by 1976. Recently a second batch of settler families are also reported to have been settled.

The settlement policy and programmes seems to have seen considerable discussion in official circles at that time. There was also a feasibility report<sup>2</sup> which discussed at length many 'sociological' issues such as supportive services, patterns of leadership, unit allotment and subsidies, education and health facilities, recruitment and selection, etc. Perhaps as a result of those discussions, a very sophisticated settlement plan was evolved emphasizing clusters of villages, proximity to cultivations integrated service centres, etc. However, as a result, land development policies developed over the decades seem to have been thrown overboard. There were 'new' policies on recruitment, subsidies, etc.

The manner in which the settlement programme works out, tested by reality over time, is yet to be seen. At the initial stage at least, the new policies seem to have led to much hardships for the settlers, hardships which may have been averted if the policy-makers had some sympathy for the settlers who were the persons who have to live through the new programme of rural settlement.

The initial stage of settlement is not as unimportant as policy-makers imagine. If the irrigation system is to work, if a new level of advanced farming and investments are to be initiated by these 'peasant' families with their 2-1/2 acres of lowland and 1/2 acre homestead, initially itself, facilities should have been available to begin investments at a higher level. At least, there should have been minimum health and other facilities so that their health would not be impaired during the initial stages.

The experience of the first batch of 2187 families is of special interest because this is the programme through which 225,000 or so 'peasant' families of whom so much is expected will have to go through when their time comes for settlement and the new future. It may also be added that now that all the Mahaweli projects are scheduled to be completed in five or six years, this would be the phase of settlement many of them would be in when the construction works are completed.

### **Findings of the Field Survey**

The field survey was conducted in May 1976 in the H 1 area on the left bank of Kalawewa. The Sample Frame was the Project allotment lists scheduling about 2013 settlers who had been allotted land. The sample was selected on block stratified random basis. At interview level, some substitution had to be made, settlers mentioned in the allotment lists not being available for interview and substitution being made by interviewing the settlers in the adjacent plot. The sample interviewed consisted of about 3.5 percent of the settler families.

The survey area covers the first area developed for irrigation and new settlements under the Mahaweli Development Scheme through the distributory canal on the left bank of Kalawewa in the North Central Province, the area marked H 1 in the Mahaweli project maps, and consists of about 6,000 acres. According to project files, 2197 settlers had been allotted 2-1/2 acres of irrigable low-lands for each family. However, only about 1900 families had taken possession of the land. The additional 1/2 acre for homestead envisaged in project plans had not been demarcated or allotted.

About 10 percent of the area (about 600 acres) consisted of old (purana) villages, and the rest government forests. The old village land had been taken over by the project and reallocated, not necessarily to the former owners.

The forest land marked out as low-lands had been cleared by the project. There was some construction work going on in the smaller distributory canals and the water outlets to the fields, the project schedules delayed reportedly due to the non-availability of sufficient bulldozers and tractors in working order. Construction work was mostly by private contractors.

The water had not yet been issued to the fields. At the time of the survey, the settlers were preparing the lowlands for irrigation, clearing the roots and mounds left by project clearing and constructing ridges to retain water when issued.

\*This article is based on a DISCUSSION PAPER READ AT THE MINISESSION ON "MAHAWELI" HELD ON 5 AUGUST 1978, SPONSORED BY THE SRI LANKA ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE.

The settlers had constructed temporary huts in the allotments, some living with their families in the temporary huts. Of the settlers, about 250 families were those displaced by the reservoir at Bowatenna in the Matale District.

At the time of the survey, the settlers had received two types of financial assistance from the project: Rs. 100/- to construct a hut and Rs. 250/- for subsistence at Rs. 50/- a month for five months, some allottees receiving the money in one payment. A further payment of Rs. 750/- was expected as costs of constructing the ridges once those are completed.

There had also been a subsistence allowance in kind which was expected to be for a year; a ration of dry milk, flour and sugar and sometimes dhal, on a basis of issuing rations upto four members of a family under the World Food Programme. These issues had been received several times though not on a regular basis. Those displaced by the reservoir had been provided with transport to bring their possessions to the project area.

The settlers had not been paid any compensation for loss of land or displacement.

These areas had by that time experienced severe droughts, reportedly for five consecutive seasons, making even 'chena' cultivation difficult: only the land irrigated by the tank waters of Kalawewa had been successfully cultivated in the area.

The area was accessible by jeep though the gravel roads were already difficult to travel in.

The new 'integrated service centre' had been constructed and inaugurated though the 'centre' seemed to be remote and deserted at that time.

The agro-identity cards were being issued as a prelude to registering all settlers in primary (branch) co-operatives.

The project officers were planning consultations with the settlers after they form farmers' societies.

The soil surveys envisaged in the project plans had not been communicated to the settlers.\*

As seen from the following tables, the settler families do not seem to have been selected very carefully. Most adults had limited education, and there was a high dependency ratio. They did not seem to have much savings or a capacity for a high level of investment. A detailed discussion of the following tables has been published by the People's Bank Research Department.<sup>3</sup> The tables provide an over-view of the socio-economic conditions of the first batch of settlers of the Mahaweli Development Scheme.

## Discussion

### (a) Advanced 'Alienation'

The first batch was settled while the construction works in the smaller distributary canals were going on. The lowland allotment of forest land was cleared by the project, the gravel roads cut, and the settlers were invited to take possession of the land. The rationale was apparently that settlers would get employment in the construction work, and that they would prepare the ridges and the land for cultivation by the time water could be issued.

This was in the left bank of Kalawewa, where some land had been cultivated from the tank waters. The vast remaining area is parched dry land. There had been severe droughts for several seasons in the area. Even 'old' villagers could not find a sufficient income in the area, even 'Chena' cultivations being damaged or destroyed. Construction was sub-contracted, and the contractors did not give work regularly. For an income, work had to be done as casual labourers, and when that was done the field could not be prepared.

As the forest was cleared and the natural rhythm broken down, sickness was always a threat. Those families who had come with their children and babies (those displaced from the Bowatenna reservoir area) seemed to be particularly at a loss. The nearest dispensary was a number of miles away and the hospital even further away. Public transport was difficult and there were no school facilities. If the settlement was delayed till construction was completed and the water capable of being issued to the fields and the services organized, all this could have been spared.

### (b) Minimum 'Subsidies'

For settlement in new land, as for any other investment, one needs finance whether as savings, aid or loans. It is not a question of 'subsidies'. However, apparently on the principle of 'self-help', these settlers were given minimum assistance: Rs. 100/- to construct a hut, Rs. 250/- for subsistence at Rs. 50/- a month for five months. A further payment of Rs. 750/- was to be made when the ridges were constructed. Those displaced from the Bowatenna reservoir area had been provided with transport to bring their possessions. Under the World Food Programme, an issue of dry milk, flour and sugar, and sometimes dhal, was received for upto four members of a family though not regularly.

The result was that the 'peasants' could not build more than a bare hut. The settlers from the 'old' villages in the nearby areas stayed in their houses, however facing the threat of eviction soon. The lack of adequate housing assistance was particularly harsh on those displaced from Bowatenna who lived in huts with their possessions piled up under a temporary shelter. Building a more permanent and healthy shelter was useless, even if they

\* According to the field informants, the Soil Surveys had not been done. But an official of the Department of Irrigation clarified that in the H 1 area, the Soil Surveys had been completed. The remaining task was to superimpose the Soil Survey maps on the settlement maps. However that may be, the settlers had not been advised regarding appropriate crops. This was expected to be done at a later stage.

could afford it, because they had not received their homestead yet.

These were of course, 'new' policies. Even as far back as 1941, Rs. 250/- was given for a 'cottage'. The unit cost of a cottage was Rs. 2700/- in 1951, Rs. 1600/- in 1953 and 1956. In 1976, what kind of cottage could be built with Rs. 100/-?

The aid given at the initial stage should be considered grossly inadequate by any standard.

#### (c) 'Delayed' Compensation

The settlers had not received any compensation for loss of property. Such compensation was to be paid after the claims are checked, etc. Why could not the compensation be assessed earlier and given to the 'peasants', so that at least some of the families would have had some savings to start the new life?

Apparently, no compensation was even envisaged for displacement. New settlements involve relocation of the schooling of children, etc. and should have been given at least some consideration.

#### (d) 'Displacing' all Families

Under the new policies, all families, including those from the 'old' villages were displaced. The land was taken over by the project and reallocated. This was apparently necessary for physical planning to irrigate the low-land areas. It may also have been necessary in the context of fragmentation, etc. However, apparently there were no physical planners associated with such 'planning'.

#### (e) Alleged Equality of 2-1/2 acres for each family

The principle of allowing 2-1/2 acres to each family for low-land cultivation and 1/2 an acre for homestead may be reasonable so that a large number can be given an adequate plot of land. However, 2-1/2 acres in the different areas will have different economic potentials. The result is that receiving the better land depends on luck or 'patronage'.

#### (f) Recruitment Principles as a 'Non-issue'

Recruitment of settlers was allegedly according to economic viability criteria and after a number of 'land kacheeries'.

However, there were families of various sizes, one with 14 members. In one family, there were only an aged lady and gentleman, both over 60. There was a high dependency ratio. Most were uneducated, specially the women.

There may have been genuine difficulties in recruitment with the necessity to give land to those displaced from the old villages, etc. It may also be true that given the Sri Lanka extended family, it would be difficult

to ascertain the precise membership of a settler family. However that may be, there was no evidence of any careful selection procedure.

#### (g) Project Officials who 'could' not meet the 'peasants'

There were Development Assistant Community Development Officers on the project. However, they had no contacts with the settlers. As these officers did not have facilities to assist the settlers, they were apparently waiting for happier times to 'organize' the community.

#### (h) Advice on Agriculture and Investments

At the time of the survey, the soil surveys had not been communicated to the settlers. As such, it may be supposed that no advice as to appropriate crops, etc., could have been given. In any case, the settlers had only a very vague idea about the cropping plans of the project etc., and were envisaging paddy cultivation when water was available, and some limited 'chena' cropping till such time.

#### (i) Services

Though the project has elaborated plans for an integrated service centre and the provision of adequate health and educational services, at the time of the survey only the integrated services centre building had been completed. There was an obvious delay in the provision of health and other social services and facilities.

In conclusion, it may be said that many aspects of the initial stage of settlement create an environment for subsistence agriculture at a low level of investment and seem to be inappropriate to an irrigation system that is to usher in an era of new investments in the irrigated areas of the Mahaweli Development Scheme. Some reasonable aid and assistance at the initial stage of settlement or timing of settlement to a time when water can be issued to the field and other services provided seem to be essential if the Mahaweli settlers are to usher in a new era in our economy and country on the basis of a firm beginning and foundation.

#### References:

1. Mahaweli Development Board, 1977, *Mahaweli Ganga Development — Sri Lanka: Summary Report on Projects*. p. 2.
2. Mahaweli Development Board and Sogreah, Grenoble, France, 1972, *Mahaweli Development Project I — Feasibility Study for Stage II, Vol. VII and VIII — Settlement Planning and Development*.
3. Karunatilake, Dingi, 1976, *A study of the Socio-economic Conditions and Investment Potentialities of the Settlers of the Mahaweli Development Project*. — The report of a Field-Survey of the First Stage of Settlers. (People's Bank, Research Department, Study Papers, 1976, Cyclostyled).

**TABLE 1 — AGE STRUCTURE**

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%</i>
0 — 5	48	29	17	17
5 — 10	34	43	77	17
10 — 15	32	26	58	12.9
15 — 20	24	28	52	11.9
20 — 25	22	25	47	10.4
25 — 30	15	19	34	7.5
30 — 40	16	28	44	9.7
40 — 50	20	13	33	7.3
50 — 60	15	2	17	3.9
Over 60	5	7	12	2.6
Total	231	220	451	100.0

**TABLE 2 — FAMILY SIZE**

<i>Family Size</i>	<i>Number of Households</i>
1	—
2	8
3	6
4	7
5	11
6	11
7	12
8	5
9	5
10	3
11	5
12	—
13	—
14	1
Total	74

**TABLE 3 — EDUCATIONAL STANDARD**

<i>Standard of Education</i>	<i>No. of Persons over 5 years</i>	<i>%</i>
Uneducated	103	27.54
Upto 5th standard	173	46.26
5th Standard to G. C. E. 'O' Level	93	24.87
Above G. C. E. 'O' Level	5	1.33
Total	374	100.00

**TABLE 4 — MINIMUM EDUCATIONAL SKILLS OF THE SETTLER FAMILIES**

	<i>No. of families</i>	<i>%</i>
No. of persons educated	5	6.76
At least one person educated upto 5th standard	60	81.08
At least one person educated upto G. C. E. 'O' Level	4	5.41
At least one person above G. C. E. 'O' Level	5	6.75
Total	74	100.00

**TABLE 5 — EMPLOYMENT (as Self-Classified)**

					<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Full time agriculturalists	...	...	...	...	71	26
Part-time agriculturalists	...	...	...	...	189	68
Labourers	...	...	...	...	13	5
Traders	...	...	...	...	1	---
Other	...	...	...	...	4	1
Total					278	

**TABLE 6 — AVAILABILITY OF LAND PER PERSON**

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Low-land Acreage</i>	<i>Acres per person</i>	<i>Entire Acreage</i>	<i>Per person</i>
Population over 15	239	185	0.77	222	0.93
Males over 15	117	185	1.60	222	1.90

**TABLE 7 — ANNUAL INCOME OF SETTLER FAMILIES DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR**

<i>Income Group</i>	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>%</i>
Upto Rs. 500	7	9.5
500 — 1000	11	14.9
1000 — 1500	7	9.5
1500 — 2000	9	12.2
2000 — 2500	12	16.2
2500 — 3000	6	8.1
3000 — 4000	12	16.2
Over 4000	10	13.5

**TABLE 8 — INDEBTEDNESS**

	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>%</i>
Below Rs. 500	10	13.5
500 — 1000	3	4.05
1000 — 2000	3	4.05
2000 and above	2	2.7
No. not reporting	56	75.6

**TABLE 9 — OWNERSHIP OF LAND PREVIOUSLY**

	<i>No. of Families</i>	<i>%</i>
No Land	42	56.7
Upto 1 acre	8	10.8
1 to 3 acres	15	20.2
3 to 5 acres	9	12.16

**TABLE 10 — ASSETS**

	<i>Value Below Rs. 1000</i>	<i>Rs. 1000— Rs. 2000</i>	<i>Rs. 2000— Rs. 3000</i>	<i>Rs. 3000— Rs. 4000</i>	<i>Over Rs. 4000</i>
Movable assets such as bicycles, sewing machines	4	1	3	---	---
Cattle	2	3	1	---	6
Agricultural Equipment	1	---	---	---	---
Value of house that had to be abandoned	8	3	5	1	31

(21 families stated that they had no house of their own previously — 5 not reporting)