

Poverty Reduction in Sri Lanka
Evaluating the Impact of Public Policy with Reference
to the Samurdhi Programme

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(Reference No : ASP/6/Research /2005/01)

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19^h January 2007

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Abstract

Poverty in developing countries, if not addressed urgently, could be regarded as a violation of human rights and a denial of the most basic needs of the poor. How to reduce poverty is the most pressing issue of the development community, Sri Lanka has no excuse. Even though, Sri Lanka has implemented various poverty alleviation programmes for last several decades, the incidence of poverty still exists. "Samurdhi programme" is another major effort introduced by the previous government of Sri Lanka, aiming at ensuring the country's prosperity through poverty reduction, job creation and development of human resources among the poor. Since 1996, this programme is considered as one of the major national development policies of the country. To date the programme has completed the 10th year of its operation. In order to accelerate the effectiveness and efficiency of the programme, an evaluation at the participant level rather than aggregate level would provide more detailed picture of both successes and drawbacks of the programme. This research is an effort to examine the effectiveness of the Samurdhi programme in terms of its intended objectives at the participant level.

Main objective of this study is three fold; to find out whether the Samurdhi programme has achieved its intended objectives, to find out what benefits and changes that the beneficiaries actually have received and to discover any success or drawbacks of the programme. The Quasi-Experimental type design was used for the evaluation of the Samurdhi Programme. Two groups were compared in this approach, one having being exposed to the programme and the other have not been. If the exposed group shows a significantly higher incidence of the desired condition or behavior, it is assumed to be attributable to the programme. In this regard, the data was gathered from a sample consisting of two hundred ten Samurdhi beneficiary families and another two hundred one families from non-beneficiary group selected from ten villages in Panadura Divisional Secretariat in Kalutara District. The success of the programme was measured in terms of the relationship among the objectives of the programme and its performance.

The data was analyzed mostly by using both quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods to examine whether there was any improvement have achieved by the Samurdhi beneficiaries than non-beneficiaries. The Chi-Square test was also used to examine any significant difference attributed to the beneficiary group. The study revealed that even the income level, consumption level and the living standard of the Samurdhi beneficiary families have been increased, these cases are of limited in number. Majority of the selected families still depend on the Samurdhi benefits and remain in poor. The study concluded that the Samurdhi programme has not been achieved its indented objectives at a satisfactory level. Any poverty reduction policy needs a multiple approach in which several activities such as delivering cash benefits for improving their consumption, empowering and awakening the poor community could be envisaged. In this respect, the theory behind the programme could be considered as good, as a multiple approach, in which attempts to get the poor involved in to the participative mechanism with a component of community development, but is bad in practice due to various drawbacks revealed by the study. By recognizing its major drawbacks, finally, the study proposes policy measures to increase the effectiveness of the poverty reduction policy in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: Poverty, Samurdhi Programme, Participation, Community Development. Policy Evaluation.

1. Introduction

Poverty means the inability of an individual to secure the most basic human needs. Poverty reduction has now become one of the millennium development goals in the development discourse. The World Bank's mission is to work for a world free of poverty. Poverty measured by income or expenditure is one key dimension of poverty (Lant Pritchett:2006) in which people are considered poor, if their living standard falls bellow the poverty line. Another dimension may be related to the UNDP (1997) who developed Human Poverty Index (HPI) which focus several elements namely, Longevity, Knowledge, and Decent standard of living. Thus, any poverty reduction policy should try to make an environment where the poor people could be able to meet their basic needs for fulfilling a normal life pattern leading to a long healthy, creative life with a decent standard of living.