

Hill Country Plantation People their life Enhancement vis a vis Poverty



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Enhancement vis a vis Poverty

Plantation workers' wage increase figures prominent in talks among the plantation workers: and, the employer federation, government and trade union circles. The problem is being approached from two angles, one from the income of the plantation workers, their daily wage, other benefits and social welfare facilities available to them and other, the productivity, the cost of production, export earnings and the profit and loss aspects.

In the meantime, there is a contention in some quarters that the standard of living of the plantation workers has raised and the poverty reduced. One can hardly forget these controversial have been thrown up with the wage increase collective agreement which is to be signed between the plantation trade unions and the employers' federation in view.

The households income and expenditure preliminary report of the census and statistics department states that the poverty has reduced and the standard of living has raised, namely; the plantation poverty which was 32% in 2006/2007, has come down to 9.2% in 2009/2010 (Head count index). On the other hand, the average plantation house hold income which was Rs. 19292.00 in 2006/2007 has gone up to 25649.00 in 2009/2010. It also states that the plantation going through a multitude of development. However as to how far these statements are credible is one for the intellectuals go into. The allocations for the development of education, physical resources, health, nutrition, the per capita income, household expenditure with specific reference to food, housing needs, water facility, toilet, lighting (electricity included) etc are the yardstick of the standard of living and the reduction of poverty.

Plantation poverty

The plantation poverty which was at 38.4% in 1995/96, fell to 30% in 2002, and, again rose to 32% in 2006/7. In 2009/10 it stands at 9.2%. The poverty alleviation measures and national development projects of the successive governments, no doubt, have contributed to the improvement and changes in the condition of the plantation people. Notable here is that the poverty level which was 38.4% in 1995/6 is reported to have declined by 6% - to 32 in 2006/7, which is a matter of ten years; from June 2007 to September 2010, it has declined to 9.2%, meaning that in two years the poverty level in the plantation sector is reportedly down by 22.8%

a great leap indeed. The possibility of such a rapid fall or the system of computation that makes the situation look as rosy as it is needs to be gone into more to though, the household income and expenditure report for 2009/10 covers the July 2009 – 2010 period, it in reality covers 3 months, namely July, August and September 2009 (HHIE report page 1, 1.2 limitation of data). Development related analysis should be comparative ones. In a country with multi sectors, multi ethnicities and gender situations, conclusions could be reached at on the basis of weather resources; opportunities and capacity have been equally distributed.

Poverty situation 1995/96 – 2009

Sector	1990/91	1995/96	2002	2006/7	2009/10
Sri Lanka	26.1	28.8	22.7	15.3	7.6
Urban	16.3	14.0	7.9	6.7	6.5
Rural	29.5	30.9	24.7	15.7	7.7
Plantation	20.5	38.4	30.0	32.0	9.2

As per the above schedule, the national level poverty which was 26.1 in 1990/91, has gradually reduced and been indicated to be 7.6% in 2009/10. And compared to even the other sectors, where there has been a gradual decline, the plantation situation is presented as a sudden decline.

As to weather a significant change has taken place in the plantation poverty situation can be best understood only when the complete report is out, than on the basis of the preliminary 3 month 2009/10 report of the statistic department.

In the meantime, the last report on the poverty situation in Sri Lanka (in 2006/7, states that the plantation poverty level is as high as 32% than the other sectors. The highest poverty level of 33.8% recorded from the Nuwara Eliya, a district which has more estates, confirms this claim. It is apparent therefore that outside the war zone areas, most poverty stricken is Nuwara Eliya district where there are more plantations. Plantation poverty level is four fold that of the urban sector, which on the other hand means that in the plantation sector 32 out of 100 are living below official poverty line.

A comparison of 1990/1991 statistics department report with the 2006/7 poverty situation report shows that in the intervening period the poverty level has increased by 68%, which substantiates that the plantation poverty is on the increase. Gender wise, most poverty stricken in the plantation sector are women.

Income

The standard of living of the people is assessed on the basis of the household income, per head income, and, particularly, the real income. The statistics department report on household income

and expenditure states that on that basis the household income of the plantation sector people has increased.

Year	1995/1996	2006/7	2009/10
Plantation household income (Rs)	4059	19292	25649

This schedule refers to the income increase at national level, but, it reflects on the plantation as well. In period of approximately 15 years the household income has increased to 21590, i.e.: at 1799 per year, but, in practice, the assessment includes both, the monetary income and non-monetary income.

Source	Sri Lanka	Urban	Rural	Plantation
Gross Income	35496	46196	34330	25650
Monetary Income	30191	37117	29520	224774
Other Income	5305	9079	4810	3176
Wages (Monetary)	12130	16569	11393	12077

According to the above table, though the plantation sector household income is 25650, in real term, all they receive as wages from the plantation is 12077. Practically, a vast majority of the plantation people are dependent on their daily wage. In the meantime, we must not forget that per capita income too plays a role in poverty reduction. As per the schedule here below on the per capita income for 2009, plantation sector records the lowest:

Sector	Rs
Sri Lanka	8931
Urban	11,143
Rural	8,744
Plantation	5,978

This is the government statistics, according to which, plantation workers are the lowest per capita income earners. Though the government development projects and daily wage increases have made same impact in the household income and per capita income in the plantation sector somewhat, the contention that the wage increase granted to the plantation workers has helped reduce their poverty is hardly acceptable.

Income increase and poverty reduction, as par as the plantation workers are concerned, is correlated. As per reports of 1995/96, the poverty has increased, and then, in 2009/10, there is a steep fall. This cannot be attributed to wage increase, since, the 2009/10 statistics department report is based on the July, August and September – 2009 situation, which states that the poverty level has come down to 9.2%. After the wage increase collective agreement was signed on 16th

September, 2009, differences were made good in October, 2009 for the Deepavali Festival. It implies that there is no connection between the poverty reduction and wage increase.

Expenditure:

The report on expenditure for 2006/7, the plantation household expenditure which was Rs.13456 in that year, has increased to Rs. 25662 in 2009/10. For the day to day food expenditure, a plantation household needs Rs 12710. This represents about 49.5% of the total expenditure. On the other hand, as duly noted, they need for food Rs. 12710, and not Rs. 12077, per month. This shows that what they earn is not enough even to satisfy their hunger fully.

The capacity to spend enhances one's standard of living, but, the plantation workers' capacity is limited.

2006/2007 to 2009/10 food expenses of Sri Lanka (sector wise) is as follows:

sector	2006/7	2009/10
National	8641	12912
Urban	11015	15446
Rural	8305	12509
Plantation	7503	12710

It could be observed that the purchasing capacity of the plantation workers is far below that at national level.

Infrastructure facilities

Housing is another indicator of the standard of living. Changes are being effected in the housing sector and, though there same changes in this respect in each plantation sector also, today 56.1 percentage of the plantation population continue to live in line house and 35 percentages in temporary sheds.

Above 35 percentages of them drink water from unsafe facilities. This rate is high compared to that elsewhere. At national level 1.8 percentage of the population use public toilet facility. While in the plantation sector the user are 12.1 percentages.

Literacy rate

There cannot be into opinions that Sri Lanka has a high literacy rate in south Asia. But as a sector, the change that has occurred in the plantation is little. A 2009/10 report states that non-schooling rate in the plantation sector Is 8.8, while it is 4.4 in the rural sector and 2.7 in the urban sector.

GCE (O/L) pass rate in the plantation sector is 5.7 while in the rural sector it is 15.8. Literacy is an indicator to a community's capacity and, the backwardness in this respect, only proves that the community's capacity is limited.

Prof: Amitha Sen points out that an assessment of a community's enhancement Should be covered out not limiting to the above aspects, but absorbing the opportunities available to the backward people of the community, their human capabilities, their freedom, human rights and right to justice, participation and decision making.

The statistics above make it clear the state of the plantation people's standard of living, the changes accruing there from the level of their development and poverty and its trend. The recent experience. Show that a broad based dialogue and analysis on their development are needed. It is also of relevance to enquire the role of the hill country intellectuals in this respect.

