

Educational Opportunity and the School Age Population in Sri Lanka

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Education is widely regarded in Sri Lanka as a major agent of individual and national development, and in this context the International Year of the Child may well be an appropriate time to review the issue of educational opportunity. This year has focussed attention on the needs and rights of children which were spelt out in the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child 20 years ago but which are still largely illusory goals - the need to ensure their physical, mental, moral, spiritual and social development, and to protect them from neglect, exploitation and cruelty¹. Unfortunately in Sri Lanka officials and the public tend to salve their conscience by delegating all responsibility to the International Year of the Child Secretariat and to be content to assume the role of critics in a task which requires maximum national awareness and participation.

Among other objectives the Declaration seeks to ensure for children free and compulsory education at least at elementary level, equal opportunity, and protection from social and economic activities which "interfere with their physical, mental and moral development"². Since the nineteen thirties, policies to extend educational opportunity in Sri Lanka have ranged from the provision of free education and school facilities in urban and rural areas to welfare measures such as the provision of scholarships and free school books. It is necessary, however, to review the current situation in order to counter inertia caused by complacency and to focus attention on needs and problems.

In low income countries with resource constraints universal education may appear to be an unrealistic aspiration and educational problems are often the consequences of distortions and inadequacies in the total develop-

1. U. N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1959.

2. *Ibid.*, principle 7, principle 9.

ment process. Nevertheless effective policy formulation and implementation have a significant role to play in ensuring optimum development of available resources.

Participation in education

Access to education is only one aspect of educational opportunity and its complement, outcomes of education, are reflected to some extent in quantitative data relating to educational participation and in qualitative achievement and development. The latter is more difficult to assess but the former may be useful as an index of educational opportunity and as a pointer to needs and priorities.

It has been assumed that there is a high participation rate in education in Sri Lanka since education has been free for over three decades and the island covered by a network of schools. While the participation rate in primary education did increase from 57.6% in 1946 to 74.4% in 1963 and in secondary education from 11.2% in 1953 to 43.3% in 1963, there has been a decline in enrolment ratio in both primary and secondary education since then. (Tables 1, 2 and 3). This decline has been largely ignored although the Consumers' Survey of 1973³ drew attention to the increasing proportion of non-school going children in both urban and rural areas. Estimates made in the mid-seventies indicate a participation rate of 54.3% in 1974⁴ and 53.4% in 1975⁵ for the age-group 6-19 years (the age of admission to schools was raised to 6 in 1972) as compared with 65.2% in 1963 and 56.7% in 1971 for the 5-19 years age group. This decline in enrolment has taken place at a time when many Asian countries have increased substantially their enrolment rate in primary education⁶.

Equal opportunity is an empty phrase in a situation in which approximately 20% of 5 or 6 year olds do not enter the school system while "drop-out" data indicate a high incidence of early leaving. It has been estimated that of 100 students who entered Grade I in 1961, 45% reached Grade 6 in 1967 and 5% Grade 11 in 1972⁷. There is inadequate data to

3. Survey of Sri Lanka's Consumer Finances 1973, Central Bank of Ceylon, Colombo, 1974, p. 28.

4. Needs of Children and Adolescents, Marga, Research Studies 5, Marga Institute, Colombo, 1975, Ch. II, Table IX.

5. Calculation based on school population in School Census and estimated population data.

6. Unesco Office of Statistics, Paris.

7. Data based on statistics from Ministry of Education and presented in "Needs of Children and Adolescents", Marga Research Studies 5, Marga Institute 1975, Ch. 2, Table XI.

ascertain retention rates of specific cohorts of school entrants but Table 4 gives enrolment figures in Grades 1, 6, 9 and 11 pertaining to students who entered the school system in 1965, 1969 and 1974. The percentages presented cannot be termed 'retention rates' as grade enrolment figures include repeaters. It appears, however, that there has been an increase in the number of children proceeding to secondary schools in the early seventies, a decline in the mid - seventies and an increase again in recent years. The decrease in the drop-out rate in Grade 11 is the result of the liberalization of criteria of eligibility for entry to the G. C. E. Advanced Level class (Grade 11).

Notwithstanding these changes, educational opportunity in Sri Lanka has to be viewed in the context that 40% of school entrants do not yet receive any secondary school education, 60% leave without reaching the G. C. E. Ordinary Level classes which lead to the basic qualification for at least middle level employment, and 80% fail to proceed to Grades 11 and 12 which determine access to higher education.

TABLE 1

**Participation rate in education by sex and age groups
1963 and 1971**

Age group	1963			1971		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
5-11	77.6	74.6	76.2	66.8	64.7	65.8
5-15	76.7	72.0	74.4	66.8	63.7	65.3
15-19	43.3	36.6	40.0	37.1	32.9	35.0
11-19	56.8	48.9	53.0	49.6	44.5	47.1
20-24	5.3	4.0	4.6	8.1	7.0	7.4
5-19	67.7	62.5	65.2	58.4	54.9	56.7
5-24	56.2	51.3	53.8	47.6	44.0	46.0

Source: Based on Census of Ceylon, 1963 and 1971, Department of Census and Statistics and presented in Status of Women: Sri Lanka, University of Colombo (1979), Table 5.8, p. 277.

TABLE 2
Participation rate in full-time educational institutions by sex and age - 1963

Age	Both Sexes			Urban			Rural		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
	5	48.1	48.0	48.2	52.7	51.4	54.0	47.3	47.4	47.1
6	73.6	74.8	72.3	79.8	81.3	78.1	72.4	73.5	71.1
7	81.1	83.3	78.9	83.2	87.5	88.9	79.7	82.5	76.9
8	83.5	84.3	81.8	87.9	90.1	85.7	82.6	84.1	81.1
9	84.7	86.3	83.1	91.7	92.6	90.8	83.3	85.1	81.5
10	83.5	84.8	82.2	86.6	90.2	82.8	82.9	83.7	82.0
11	82.0	84.7	79.1	88.3	89.0	87.5	78.0	79.1	77.3
12	73.6	77.3	69.6	80.7	82.3	78.9	72.2	76.3	67.7
13	70.8	75.3	66.2	78.0	80.0	75.9	69.2	74.2	64.1
14	63.8	68.8	58.5	73.6	74.6	72.5	61.4	67.4	55.3
15-19	40.6	43.3	36.6	49.7	51.2	42.9	37.5	41.1	33.8
20-24	4.6	5.3	4.0	12.4	13.4	11.2	2.5	2.7	2.3
25-	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.4	0.3	0.5
Total 5-24	53.8	56.2	51.3	58.6	58.5	58.4	52.7	55.3	50.1

Source: Census of Ceylon, 1963, Department of Census and Statistics.

TABLE 3
Participation Rate in full-time educational institutions by sex and age - 1971

Age	Both Sectors			Urban Sector			Rural Sector		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
	5	15.6	15.7	15.4	16.4	16.4	16.4	15.4	15.5	15.2
6	60.1	60.8	59.4	62.4	62.6	62.1	59.5	60.3	58.2
7	73.3	74.1	72.5	76.7	77.3	76.1	72.4	73.2	71.5
8	76.8	77.8	75.8	80.1	80.5	79.6	76.0	77.0	74.9
9	79.1	80.3	77.8	82.1	83.1	81.1	78.1	79.6	76.9
10	78.1	79.8	76.4	81.4	82.6	80.2	77.2	79.0	75.4
11	77.4	79.6	75.1	82.0	83.2	80.7	76.2	78.7	73.4
12	69.3	71.6	66.8	75.1	76.6	73.5	67.7	70.3	64.9
13	64.9	67.8	61.9	72.3	74.2	70.3	62.8	66.0	59.5
14	57.2	60.2	54.2	65.7	67.5	63.7	54.9	58.1	51.6
15	51.0	53.4	48.5	60.3	62.5	58.0	48.3	50.7	54.8
16	43.2	45.7	40.8	52.9	55.5	50.1	40.5	42.7	38.2
17	35.2	37.1	33.3	43.6	46.0	40.9	32.7	34.3	31.2
18	24.2	25.9	22.5	30.2	32.3	27.8	22.5	23.9	21.0
19	18.8	20.2	17.3	23.8	25.1	22.2	17.2	18.5	15.9
20	12.6	13.8	11.4	16.8	18.0	15.4	11.2	12.3	10.2
21	10.4	11.1	9.7	14.1	14.7	13.4	9.2	9.8	8.6
22	7.7	8.4	7.0	11.5	12.0	10.1	6.5	7.1	5.9
23	6.3	6.9	5.7	9.6	10.1	8.6	5.2	5.7	3.7
24	5.2	5.9	4.6	8.2	8.7	7.6	4.2	4.8	3.7
5-25	46.0	47.6	44.4	49.3	49.6	49.0	45.1	47.0	43.2

Source: Census of Population, Sri Lanka 1971, Department of Census and Statistics.

TABLE 4
Enrolment in Schools in Specific Grades

Grade	Year	Enrolment	% Retention	Year	Enrolment	% Retention	Year	Enrolment	% Retention
Grade I	.. 1965	380,800	100.0	1969	415,897	100.0	1974	361,493	100.0
Grade 6	.. 1970	234,180	61.5	1974	230,719	55.5	1979	222,431	61.5
Grade 9	.. 1973	158,778	41.7	1977	161,590	38.8			
Grade 11	.. 1975	36,221	9.5	1979	80,097	19.2			

Source: Based on School Census data, Ministry of Education

Tables 5 and 6 present early school leaving statistics in 1976 and 1979. A singular feature of educational participation in Sri Lanka is the relatively high proportion of 'repeaters' particularly in the primary school (Table 5). This proportion has been as high as 30% in Grades 1 - 4 in educationally backward districts and this phenomenon of 'repeating' in the primary school is an indictment of the process of education to which these young children are exposed. It is possible that this early experience of failure is a result of absenteeism reflecting problems in educational participation and is, in turn, a predisposing factor to early leaving.

TABLE 5
Leaving and Repetition Rates by Grades - 1976

Grade	Leaving Rate (%)	Repetition Rate (%)
1	0.8	15.6
2	2.3	12.6
3	5.5	12.2
4	7.4	10.9
5	10.2	11.8
6	7.5	6.3
7	6.3	4.6
8	13.9	4.6
9	50.7	25.9
10	74.8	1.5
11	2.6	2.6
12	74.8	25.2

Source: School Census, Ministry of Education.

TABLE 6
Early School Leaving Ratios 1978/79

Educational Districts	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5	Gr. 6	Gr. 7	Gr. 8	
Colombo South	0.6	0.2	2.3	4.1	—	4.7	9.6	6.1	2.5
Homagama	0.4	—	—	—	2.3	3.4	8.1	4.7	0.3
Gampaha	0.6	0.1	1.9	2.0	3.6	6.0	7.7	6.6	3.0
Minuwangoda	0.7	1.8	2.6	4.9	9.5	5.6	9.7	5.1	4.2
Kalutara	1.2	0.4	2.1	4.0	6.5	4.9	7.7	4.9	3.2
Kandy East	1.0	—	2.8	2.7	4.5	5.6	6.0	5.2	3.7
Kandy West	1.6	2.1	4.3	3.1	1.4	3.5	5.9	2.8	2.8
Matale	1.3	3.9	5.9	4.6	5.9	5.2	6.6	4.1	4.3
Nuwara Eliya	3.0	0.3	1.0	0.5	0.3	1.3	1.5	—	1.2
Galle	0.9	1.0	2.6	3.9	2.8	5.8	5.2	4.0	2.8
Matara	1.0	1.5	2.6	3.5	3.9	4.2	5.1	6.2	3.0
Tangalle	1.2	1.3	4.3	5.3	7.1	8.8	7.8	9.0	4.7
Jaffna	0.5	0.1	3.5	3.6	6.7	3.1	5.9	3.3	3.0
Mannar	1.2	2.1	4.9	10.1	14.5	12.0	10.9	8.8	6.7
Vavuniya	1.3	2.6	7.4	7.1	12.5	9.1	9.8	5.4	8.0
Batticaloa	2.1	5.5	9.0	11.9	15.9	7.1	6.6	6.1	16.3
Amparai	2.4	6.4	7.1	6.1	6.8	3.4	6.0	6.3	2.5
Kalmunai	2.8	4.8	9.9	8.3	14.5	5.8	3.8	4.0	6.5
Trincomalee	2.3	3.9	6.2	10.4	11.9	6.1	8.6	8.6	6.2
Kurunegala	0.9	—	1.9	3.9	2.5	4.4	6.0	2.9	1.8
Kuliyapitiya	0.8	0.8	4.6	4.7	5.6	7.2	9.0	5.9	4.2
Nikaweritiya	1.2	1.6	1.4	6.0	6.3	4.2	2.6	4.0	3.0
Chilaw	1.1	—	3.0	5.7	7.3	6.1	5.1	6.7	3.8
Puttalam	1.4	4.9	5.9	12.7	13.7	11.0	7.9	8.3	6.3
Anuradhapura	1.6	0.7	4.7	4.3	6.2	6.7	8.1	3.1	3.7
Polonnaruwa	1.4	3.9	6.3	2.7	14.2	6.4	6.8	3.8	5.3
Bandarawela	2.0	4.5	4.7	5.7	2.6	7.5	6.5	4.6	4.4
Moneragala	1.3	3.4	5.9	2.0	9.6	9.9	5.9	8.1	4.7
Ratnapura	1.4	0.5	1.7	4.0	3.5	5.2	5.9	5.4	2.7
Kegalle	0.9	2.1	2.9	3.6	4.8	7.3	5.6	4.1	3.5
Total Sri Lanka	1.3	1.2	3.4	4.3	4.9	5.4	6.5	4.9	2.8

Source: School Census, Ministry of Education, 1979.

The Grade 5 and Grade 7⁸ scholarship schemes were introduced to assist able children to utilize secondary and higher education opportunities. It may be hypothesized that the 2500-3000 scholars selected on the basis of an all-island competitive examination are among the upper range of 'ability' in each age group and that accordingly the majority of these scholars were likely to find their place among the 4000 secondary school students who gain admission to the university each year. A recent survey of the academic progress of the 1970 group of 2446 Grade 7 scholarship winners showed that only 9.9% had entered the University in 1977 - the first year in which they were likely to do so - and subsequently 8.9% of

8. Scholarships were awarded on an examination held at grade 7 from 1969 to 1976.

this group had gained admission in 1978 and 4.4% in 1979. Three-fourths of these scholars have therefore not entered the University. The reasons for this situation are evidently many and varied, and includes 'dropping-out', and this educational wastage and frustration of aspirations are also negative features of educational opportunity in Sri Lanka.

Imbalances

As the sex-wise data in Tables 1, 2 and 3 show, sex disparities in educational participation at school level are minimal in Sri Lanka as a result of the policy of equal access to education supported by free education facilities for both sexes.

On the other hand marked regional imbalances in educational participation are manifest, clearly reflecting unequal rates of socio-economic development in different regions (Table 7). It will suffice here to cite two examples.

(i) Crucial to the problem of educational opportunity and to the relationship between education and the socio-economic environment is the fact that early school leaving ('dropping out') rates in primary and secondary schools are high in the Eastern and Uva provinces and that half the educational districts, including some which are contiguous to Colombo district, have a relatively high rate of 'dropping out' from Grade 5 and from the secondary school (Table 6).

(ii) The low level of participation in Grades 11 and 12 Science classes, the main avenue to socio-economic mobility in Sri Lanka, in 15 of 26 districts (Table 7) is a disquieting feature calling for dynamic measures and even positive discrimination in regional socio-economic development policies and in the organization of well - equipped district senior secondary schools. The present scheme of basing selection on district quotas is a short-term measure and is hardly an effective substitute for reducing disparities and equalizing opportunities at school level.

Within regions, income disparities adversely affect educational participation and achievement. National level data from the last socio-economic survey (Table 8) points to relatively wide differentials in participation in education particularly in the upper levels of the school system and to low participation in post-secondary education of students from income groups below Rs. 600/- a month.

9. Achievement and under-achievement in Sri Lanka - Longitudinal Study of the Navodaya Scholarship Winners of 1970 - Jayaweera S. and R. Gunawardena. Unpublished Study by Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo (1979).

TABLE 7

Enrolment by Districts 1977 (Percentage Distribution)

Educational Districts	Population Distribution	Grades 1-12 Total enrolment % Distribution	% Distribution Male	% Distribution Female	Enrolment Grade 11-12 Sc. % Distribution	Male enrolment Grade 11-12 Sc. % Distribution	Female enrolment Grade 11-12 Sc. % Distribution
1. Colombo South	} 20.9	8.3	7.8	8.3	19.2	18.5	19.9
2. Homagama		3.1	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.1	2.8
3. Colombo North		6.0	6.0	6.0	6.4	6.6	6.1
4. Minuwangoda		3.4	3.5	3.4	2.0	2.0	1.9
5. Kalutara		5.4	5.5	5.4	5.5	4.7	6.4
6. Kandy		9.3	8.2	8.3	9.0	8.9	9.0
7. Matale		2.5	2.5	2.5	1.9	2.1	1.6
8. Nuwara Eliya		3.5	2.9	3.5	0.9	0.9	0.8
9. Galle		5.7	6.1	5.9	7.7	8.2	7.0
10. Matara		4.6	5.0	5.3	4.5	4.6	4.4
11. Tangalle		2.7	3.0	3.1	1.5	1.5	1.6
12. Jafna		5.6	6.3	6.3	15.9	15.8	16.0
13. Mannar		0.6	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.3
14. Vavuniya		0.8	0.8	0.8	0.4	0.5	0.3
15. Batticaloa		2.1	1.9	1.9	1.8	2.6	1.0
16. Amparal		2.2	0.9	0.9	0.2	0.2	0.1
17. Kalmunai		2.2	1.6	0.8	0.9	1.1	0.7
18. Trincomalee		1.5	1.6	1.7	0.8	1.2	0.3
19. Kurunegala		8.1	7.3	7.4	6.5	6.1	6.9
20. Chilaw		3.0	4.4	4.6	2.3	2.4	2.2
21. Anuradhapura		3.1	3.6	3.6	0.7	0.8	0.5
22. Polonnaruwa		1.3	1.5	1.5	0.4	0.5	0.4
23. Bandarawela		4.9	3.3	3.3	1.4	1.2	1.6
24. Moveragala		1.6	1.2	1.3	0.2	0.2	0.1
25. Ratnapura		5.1	4.6	4.6	1.9	1.6	2.3
26. Kegalle		5.2	5.3	5.2	4.8	4.3	5.3
Total - SRI LANKA	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Based on School Census data, Ministry of Education, 1977 and presented in Status of Women: Sri Lanka, University of Colombo (1979), Table 5. 19, pp. 250.

TABLE 8

Participation Rate in Education by Household Income (1970)

Income	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-19	Age 20-24
Less than Rs. 100 ..	61.9	64.7	29.1	6.3
Rs. 100-199 ..	68.9	73.9	28.9	2.2
Rs. 200-399 ..	75.8	81.3	36.1	6.5
Rs. 400-599 ..	79.6	85.7	48.7	6.5
Rs. 600-799 ..	85.6	85.6	57.5	16.6
Rs. 800-999 ..	76.3	83.8	55.3	22.2
Rs. 1000 & over ..	85.8	81.3	61.5	19.9
All groups ..	73.8	79.3	38.8	6.8

Source: Socio-Economic Survey 1969/79, Dept. of Census and Statistics.

The effect of disparities in school facilities and other environmental factors is further seen in the concentration of university entrants from low income groups in arts courses. Data relating to the 1976 university entrants indicates that 76.4% of the entrants from families with monthly incomes of over Rs. 600/- and only 25.1% of the entrants from families with a monthly income less than Rs. 600/- gained admission to science courses.¹⁰ Since arts courses in most instances lead to less remunerative employment and even to unemployment, inequalities in educational opportunity have significant repercussions even for those who are able to complete their secondary education.

Currently the Indian Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka are also educationally disadvantaged groups as a result of historical and cultural factors.

National or even regional data are often misleading in that they contribute to generalizations which mask the gravity of the problem of inequalities and deprivation in specific geographical areas or social groups. Micro-studies have been few but they provide a corrective to such generalizations. A very high incidence of early leaving has been found for

10. Based on data in "University Admissions 1976 - A Report on the Background Characteristics of the Entrant Population", Planning and Programming Division, Ministry of Education.

instance, in economically and socially underprivileged neighbourhoods such as urban shanty settlements and remote villages.¹¹ Recent studies in agricultural settlements such as Minipe¹² and the Mahaweli area¹³ have shown that the economic value of child labour in agricultural communities, particularly during times of peak activity, have led to absenteeism and withdrawal of children from school partly as a result of the rigidity of educational organization and insensitivity to varying social needs.

Determinants and Policies

Poverty and the consequent inability on the part of parents to maintain their children at school as well as negative attitudes to education have been identified as major causes of non-enrolment in schools and early leaving. Economic constraints have also led to inadequacies in educational provision and facilities from pre-school level to further education. Half the schools in the island (50.5% in 1977) can be classified as "small schools" with meagre facilities and with enrolments ranging from less than 50 to 200 students. Many of these schools are found in less developed districts where geographical factors also limit the access of these children to secondary and senior secondary schools within these districts. Imbalances in the supply of qualified teachers in crucial areas such as mathematics, science and languages, and in the provision of laboratory facilities and other educational equipment further bedevils the issue of educational opportunity.

Compounding the consequences of these economic constraints are the lacunae in policies directed towards universalizing educational opportunities. Free education was introduced over three decades ago but supportive legislation is lacking and priority has yet to be directed to the most needy in introducing complementary socio-economic measures.

Section 12 of the Constitution permits the adoption of special measures for the advancement of children, but contrary to popular assumption there is no national legislation in operation enforcing compulsory education at any level in Sri Lanka. The 1939 Education Ordinance¹⁴ empowered the Executive Committee of Education of the State Council to

11. Kariyawasam T., *A Study of Early School Drop-outs in the Secondary Schools of Underprivileged areas in the City of Colombo*, Y. M. C. A.; 1976

12. Wanigaratne R. D. *Development of the Minipe Colonization Scheme*, Research Study Series No. 29 Agrarian Research and Training Institute, Colombo, 1978.

13. Dr. Percy Silva, Dr. Jayanthi Perera and Mr. W. N. Wilson, Dept. of Geography, University of Colombo, National Science Council Man and Biosphere Project in the Mahaweli New Settlement areas (on-going).

14. Education Ordinance No. 31 of 1939, Part V Sec. 32, (Govt. Press).

make regulations enforcing compulsory education and with the change to Parliamentary government the Education Ordinance empowers the Minister to make regulations in respect of compulsory education,¹⁵ but no laws or regulations have been introduced subsequently.

Legislation that cannot be enforced through lack of school facilities or economic difficulties may appear to serve little purpose, but it is always possible to enforce such legislation initially in areas where schools are available within a reasonable distance, with provision for exemption where necessary. A positive policy in this respect will lead to greater awareness of the problem of non-school going children and to the adoption of ancillary measures at local and national level to assist children from underprivileged families to utilize available facilities.

Similarly the provision in The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act¹⁶ relating to the prohibition of the employment of children under 14 years has never been enforced, thereby leading to the exploitation of young children in what is, in some instances, virtual slave labour. Legislation to enforce even minimum part-time educational facilities for those who are compelled to seek employment have yet to be implemented in relation to the educational needs of these children.

Concern has generally tended to be directed to over-all policies, and in implementation, to only those in the "pipe line" within the education system who are often the children from the more developed areas and from articulate sections of the community. Alternate measures to reach those who are outside the system - who have failed to enter it or who have 'dropped out' of it - have not received adequate attention. In Sri Lanka non-formal education has been conceived largely in terms of vocational training but educational opportunities even in this area are yet limited. In quantitative terms the total efforts of the Ministry of Education, the National Apprenticeship Board, the Department of Labour, the National Youth Council, the Department of (Small) or Rural Industries and other employment-oriented Ministries and Departments as well as the non-government sector can hardly meet the needs of even a fraction of the non-school going population who form almost half the school age population, which in turn constitutes approximately half the population of the country.

15. The above Ordinance as amended, Part V. Sec. 37, Government of Ceylon, Legislative Enactments, Govt. Press.

16. The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act No. 47 of 1956.

Many economically developing countries have experimented with alternative strategies and organizational patterns to extend educational opportunities to children from low income families. Some of these have been introduced as pilot projects but their innovative features offer possibilities of adaptation.

Within the education system efforts have been made in the Asian and Pacific region to synchronize school vacations with agricultural seasons and to shorten school hours to enable children who have domestic and occupational responsibilities to continue to attend school. Multiple points of entry and re-entry have been accepted in some countries so that children who have not been to school or have 'dropped out' can enter it at a further point after preparation through non-formal programmes. For instance, both in the Philippines and Thailand 'second chance' programmes are provided to enable children to re-enter the education system at second level, and it is proposed to extend this system to primary schools also.¹⁷

Outside the formal education system part-time education facilities are provided in many Asian countries to assist early school leavers to continue their education. In the Philippines, Learning Centres are organized in schools and churches, evening primary classes are held in Manila for school drop-outs and multigrade classes in remote areas for out-of-school children.¹⁸ The National Council of Educational Research and Training in India has made preparations to introduce part-time educational facilities for 6 to 14 years old children who have not been to school or who have 'dropped out' to seek employment.¹⁹ The Undeprivileged Children's Education programme begun in 1973 in Bangladesh offers a shortened primary education including craft training to children who work as hawkers, sweepers, labourers and waiters and Indonesia has its Development Learning Centres. The problem of inadequate facilities in remote areas has been countered in economically developed (Australia) and developing countries (India and Papua New Guinea) by the use of itinerant teachers or by distance education programmes using correspondence courses, radio and television.

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17. *Education in Asia and Oceania - Progress and Prospects E. D. - 78 / MINEDASO* 3, 1978.
 18. *Asian Programme for Education Innovation and Development. Report of Programme Development Meeting, April - May 1977, Unesco, Bangkok, 1977.*
 19. *Non-formal Education for Drop-out Children and Rural Development-National Council of Education Research and Training, New Delhi, 1977.*

In Sri Lanka such efforts have been rare largely because both public and official attention have been focussed on the formal system and have tended to be oblivious of the needs of those who have been pushed or left out of this system.

Some Consequences

Some implications of the neglect of the problem of educationally deprived children are seen in the numbers of children who have lost their minimum 'rights' as spelt out in the Declaration and whose unfortunate position is reflected even in the inadequate statistics available in Sri Lanka.

Literacy rates in Sri Lanka increased consistently till 1963 but only the rural female literacy rate registered an increase from 1963-71, while urban literacy showed a slight decline. Literacy figures in different Census Reports need to be interpreted cautiously. Nevertheless the decline in literacy rates of school age groups (Table 9) is a pointer to the fact that the proportion of children receiving even a minimal education to ensure functional literacy has decreased. Between 1963 and 1971 (the last Census year) there was a perceptible decline in urban and rural male and female literacy among 10-14 year olds. A similar decline was noted among urban males and females and rural males of the 15-19 years age group. The impact of the declining enrolments of the nineteen seventies on literacy has yet to be seen.

Labour force statistics (Table 10) indicate that the number of children aged 10-14 in the labour force decreased from 1946 to 1963 inevitably as a result of increasing school enrolment, and more slowly from 1963 to 1971 while the activity rate of this age group declined from 13% in 1946 to 6.2% in 1963 and to 5% in 1971. In economically developing countries in Africa and Asia the labour force activity of children of this age is relatively high while it is insignificant in industrialized countries, and this disparity reflects differences in economic growth rates and in the structure of the economy.

Nevertheless the fact that 80,729 children (49,400 boys and 31,329 girls) in Sri Lanka between 10 and 14 years were in the labour force in 1971, in a country in which part-time education facilities for this age group are practically non-existent, illustrates the sad plight and bleak future of a sizeable proportion of children. Of this number 33.3% of the boys and 41.9% of the girls were classified as belonging to the large pool of unemployed youth in the country.

TABLE 9
Literacy Rates

Age Group	1946			1953			1963			1971		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	Total 10-14	68.6	54.9	61.9	81.9	69.8	76.1	86.6	82.7	84.7	83.7	82.3	83.0
15-19	79.5	59.0	69.9	83.5	66.3	75.2	90.3	82.2	86.3	88.3	85.1	86.7
Urban 10-14	74.6	68.0	71.5	86.0	82.9	84.6	91.5	90.3	90.9	88.4	87.6	88.0
15-19	84.7	75.1	80.8	90.5	84.2	87.7	94.8	92.1	93.5	92.4	91.0	91.7
Rural 10-14	67.7	52.9	60.5	81.3	67.7	74.7	85.6	81.1	83.4	82.4	80.9	81.7
15-19	78.3	65.0	67.8	82.0	63.2	72.8	89.1	79.8	84.5	87.0	83.4	85.2

Source: Census of Ceylon 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971, Dept. of Census, Colombo.

TABLE 10
No. of Children aged 10 - 14 years in the Labour Force and
Activity Rates

Age group 10 - 14 years			1946	1953	1963	1971
Labour Force (Nos.)						
Total	..	..	104,502	92,488	82,758	80,729
Male	..	..	58,491	48,207	55,025	49,400
Female	..	..	46,011	44,281	27,733	31,329
Activity Rate (%)						
Total	..	..	13.0	10.2	6.2	5.0
Male	..	..	14.1	10.5	8.1	6.0
Female	..	..	11.8	9.9	4.3	4.0

Source: Census of Population Sri Lanka, 1971, Dept. of Census and Statistics.

Area and micro-studies of colonization schemes have shown that a large proportion of children under 14 years of age are full-time or part-time agricultural workers. In the sample survey in Minipe, 41% of the population between 6 and 14 years of age did not attend schools and 98% of these were full-time or part-time helpers in agriculture and in household family duties²⁰. It is apparent that children in the labour force are engaged chiefly as casual labour in the rural and urban sectors. An interesting feature of the census data, however, is that the urban activity rate is higher than the rural activity rate for the age group 10 to 14 years, whereas the rural rate is higher in all other age groups. This difference may be indicative of the prevalence of exploitation of child labour in domestic service and in ill-paid jobs in the informal sector in urban areas. Physical and psychological cruelty are often concomitants of such exploitation.

Another facet of the status of children under 14 years of age can be seen in the distribution of children by activity in 1971 in Table 11. The unemployed proportion of this age group had increased in contrast to the decline in the proportion of the employed and a significant increase was seen in those classified as "others" from 9.7% in 1963 to 15.8% in 1971 - that is, those who are not in schools or in the labour force or engaged in household duties. These non-school going 'inactive' children of this vulnerable age group are apt to be victims of circumstances which enmesh them in activities which are detrimental to their own well being and to that of the community.

20. Refer Notes 10 and 11.

TABLE 11
Percentage Distribution by Activity of Children aged 10-14 years

Activity	1963			1971		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Employed ..	6.5	3.6	5.1	4.0	2.3	3.2
Unemployed ..	1.6	0.7	1.1	2.0	1.7	1.8
Students ..	78.7	71.6	75.2	76.6	71.3	74.0
Engaged in Home Duties ..	3.5	14.3	8.8	1.9	8.6	5.1
Others ..	9.6	9.9	9.7	15.5	16.2	15.8
Total ..	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Census of Population Sri Lanka, 1971 Dept. of Census and Statistics.

According to available statistics a small proportion of children are currently accommodated in welfare institutions for the physically, mentally and socially handicapped (2634), children's homes (4173), state receiving homes (327), remand homes (334) and certified schools (530)²¹ i. e. only 7098 children are in institutions set apart for the handicapped, the homeless and those identified as being prone to deviant behaviour. Only 200 child beggars have been admitted so far to institutions for rehabilitation²². These children in institutions form only a minute proportion of the neglected and deprived and of those who need protection from their proclivities in underprivileged and congested areas.

Positive features of the education situation are the social goals of education policies which have survived the vicissitudes of policy-orientation over three decades, the high aspirations of parents and children²³ from all economic strata, and the faith placed by them in education as an agent of individual mobility and advancement. It is opportune now to review the efficacy of the education system in Sri Lanka from the perspective of social justice and to evaluate its outcomes and direct its policies to encompass the needs of that half of the school age population who have failed so far to share the benefits of education and have therefore been exposed to 'neglect, cruelty and exploitation'. National policies need to be augmented by district level planning and implementation, and the reduction of educational disparities appear to depend largely on integrated district development in which education functions positively as a co-agent of accelerated socio-economic development.

21. Data compiled by the Sri Lanka School of Social Work, Colombo 3 (1979).

22. Ministry of Social Services (1977).

23. Several Studies have found that children and parents in Sri Lanka have high education aspirations e. g. refer Status of Women: Sri Lanka, University of Colombo 1979 pp. 374 - 384.