

Settlement Planning in Area H

Percy Silva

Department of Geography, University of Colombo

One of the major objectives of the Mahaweli Programme is the development of agriculture in the Dry Zone through a process of land settlement based on family farms. In pursuance of this objective, plans have been drawn up to settle 24,512 families in area H located in the basin of the Kala Oya. Of this, 6007 families have already been settled and it is expected that the remainder will be settled within the next few years.

Area H which is approximately 70,000 acres in extent has been divided into six main sections based on topography and drainage. Each of these sections in turn has been sub-divided into blocks based once again on micro-level variations in topography and drainage. Within each block, an allottee has been given 2-1/2 acres of irrigable land and 1/2 acre of unirrigable land to serve as his homestead.

The blocks are of different sizes and in consequence the number of holdings vary accordingly. This can be seen from Table I which gives the total number of irrigable holdings and homesteads in the blocks that have already been settled within areas H1 and H2.

TABLE I

Distribution of Irrigable Holdings and Homesteads in areas H1 and H2.

Area	Blocks	No. of Irrigable holdings	No. of homesteads
H1	301	271	577
	302	681	881
	303	217	535
	304	602	829
	308	258	367
H2	305	567	601
	306	481	475
	307	355	356
	309	413	467
	310	248	362
	311	317	470
	313	447	683
	314	488	482

Source: Settlement Planning Division, Mahaweli Development Board.

In all of the previous land settlement schemes, the homesteads have been physically separated from the irrigable holdings because of micro-level variations in topography and the development of irrigation systems based on gravity flow. Since the prevailing topographic conditions and the irrigation system in area H

are similar to those of other areas, the physical separation has been unavoidable. All the same, the Mahaweli authorities have attempted to minimize the deleterious effects of such separation by ensuring that an irrigable holding is located less than 2-1/2 miles from the corresponding homestead.

The type of settlement that has been planned for area H also differs from those in the other land settlement schemes. Hitherto, in almost all of the land settlement schemes, the unirrigable holdings or "homesteads" have been distributed in a linear fashion. The linear type of settlement gave rise to a multiplicity of problems, the chief amongst which are (1) the long distances separating the homesteads from the irrigable holdings, (2) the difficulties involved in the provision and utilization of public facilities, (3) the problems in fostering better relationships and solidarity amongst the farming population and (4) the lack of self-identification by the settler.¹ Because of these problems the linear type of settlement has been abandoned in favour of the cluster type, each cluster corresponding to an irrigation block.

Within each block the homesteads have been grouped into several hamlets. The number of hamlets per block and the number of homesteads per hamlet vary from one block to another depending on the size of the block and the local environmental conditions. This can be seen from Table II which gives the number of hamlets and the number of holdings per hamlet in certain selected blocks within the H1 area.

TABLE II

Distribution of Hamlets and Homesteads in Blocks 301, 302 and 308.

Block	Hamlet	Number of homesteads per hamlet
301	1	117
	2	120
	3	176
	4	164
	5	223
	6	138
308	1	127
	2	113
	3	128

Source: Settlement Planning Division, Mahaweli Development Board.

A hamlet with approximately 100 to 150 families was considered to be an ideal size because it was expected to "correspond generally to the peasants conception of a manageable and comfortable social unit".¹ Furthermore, it was pointed out that "for villagers and for old colonists such a dimension is the ideal to permit the smooth play of solidarity ties for any purpose. It facilitates the managing of a new village by its own leaders, their control of social order and the correct operation of cultivation schedules without depending on the external authorities".¹

One of the major problems in many of the previous land settlement schemes was the high degree of cultural and social heterogeneity even within individual settlements. This problem arose partly because of the linear type of settlement that was established and partly because of the inadequate attention given to social and cultural factors when grouping people together. These in turn promoted individuality and prevented the settler identifying himself with a social group. The Mahaweli authorities have attempted to minimize these problems and at the same time promote cohesiveness and solidarity amongst settlers by grouping together as far as possible in hamlets, people having a similar geo-cultural background, a similar social status and wherever practicable, similar caste affiliations.

The selection of allottees and settling them on family farms is only one aspect of land settlement. An equally important aspect is the provision of infrastructure services needed by the settlers not only for the persuance of their agricultural and other economic activities but also for their day-to-day living. In the previous settlement schemes their services were not adequately provided and the little that was provided were often at the wrong locations. Clearly, all of the services needed by the settlers cannot be provided at every service centre because of the huge expenditure involved and the problem of an adequate threshold. Consequently, the plans for area H envisages the provision of these services on a hierarchical basis at 3 different levels, i.e. hamlet centre, village centre and township. The distribution of these different centres within area H can be seen from Table III.

TABLE III
Distribution of Hamlet Centres, Village Centres and Townships in Area H

Area	Blocks	Hamlet Centres	Village Centres	Townships
H ₁	5	23	2	1
H ₂	9	43	2	1
H ₄	10	79	12	2
H ₅	11	67	10	2
H ₇	4	26	2	2
H ₉	5	21	3	1
Total	44	259	31	9

Source: Settlement Planning Division, Mahaweli Development Board.

The services that will be provided at these centres have been divided into 7 categories i.e. administration, commercial, agricultural, educational, cultural,

health and others such as cemeteries and public toilets. The range of services to be provided at each centre varies with the level of settlement. The hamlet centre will serve 100 to 125 families which would amount to 200 to 600 persons. Being the lowest order service centre, the hamlet centre is not expected to perform any administrative functions. The next order centre is the village centre designed to cater to the needs of 4 to 6 hamlets that would include 500 to 700 families. The total population to be served would vary between 2500 and 3500 families. The village centre because of its larger size and location will have more functions and provide a wider range of services than the hamlet centre. Next to the village centre is the township centre which is expected to serve 5 to 6 clusters. These clusters will have 3000 to 3600 families and a total population varying between 15,000 and 20,000 persons. Being a higher order centre, the township is designed to provide a much wider range of services than the other two types of centres. The range of services that will be provided at each level can be seen from Table IV.

It is noteworthy that plans have also been drawn up to provide a suitable industrial base for the village centres and townships. At the village level, the industries include a textile weaving centre, cottage industries and smallscale paddy and fibre-processing mills. The larger industries are to be located at the township level. These include a textile mill, rice processing mills and other mills for agro-based industries such as groundnut oil and straw ware.

Plans that have been drawn up, to be of practical significance should be implemented quickly and efficiently. This is particularly true of service facilities. In the past, there has been a wide time gap between the settling of people and the provision of even the basic service facilities. Furthermore, even after some of the facilities have been supplied, it has taken a long time for them to be developed to a satisfactory standard.

This has not only forced the settlers to face a lot of unexpected difficulties but has also prevented them from sending their roots into the area. An equally serious problem has been the unplanned growth that has inevitably resulted from the delay in the implementation of plans. Some of the unplanned growth has no doubt been salutary. But much of it has been unsatisfactory partly because it has retarded the development of the planned service centres and also because it has led to the emergence of patterns of land use often contrary to what has been planned. All of these problems will have to be avoided in area H if the new settlements are going to emerge as healthy viable communities.

It is clear that a great deal of thought has gone into settlement planning in area H and the net result has been a healthy and welcome departure from the type of settlement planning that has gone on in the past. Several new concepts have been incorporated in the planning process and of these the cluster type of settlement and the hierarchical approach to the provision of services appear to be particularly significant. All of the concepts have no doubt been introduced with certain specific objectives but the extent to which they will be realized depends on the manner in which the plans are implemented.

TABLE IV
INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

SETTLEMENT LEVEL	ADMINISTRATIVE	COMMERCIAL	AGRICULTURAL	EDUCATIONAL	CULTURAL	HEALTH	OTHERS
Hamlet 100—125 Families (500—600 persons)		Co-operative Depot Post Box Boutiques	Farmers organisation Representative	Primary School	Area to be reserved for Recreation, Religious & Community Activities.	Mobile Dispensary	Cemetery (One for two hamlets)
Village Cluster for 4—6 Hamlets 500—700 families (2500—3500 persons)	Grāma Sevaka's Office Range Office (One for every two clusters)	Branch Co-operative Society and Co-op. Depot. Sub Post Office (One for two Clusters) Repair Shops Shops and Sunday fair (Pola Grounds)	Fertilizer Store Paddy Store Tractor Repair Station Project Office (Cluster level)	Primary Educational Institutions Junior Secondary School Play Ground.	Community Centre Multipurpose Hall, Reading Room Library Play Ground, etc. Archaeological and Architectural Ruins to be preserved Religious Institutions Temple, Church Kovil, Mosque, etc.	Public Health Midwife Dispensary (Visiting) (One for two clusters)	Bus Stops Parking Area Green Belts Cemetery Public Toilets.
Township 5—6 Clusters or villages 3000—3600 families (15000—20000 persons)	Town Council Range & Regional Office Police Station	Multipurpose Co-operative Society-Primary Co-operative Retail Depot. Post Office, Banks Central Market Shops Repair Shops Filling Stations Cinemas	Agricultural Training Centre Sub-area farmers Committee Office Paddy Store Fertilizer Stores Agricultural Service Centre	Senior Secondary School & Play Ground Other Educational Institutions Technical & Commercial	Community Centre Multipurpose Hall, Library Play Ground Cinema etc. Religious Institutions Archaeo- logical & Architec- tural Ruins to be preserved	Central Dispensary & Maternity Ward Public Health Centre Hospitals (Peripheral Unit or Rural) Green Belts (For type or distri- bution see F studies)	Bus Stand (Main) Bus Stops Railway Station (If Passing through) Parking Lots Green Belts Public Toilets Cemetery & Crematorium

Source: Settlement Planning Division, Mahaweli Development Board.