

# PUBLIC SECTOR PROGRAMMES FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Rural Development is a term widely used by many persons throughout the world. The meaning of the term differs from country to country depending on its socio-economic situation. In Sri Lanka, the rural sector comprises of about 70-80 per cent of its economy. The non-urban areas mainly depending on traditional agriculture, excluding the plantation sector can be demarcated as the rural sector. "Rural Development is therefore, an attempt to raise output, income and the well-being of the people of this sector". (Hiran Dias and W.P.J. Silva - 1981). Some main characteristics identified in the rural sector of Sri Lanka are given below:

- a) Many rural people are living below the poverty line
- b) Malnutrition
- c) Inadequate Health and Education services
- d) Inadequate infra-structure
- e) Traditional technology of production
- f) Illiteracy and ignorance
- g) Greater level of dependency on Government and other external services

Any attempt to eradicate these undesirable characteristics and provide opportunities for improvement of quality of life of rural people can be defined as "Rural Development"

The consecutive Governments that came into power since independence have launched numerous and different programmes towards development of rural people in Sri Lanka. Although the programmes have been labelled in different ways the main objective was "Rural Development". Therefore, in this discussion the main programmes are divided into the following six major categories:

1. Poverty-Reduction Programmes
2. Infra-structure Development
3. Welfare-Oriented Services
4. Agricultural Productivity Raising Programmes
5. Education Programmes for Rural People
6. Institution Building Programmes

Although there are some special development programmes aimed at specific geographical areas such as Mahaweli, District Integrated Rural Deve-

lopment, Export Development Villages etc., they are not discussed here as Public Sector development programmes. These special programmes may be dealt with in a separate issue of this journal.

## 1. Poverty-Reduction Programme

### (a) Food Stamp Scheme

Sri Lanka has been cited for its remarkable social progress and thus described as a welfare state; "This progress appears to be at least in part the result of a series of social policies that have been followed in the country since and in some cases prior to independence. Among these are the food distribution programmes. A comprehensive public rice distribution system has operated since World War II." (Gavan & Chadrsekera - 1979). The entire population of the country irrespective of their income level were enjoying this "food subsidy" until 1978. "There was no target group approach in the welfare services up to 1978, and the present regime introduced 'growth oriented', approach to replace welfare-oriented programmes". (Wickramasekera P-1985).

The food subsidy was limited only to low income households from 1978, and the Food Stamp Scheme was introduced in 1979. This new scheme also provided a cash subsidy in contrast to earlier commodity specific services. The income ceiling for a family of five members for entitlement of food stamps was Rs.300/= and Rs.60/= per additional member at the time when it was introduced. In 1979, there were 7.72 million persons who claimed to be below this income level.

The percentage of food subsidies as a total government ex-

penditure which was 16 in 1977 has declined to 7 in 1980. Later, this income ceiling was changed and the present scheme is as follows:

Income Category	No. of persons entitled for food stamps in a family
Below Rs. 300/-	All
Rs. 301/- - 400/-	4
Rs. 401/- - 600/-	3
Rs. 601/- - 700/-	2

Although the government wanted to increase the income ceiling and issue food stamps only to about 50 per cent of the people, the number of people who are eligible for food stamps remained the same. There were 6.9 million persons receiving food stamps in 1986. The other problem is that while some persons such as monthly paid labourers lost their food stamps, people with substantial income from self employment sources could enjoy this subsidy. Some critics point out that government officers who recommend the issue of food stamps at local level such as Grama Sevaka Officers are subject to local political pressure and most of them are new or outsiders who do not know much about the people and their income. While there was no effective mechanism to monitor the programme, the receivers of this cash subsidy were affected by the inflationary trends of the price of essential food items.

### (b) Public Assistance Programme

This is a monthly dole given to the helpless persons especially the disabled, aged and orphans. The programme has been administered by the Department of Social Services for over four decades. There are three main types of monthly assistance given to people, such as Public Assistance/Charitable allowance, special allowances for T.B. and leprosy patients. Very few cases are

being selected among receivers of public assistance for the 'rehabilitation' programme, which helped them to start as self-employment.

The amounts of money spent for Public Assistance and other special programmes are given below.

#### Public Assistance Programme

Year	Maximum amount paid to a single person	Maximum amount paid to a person with dependents	Number of families received	Total amount paid (Rs)
1981	Rs. 20/-	Rs. 75/-	194850	41989660.00
1982	Rs. 20/-	Rs. 75/-	201463	43934192.00
1983	Rs. 40/-	Rs. 150/-	195442	66305910.00
1984	Rs. 40/-	Rs. 150/-	199009	93651352.00

#### T.B. Allowance and Leprosy Allowance

Year	Number of Families		Total Amount Paid	
	T.B.	Leprosy	T.B. Rs.	Leprosy Rs.
1981	5702	733	3,494,296.00	552,680.00
1982	6337	908	4,196,873.00	638,845.00
1983	9706	1,077	4,630,225.00	998,991.00
1984	5729	1,015	7,229,083.00	1,388,264.00

Source : Administration Report - 1984 of Director Social Services (in print)

These programmes are routinely administered by an Assistant Director at District level, Assistant Government Agent at Divisional level and Grama Sevaka Officers at Village Level. Since there are limitations of funds allocated for these purposes, it is difficult to say that there is a considerable impact on income level of the people in the country. On the one hand the amounts paid were hardly sufficient and on the other hand there can be many more people in rural areas who are eligible but not receiving any assistance. This

programme, therefore needs to be evaluated and revised on a regular basis.

### 2. Rural Infra-Structure Development

Development of basic infra-structure facilities in rural areas is one of the most important public pro-

grammes. Sri Lanka's progress in basic amenities is remarkable when compared with any other developing country. Even in the remotest village, there is a public school and almost all the villages are interconnected with a comprehensive road network.

#### (a) Decentralized Budget

Since independence, the consecutive governments have been concerned with allocating funds for basic requirements. This

concern has become more important since the 1970s with the introduction of the Decentralized Budget (DCB)

There has been considerable progress during the past decade in the areas of school buildings, irrigation, other public buildings rural roads, rural housing and electrification programmes as a result of the DCB system.

The Government, at present allocates Rs. 5 million for each electorate under the DCB, and out of this amount, Rs. 2.5 million is spent through District Development Councils while the other half is utilized on the basis of the electorate or Member of Parliament.

The following table depicts the amounts spent under DBC on some selected items during the year of 1984.

In (Rs. '000)					
	Irrigation	Highways	Education	Health	CEB
New Works	9,769	47,516	58,523	2,658	71,566
Continuation Works	3,764	18,571	19,802	388	1,220

Total amount spent in 1984 has been Rs. 378,545,000 for new works and Rs. 89,554,000 for continuation works.

### (b) Rural Electrification Programme

Until the 1970s the use of electricity was limited to industrial and commercial projects mostly located in urban areas and to domestic consumption of urban and a handful of rural affluent families. As the generation of hydro-electricity in the Mahaweli and other projects increased the supply of electricity was extended to rural areas, with a view to promote the growth of small scale industries and use of

electricity for domestic purposes. The funds allocated for this purpose came either from the Ceylon Electricity Board or from the Decentralized Budget. However, the Ceylon Electricity Board has extended the services tremendously into rural areas during the recent past.

The supply of electricity to rural areas has had a great impact on the social standards and quality of life of rural people. Although, the provision of this service has been broad-based, there are a large number of people still waiting to get electricity for their houses, and thus action should be taken to serve all those applicants. The other aspect is that a large number of rural people who live in wattle and daub and cadjan/hay roofed houses are not eligible to obtain electricity because of the poor conditions of their houses.

### 3. Welfare-Oriented Services

Social Welfare Oriented services reaching the entire population have been in operation since the 1940s. The two main services are education and health for all the people. Although, there are some private sector agencies providing both these services on payment of fees they are limited to urban areas and the entire responsibility and cost of such services in rural areas have to be borne by the Government.

#### (a) Education Programmes

The formal education from kinder-

garten to University level has been provided entirely free of charge since the 1940s. There is a Government School in any corner of the country. In 1980, the Government also introduced distribution of free school text books to the school children from year/grade 1 to year grade 11.

There was a total of 9914 schools of different categories in the country, by the end of 1984. This has been increased to 10,051 in 1985. The total number of teachers who work in Government Schools was 143,314 and the number of pupils was 3,638,257 in 1985. The Government expenditure on education in the same year was as follows:

Current Expenditure (Rs. Mn.)	2,835.6
Capital Expenditure "	189.9
Total "	3,025.5

It is a remarkable feature in Sri Lanka that a high rate of literacy (85%) has been achieved. This rate is very close to that of developed countries, and for above many among South Asian countries.

This achievement can be mainly attributed to the education policies of Sri Lanka. However, some shortcomings of the education policies have been observed by some experts. First, there is a great disparity of educational levels and facilities available in urban and rural areas. Urban schools with many facilities and qualified teachers offer an irresistible attraction throughout the country. Secondly, it has also been verified that enrolment rates and progression rates are linked with income levels of the parents. The Mahapola Scholarship Scheme has helped poor children at University levels. But there is no such Scheme for the secondary and primary levels. The third factor is that the system of education does not produce the skilled persons required by the country today. "The education system was basically oriented towards academic skills and little related to development needs of the country". (Piyasiri Wickremasekera - 1986). Therefore well planned education policies

should be introduced with the consent of all leading political parties without allowing it to be changed according to the whims and fancies of a few people

**(b) Health Services**

There has been a considerable improvement in health and medical services since the 1940s. Like education, the health services also

vides free health services, the situation in rural areas is not so 'healthy' as in urban areas. Lack of medical and para-medical personnel, lack of equipment, drugs and transport facilities are major constraints in rural areas. The other factor is that there is still less emphasis on preventive services than on the curative services.

tent of pioneering an International Year of Shelter for Houseless, by the United Nations. There is evidently a greater level of improvement in housing during the 1980 decade.

The following table shows the progress of Rural Housing Programmes from 1978-1982.

So many poor people in rural areas have been fortunate enough to own a permanent house as a result of the One Million Housing Programme. However, it is important to consider some way of living for most of those who have received houses as they find it difficult to find employment in their immediate environment. The model village programme has been more beneficial since a model village has other basic facilities such as a Civic Centre, Employment Generation project etc.

Per 1000

Year	Birth rate	Death rate	Increase rate	Maternal Mortality	Infant Mortality
1945	36.5	21.9	14.7	16.5	140
1965	33.1	8.2	24.9	2.4	53.2
1975	27.7	8.5	19.2	1.0	45.1
1980	28.4	6.2	22.2	0.6	34.4
1985	24.3	6.2	18.1	-	-

The Life Expectancy rate at birth has also increased during the last few decades in the following manner.

Year -	1920	1946	1953	1962	1967	1971	1979
Male -	32.7	43.9	58.8	61.9	64.8	64.2	66.0
Female-	30.7	41.6	57.5	61.4	66.9	67.1	70.2

have been provided free of charge at all levels to people in the country. The systematically organized network of medical and health service systems has achieved tremendous success - especially after independence in 1984. The social indicators given in the following table prove this success.

The contribution of the Government to health services is very large and the amount spent in 1984 was Rs. 1,751 million. There were 490 Government Hospitals (Western Medicine), 338 Central Dispensaries with a total of 43,877 beds in the country during the year 1985. The number of Government medical officers was 3,108, and Registered Medical Practitioners was 984.

Although, the Government pro-

**(c) Rural Housing Programme**

Sri Lanka has been very fortunate in the field of housing development, which has gone to the ex-

**4. Agricultural Productivity Raising Programme**

Agriculture occupies an eminent position in the economy of Sri Lanka. The geography of the country enables supply of water from rivers starting in the central hilly region and flowing down to the flat terrain of lands in the maritime and dry zone regions providing tremendous opportunities for irrigated agricultural development. The rural areas comprise about 70-80 per cent of the country and in most

	Total estimated cost Es.m.	No. of Units-completed	No. of units under construction
ASH Housing	(100.0)	19,230	8,833
Model Villages		10,638	4,826
Electoral Housing Schemes		7,447	n.n.
Total		26,677	13,844

part of it a rural agriculture-based economy. (Plantation areas are not taken into consideration here).

The agricultural sector plays a vital role and thus agricultural production as a percentage of GDP was 35 and percentage of labour force employed in agriculture was 54 in 1978.

The public policies even before Independence have encouraged domestic agriculture, with restoration of tanks and irrigation schemes and land settlement programmes in the dry zone. All the Governments that have come into power since Independence have launched many programmes to improve agricultural production. Among them land alienation and settlement, improvement of irrigation facilities, agricultural extension services, credit and insurance for agriculture, use of modern technology, use of improved mechanical equipment, and livestock and fisheries development are the major programmes which have affected productivity. The following figures show that there has been a notable increase of land alienation during the past decades.

	1952	1966	1980
Number of Allottees	16,332	39,672	97,000 (excluding Nabalotti)
Extent (in acres)	118,430	284,111	

Season	Harvested area (hectares)	Production in '000 Metric tons	Average Yield in per Hectare
1977 - 78	Naha 352,731 Total 386,694	1,286 605	2,754 2,403
1983 - 84	Naha 308,933 Total 375,874	1,353 1,060	3,031 3,146

Source: Department of Census and Statistics

The public sector programmes have been carried out throughout the country with the assistance of many Ministries and Departments, District Administrative Systems and other Agencies. The following data substantiates the increasing trend in this sector.

There were 426,443 hectares of land under major schemes and 231,916 hectares under minor schemes irri-

gated for paddy cultivation in the year of 1984. The Government also has helped livestock and fisheries development through the respective Ministries under various specific programmes.

Sri Lanka today has achieved the level of self-sufficiency in rice and considerable improvement in other fields. However, some have observed that although national targets in agricultural production have been achieved, the quality of life of people in rural areas, who are engaged in agriculture has not been increased accordingly. The production as well as price of paddy and other commodities have gone up and at the same time, the cost of production also has increased. With the withdrawal of subsidies on fertilizer and other inputs, the net outcome of farmers have remained unchanged. There are also many others still without land and other facilities for agriculture living in rural areas.

### 5. Education Programmes for Rural People

The formal education provided through the public schools is not discussed here while various programmes launched by some Govern-

ment Agencies on informal education and training of rural people are discussed here. Some of the major programmes in this respect are listed below:

In addition to the above training programmes, various other Government Agencies also conduct training programmes for rural people on different topics.

Although, much effort has been made on this subject, still the rural masses remain ignorant about many things, including the types of public delivery systems which affect their lives.

### 6. Institutional Building Programmes

It is accepted and unquestionable that 'people' who benefit from different programmes should be actively involved in planning, implementing and evaluating such activities. Therefore, people's participation in the true and objective sense should be obtained in any rural development effort. There should be active people's organizations, which provide opportunities for active mobilization of people. There had been many people's institutions in rural areas which prevailed over many decades. Among them are the Rural Development Society, DEath Donation Society, Cooperative Con-

Programme	Agency
a) Adult Education	Ministry of Education
b) Training on Nutrition and Family Planning	Ministry of Plan Implementation
c) Agriculture Training	Department of Agriculture
d) Health Training	Ministry of Health
e) Village Level Training	Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration
f) Training of Target Groups of rural communities	Rural Development Training & Research Institute
g) Village Level Leaders Training	International Institute of Training Village Leaders (Embilipitiya)

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sumer and Credit Society, Religious Societies, Recreation Clubs, Farmer Organizations and many other voluntary organizations.

Although, these 'Peoples organizations' work in many rural areas, their impact on institutional building capacity of the people has not been very effective. Still many rural people depend on the Government bureaucracy and external assistance rather than building up their own strength.

The other point is that the activities of many such organizations seem to be overlapping while a smaller proportion of rural people have enrolled in them.

#### Conclusions/Recommendations

Although there had been numerous public programmes for rural development over the last few decades, there is still a larger proportion of poor, illiterate people, living in rural areas even without 'basic human needs'. Some have observed that the urban-rural gap has been widened over the past. Basic problems of landlessness, unemployment, illiteracy, inadequate infrastructure, ineffective education programmes and peoples' participation are getting aggravated in rural areas. (Wickremasekera - 1985).

Therefore some clear-cut public policy on rural development with total commitment of the national leadership is essential for an effective rural development effort. It is also important to change the approach of the bureaucracy with a proper re-orientation of Government. Officers at all levels, so that they would manage development 'not for the people, but with the people'. Proper coordination of activities aimed at rural development at national, regional and rural levels is a very important aspect that the authorities should look into. Attempts should be made to provide at least basic needs for rural people with their

effective participation while bridging the urban-rural gap.

Government may consider providing more attractive facilities in rural areas to discourage the migration to urban areas. Action may be taken to appoint qualified and dedicated officers (including Government School Teachers) to rural areas

and induce them to remain by introducing various incentive schemes. Proper credit and marketing facilities should be made available in rural areas. The people in rural areas should be assisted to achieve at least the minimum level of socio economic and rural development based on their self-respect and self-reliance.

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#### Gramodaya Mandalaya.....

of the resources needed. Manpower, however, is considered more important.

Since non governmental organisations are the main agent in the Gramodaya Mandalaya programme, its success depends mainly on the availability of such organisations and their ability to work effectively.

A paper by T. Abeyrama, a Research Associate in the Human Settlements Development Division and K. Saeed Associate Professor of System Science and Management, of the Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand, reviewing the Gramodaya Mandalaya concept concludes that "In principle the Gramodaya Mandalaya scheme seems to be a sound way of improving the people's participation in development. But this can be done only if proper attention is paid to overcoming barriers which may hinder the proper utilisation of existing voluntary organisations in harnessing the people's participation in development. This may require the reform of the existing voluntary organisations as well as the provision of

opportunities for the training of their members. Furthermore, social development inculcating values of self-reliance, self-help, self-sufficiency and mutual co-existence is to be undertaken, and technical knowhow and management training is to be provided.

Organising the masses is not an easy task. Since different people and groups of people have different interests, conflicts of interest will develop. Also, the administrators and politicians may see mobilisation of the masses as a threat and may implicitly or explicitly discourage programmes attempting such mobilisation.

Thus, even though participatory development schemes are conceptually very appealing, their implementation is quite problematic. The Gramodaya Mandalaya scheme attempts to increase the people's participation but if it is implemented without paying attention to the social environment of the scheme, the chances of its success will be low.