

Community Perception on Government Responses to Ensure Human Security in Rural Sri Lanka: A Case Study Based on Two Villages in Anuradhapura District

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Abstract

Poor governance creates many problems to human lives. People's awareness on public policies is important as knowledge, failure of addressing public issues implies the failure of public policy. The objective of the study is to identify the perception of rural communities on government response to human security in terms of life, livelihood and health security. Data were collected through a randomly selected sample of 158 individuals from 79 households from two elected divisions in Anuradhapura District. The case study analysis was also carried out based on interviews with 19 individuals from 10 households and data were collected from five informants. The results showed that gender, age and income have influenced the perception of people of the government's response to rural issues. People do not expect the government's support for life security and livelihood security of rural communities while for health security, people's perception is that the government's support is essential. In conclusion, Sri Lanka needs to focus on human security in formation and implementation of development policies where referent object is an individual.

Key Words: Rural communities, Community factors, Government support and services, Human security

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations, designed for socio and economic development by 2030 state that around one billion people live in extreme poverty (United Nations, 2015). They live on less than \$1.25 income a day (World Bank, 2014). The gap between rich and poor widens the distance between those who can and cannot access opportunities. Gini index which measures the extent to which the distribution of income or consumption of individuals or households deviate from a perfectly equal distribution, illustrates that compared to western countries, South Asian countries stand far behind the equal income distribution (Quandl, 2015). Hence, access to good education, healthcare, electricity, safe water and other critical services which have an impact on the lives of rich, remain mainly restricted to rich economies. In addition, the impacts of economic crisis, food insecurity, climatic change and natural disasters also drive vulnerable populations into serious struggle to access basic needs.

According to the World Bank (2019), Sri Lankan economy grew an average of 5.6 percent during the period of 2010- 2018. However, in the last few years, the growth of the economy has slowed down. According to Sri Lankan Census and Statistics reports, Sri Lanka has successfully alleviated poverty to the point where the Poverty Head Count Index/ Ratio (PHCI/ PHCR) has dropped from 15.2% in 2006//07 to 4.1 percent in 2016 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2018). Although, Sri Lanka has made impressive gains in some social indicators such as primary school enrolment, literacy rate and infant mortality rate, the indicators are still below the improvement of other Asian nations such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia (Central Bank, 2018). Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) measures the severe deprivation in education, health and living standards (Department of Census

and Statistics, 2019). The report indicates that the proportion of population, who lives in multidimensional poverty in Sri Lanka is 2.4 percent i.e. around five hundred thousand people. According to the vulnerability analysis of the report, it is stipulated that, out of the total population, 11.9 percent (2.5 million people) have experienced vulnerability in poverty in Sri Lanka. Therefore, challenges of development still remain at the regional level and amongst vulnerable communities. MacFarlane & Khong (2006) put forward that state bears the responsibility to address needs and aspirations of the citizens. Therefore, government's support for the rural community is of major importance. During the past five years, the government of Sri Lanka has spent around 22% of total budgetary provisions on infrastructure development (Ministry of Finance, 2018). From 2005 to 2016 the government expenses show a gradual decrease. And the development policy has gradually changed from agricultural-based economy to an industrial based economy over last few decades (Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Sri Lanka, 2007). Nevertheless, next to the service sector (41.5%), around 39.4% of the population engages in agriculture. Agriculture accounts for 10.76% of GDP of the country (Quandl, 2015).

Even though acute poverty is not experienced in Sri Lanka, poverty is still holding back the economic development. According to the Rural Poverty Portal which is powered by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 90% of the Sri Lankan poor lives in rural areas (Rural Poverty Portal, n.d.). United Nations Human Security Unit (2016) mentioned that for the majority of the world population, the environment and the living conditions are not secured because of natural disasters and anthropogenic catastrophes such as conflicts, violence, persistence, poverty, health pandemics, international terrorism and economic crisis. Such calamities crop up complex

and multidimensional human insecurity. King & Murray (2002) have proposed that human security can be defined as the longevity of future life that spends below the threshold of any key domain of human well-being. Moreover, according to King & Murray (2002, p. 587) “development was defined broadly as expanding people's choices in almost every relevant way.” The argument is further enhanced by Sen (1999), by stating the development in terms of expanding an individual's freedom. In the 21st century, development policy of states was debated over the economic development perspective and the human development perspective where Sri Lankan development policies were also critically argued. Ratnasabapathy (2019) stated that people may assume the state to address the public wishes and the political actors to concern the public interest in formulating and implementing policies. It can be argued that political motives do not abandon their personal interest over public interest. Right to Information (RTI) Act No 12 of 2016 denotes the people’s ownership of the state (Right to Information Sri Lanka, 2018). Thus, the fundamental of RTI lies as the right of people to know information of the functions, programmes and the policies of the state that utilize public funds. Morgan (1997) emphasized that in modifying or amending public policy, public perception is important and the ignorance of public opinion may result the failure of the modification or amendment. Therefore, the community perception of government policies and regulations need to be studied to proceed with the existing and future policies to secure human insecurity. Hence, this controversy leads to the research question of this study as follows:

How far does the rural community perceive the government policies and programs concerning the human security, life security, livelihood security and health security?

Thus, the objective of this study is to identify the level of understanding of the

people towards government policies and programs that grant the human security to the community.

Understanding the concept of human security may differ from state to state according to the values, norms and culture. In spite of routine human insecurity discourses of daily life, the non- traditional approach to human security offered some insights to rethink development strategies in rural Sri Lanka. However, understanding and awareness of the concept of human security is still in the primary stage in Sri Lanka. Hence, improving people's awareness and understanding of the government response to human security in local and national policy formulation is vital.

Literature Review

Public Awareness/ Public Perception

Public awareness is known as understanding the level of public about the importance and implications of a particular matter (UN Women, 2010). Public awareness can be further described as explaining the issues and disseminating the knowledge to make individual decisions by the public. Public perception or public opinion has important implications through knowledge and understanding of the public and failure of addressing public opinion can result in the failure of public policy as well (Morgan ,1997). Phongpaichit *et al* (1996) indicated that developing countries are facing problems because of the resistance of the government to act quickly on social problems while hardly protecting the basic rights of citizens is one of the issues of the government.

Lee (2003) emphasized that the government has the responsibility to protect not only the territorial security and sovereign integrity but also the freedom and rights of citizens. The author put forward that there is a necessity to

formulate effective government policies and institutions by identifying the new security aspects. Thus, human security attributes of the nation are protected by the governing policies. Therefore, development policy focuses on its own redesigning based on human factors which are considered carefully (World Bank Group, 2014). Nagy (2013b) pointed out that poor governance can cause threat to human lives. Thus, inadequate government responses to rural issues can exaggerate the gravity of the problem.

Community endogenous factors like age, gender, education and income also have the impact on the perception of the people. Acharya & Acharya (n.d.) points out that increasing of civil education will increase the responsible political participation of people through informed understanding. Nishikawa (2010) pointed out that the increase of the price of food has disrupted the peaceful environment of Myanmar. This implies that government policies can create threat to life of the citizens, because of not addressing non-traditional human security discourses such as poverty and epidemics.

Addressing Human Security in the Development Policies of States

As mentioned earlier, in ensuring the security of the state in terms of territory was re-conceptualised towards securing individual human security by introducing the human security approach. According to UNDP (1994), human security determines safety from chronic threats such as hunger, diseases, repression and protection from sudden and harmful disruption of everyday life. Furthermore, Lee (2003) pointed out that the government has a responsibility to protect territorial security and also to protect freedom and rights of the citizens. The author further exaggerates that the necessity of recognizing new security tasks in formulating policies and institutionalization of those policies. Insecurity of people and communities can in many cases be

caused by inequality and injustice. As the Human Security Report of UN Commission on Human Security (2003), “Deprivation and unequal treatment may not generate an immediate revolt, but they can remain in people’s memory and influence the course of events much later” (p.7). Thus, human security makes a difference in global policy formulation.

Gerston (2008) has stated that policy making is as simple as what is decided by the government to implement. Thus, governments have the responsibility to incorporate human security aspects in state policies. Kraft & Furlong (2013) pointed out that in democratic societies citizens can participate in policy development and government actions, as citizens elect the delegates to act on behalf of them, but there are no factors such as politics to keep the citizen away from the decision-making process and the citizen can effectively participate in assisting the government to understand the problems. Moreover, the citizen has the ability to influence the government decisions (Kraft & Furlong, 2013). The authors have put forward that citizens are the best equipment to get information to understand the dynamics of a particular problem and develop the alternatives for implementation.

“Development” should take a paradigm shift towards “human development” instead of capital accumulation, in redefining the goal of development (Shani, 2012). Furthermore, as Richardson (2005) points out if development policies cannot meet the aspirations of every citizen; compensations for disadvantaged groups should be included in the development package. The critiques on the perspective of economic progress or materialistic accumulation on determining development or civilization or wealth of the state have been further challenged by several other scholars. Sen (1999, p.27) noted that the trend of economic disciplines is moving away from the values of freedom which in return undermine the role of market mechanism. Thus, the economic

insecurity makes the turbulence of human security too. Moreover, as Shani (2014) stresses, determination characteristics of developed or civilized states go beyond economic notions. Furthermore, Nagy (2013b) emphasized that to shape the state, it is important to have shared ideas, expectations and beliefs to institutionalize the views.

Moreover, “Deprivation and unequal treatment may not generate an immediate revolt, but they can remain in people’s memory and influence the course of events much later” (UN Commission on Human Security, 2003). Therefore, the policies of government have the vital role in balancing community needs and development. Richmond (2010) further criticizes that mishandling of the allocation of resources for human needs in different societies is the base for the creating conflict within the society. However, Shani (2012) argues that the concept of development is still under the shadow of economics when it focuses on market-orientation. Further, Sen (1999) notes, that in post neo-liberalism, though economic development is seen as the channel to expand human choices, it is not the destination or the end of the development.

The studies of human security have an extending relationship with human rights where most of the basic needs of human beings are secured with the United Nations Human Rights Declaration. Nagy (2013a) pointed out that human security approach re-enforces human rights.

Moreover, the universal declaration of Human Rights which recognizes the dignity, equal and inalienable rights in the basis of freedom, justice and peace, is considered as one of the primary sources of human security. In the context of human rights, it has the legal argument that protects the individuals. Furthermore, Nagi (2013a) puts forward that human security concept has an

enforcement ability of human rights. Human rights additionally illustrate more deeply on the right to life (should not to be unjustly killed by another human being), freedom of religion or freedom of belief, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, right to health, and right to an adequate standard of living.

Human Security

Lee (2003) stated that cognitive content of security alters far from state to individuals. And he puts forward that human security can only be addressed by providing protection to all threats of human survival and personal well-being of the individuals or the community within the state. Lee (2003) and Peou (2014) further elaborates that human security varies from minimum level (protection of individuals from hunger, poverty, natural disasters, violence and forced displacement) to maximum level (individual self-fulfillment through equal opportunity, social and political empowerment, the establishment of the sustainable civil society). Peou (2014) pointed out that in the liberal world, the concept of human security relies on liberal state and does not concentrate enough on the humans. However, in modern radical perspective, humans are highly engaged in security, focusing on individual's security, by protecting personal rights.

People should be secured with “freedom from want (protection from threats due to hunger, diseases and natural disasters)” and “freedom from fear (protecting individuals from violent conflicts which associate with poverty, lack of state capacity and other forms of inequality)” (Ogata, 2014, p. ix). In addition, he stated that it is important to respond to social and economic needs of people. Furthermore, former Prime Minister of Japan, Keizo Obuchi advocated that human security was fundamental to protect people from threats

to human lives, livelihoods and dignity (Kofi Annan, 2000, cited in Ogata, 2014). “Human security can only be achieved when the individual or groups residing within a state is provided protection from all threats to human survival and personal well-being” (Peou, 2014, p.43).

Human security commission frameworks dealing with people living under life threats, victims of conflicts, refugees and displaced persons and people living in extreme poverty, hunger and diseases, also promote empowering of people through education, social mobilization and participation in public life where people can self-survive in times of disaster or threats (Ogata, 2014). MacFarlane & Khong (2006) defined human security as, “the notion of human security is based on the premise that the individual human being is the only irreducible focus for discourse on security. The claims of all other referents (the group, the community, the state, the region, and the globe) derive from the sovereignty of the human individual and the individual’s right to dignity in her or his life. In ethical terms, the security claims of other referents, including the state, draw whatever value they have from the claim that they address the needs and aspirations of the individuals who make them up” (MacFarlane & Khong, 2006).

Shani (2007) further argues that protection from viable threats of economy, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political, and encompassing elementary rights and freedoms to fulfill well-being, are insufficient for human security. Thus, past research on human security emphasizes that individual or community-oriented human security is essential to address.

The theories of traditional and non-traditional approaches also give the in-depth insight into the human security concept.

As per Nagy (2013b) there are two aspects of state security i.e. traditional and non-traditional securities and traditional security concerns mostly on military and political security which has a direct impact on state survival.

Increasing interdependence over globalization, open the eye towards non-traditional security, which demonstrates that the non-state actors have a role to play in the security. Nagy (2013b) further mentioned that the understanding of non-traditional security of states is not consistent. It is mentioned that non-traditional security threats are of domestic origin and have an impact on regions or trans-nations. For instance, transnational infectious diseases, environmental degradation and destruction, financial and natural crises can be the non-traditional threats. Nishikawa (2010) stated that individuals and communities are the primary concerns of security in contrast to traditional discourse which concerned about the state security while people are the focal point of security-based analysis and policies.

Nishikawa (2007, Cited in Nagy, 2013a) suggested that human security measurements as economic security, food security, health security (access to healthcare and protection from diseases), environmental security (protection from environmental dangers eg: pollution and depletion), personal security (physical safety from war, torture, criminal attacks, domestic violence, drug abuse), community security and political security. Thus, in this research, basically, a broader/ narrow approach and non-traditional approach are considered as the primary theories paying attention to the individual well-being.

As Sen (1999, p.3) pointed out, development, “as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy”, human security and development have a direct relationship. Therefore, the combination of human security and development play a vital role in state development.

Methodology

The research was based on the mixed method and carried out in two villages i.e. Mahakongaskada and Thammenna Elawaka in Madawachchiya in Anuradhapura District. The total population of the research is 968 (280 households) of both Mahakongaskada and Thammenna Elawaka. Out of 280 households 79 households (158 individuals) were randomly selected.

Secondary data was collected through the website of Madawachchiya Divisional Secretariat and Madawachchiya Divisional Secretariat resource profile was also used. Primary data was collected using a questionnaire. Village headmen, grass-root level government officers and middle managers were considered as key informants.

Interviews with household headman/ head-woman were carried out by an assigned grassroots level government officer. The key informants (government officers i. e. Assistant Divisional Secretary, two Grama Niladharis and two development officers) carried out interviews with household participants and recorded the conversations and the key informants' interviews were carried out by the researcher. All interviews were carried out in Sinhala language.

Frequency analysis was carried out based on the data collected from 79 households (158 individuals) while case analysis was carried out using the data collected from 10 selected households (19 individuals) to identify the peoples' awareness level about the public policies.

Analysis and Discussion

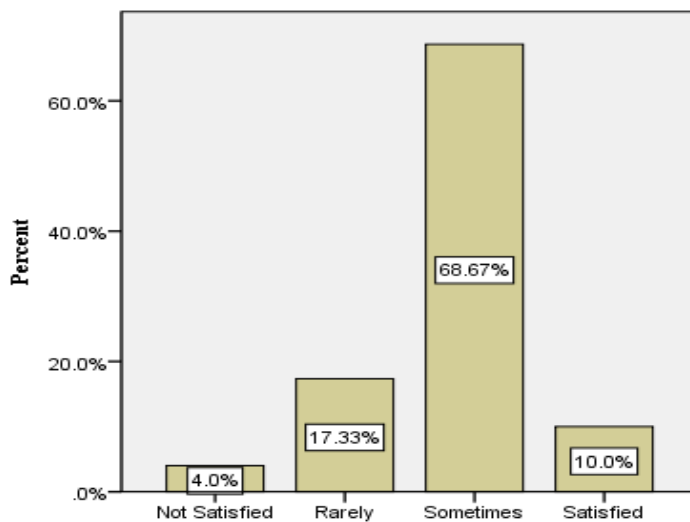
In the frequency analysis, community endogenous factors (gender, age, education attainment, income), human security attributes (life security,

livelihood security, health security) and government response to human security issues in rural communities were observed.

People’s Awareness on Government Policies and Programs

Figure 01 indicates the peoples’ awareness level on government programs to address human security aspects in rural communities.

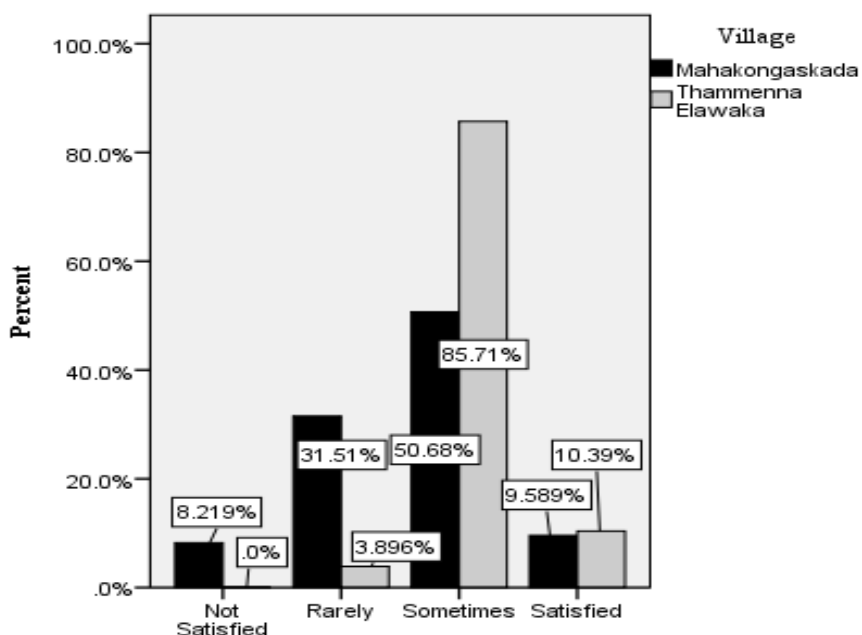
Figure 01: Opinion of the community on government response to rural issues



Source: Field Data

According to Figure 01, more than 78% of the rural community is fairly satisfied with the government's recognition of rural Issues. More than 21% of the sample was not much satisfied with the government’s understanding of their issues.

Figure 02: Opinion of the community in Mahakongaskada and Thammenna Elawaka on government response to rural issues



Source: Field Data

According to Figure 02, the majority (85.7) of the sample of Thammenna Elawaka, was satisfied with the identification of rural problems by the government of Sri Lanka while more than half of the sample from Mahakongaskada was satisfied with the government response.

Overall Satisfaction of the Community towards Government Response to Human Security

Case analysis was based on selected 10 households (19 individuals). One household from Mahakongaskada satisfied with the government’s understanding of rural issues. All key informants’ view is that the government has identified rural issues, but two key informants mentioned that there is a mismatch between what villagers need and what the government provides.

One informant mentioned that people demand for the (a small dam) non-perennial stream of the village and government provides them with a road. Even though citizens have a lack of knowledge about public problems, policies, government decisions or politics, still people can participate in policy development where they can assist in improving the understanding of the issues (Kraft & Furlong, 2013). Even though the people have the capability of self-development, they still depend on the government to enrich them (dependency syndrome). Development is not the capital accumulation but the human development. Hence, the direction of development of Sri Lanka has to be diverted towards human security aspects (Shani, 2012).

Both villages get more or less equal support from the government. “There is a water purification unit in the village next to Mahakongaskada. However, Water Board of Sri Lanka provided rain water tank to every household, though people do not maintain the tank properly. There is a market system of selling and purchasing purified water for 2.50/ 3 LKR per liter. “There is a purification unit that was constructed by Sri Lankans employed in Kuwait” (a respondent from Thammanna Elawaka). Another informant mentioned that they have a local government councilor who provided them with the necessary facilities such as roads, culverts. “As the village has an elected member of provincial council under his intervention a road from Madawachchiya to Mahakongaskada was developed” (an informant). But villagers were dissatisfied with the quality of the road. There is no elected political representative for Thammanna Elawaka village where there is a lack of such infrastructure development.

Gender based Perception towards Government Response to Human Security

In both villages, males' and females' opinion on government responses to rural issues, are more or less similar. In some households, "both husband and wife were satisfied with the government identification of village problems. "I am satisfied with the way the government identifies the problem through grass root level officers" (A respondent, 2014). In some households, even though the wife was happy with the government recognition of development issues of village, the husband did not totally agree, as most of the government programmes focused on cities rather than rural villages. The Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Sri Lanka (2007) has stated that Sri Lanka is gradually changing its development policies towards the industrial economy from agricultural economy, as Sri Lanka formulates its development on macro-economic framework. Thus, large scale industrial zones are mainly situated nearby main cities.

Most of the village societies are connected with government policies and activities. Thus, to get information and benefits from the government at least one member of the family normally engages in social activities through village societies. Therefore, men and women were equally knowledgeable about government activities. However, in some cases wife's opinion can be influenced by her husband. Nagy (2013b) emphasized that to shape the state, it is important to have shared ideas, expectations and beliefs to institutionalize the views. Thus, gendered views on state behaviour enable to understand the individuals' interests, which will lead to capture the different needs of minimum human security aspects of man and woman.

Age based Perception of the Community towards Government Response to Human Security

Old-aged households showed different views with regard to government response to rural issues. A female respondent said that she was not satisfied with the government's identification of rural problems as she did not have any opportunities to forward her problems directly to the government. But the male counterparts who were in a nearer age group to that female, were satisfied with government responses.

By different political parties, the same policies were formulated with different names and different implementation strategies. Therefore, people hold the same opinion on government's response to rural issues despite their age maturity.

Education based Community Perception towards Government Response to Human Security

Among case studies, the highest educational level achieved by the individuals are Ordinary Level and within this category opinions of government recognition of rural issues have not been that much diversified as two out of three cases were not satisfied with the government responses. Gerston (2008) has put forward that different communities will respond differently to the same policy issue. Thus, educated communities' perceptions on a policy issue can vary from the non- educated communities. There is no difference of expectations towards government response to rural issues within the educated and non-educated communities. This result can be due to all the members living in the same economic, social, cultural and environmental conditions and the gap between the educated and non-educated is not that significant. For instance, some of the households (passed up to Ordinary level education) were

satisfied with the government support to rural community, because the government gets the information through grass root level officers who know the situation of the village, but some of the households with the same education level as above were not satisfied, as there are still under-developed areas in the village.

Income based Community Perception towards Government Response to Human Security

Income disparity of the villages is not very high even though they showed two extremes. Both high income citizens and low income citizens engage in quite similar activities in generating income.

Even the people who are well-off they expect individual supports from the government rather than the common support for the community and the government policy can ensure the narrow approach to human security by addressing individual's necessity for economical human security. There is a necessity to ensure human development to act on behalf of them (Shani, 2012).

Community Perception on Life Security, Livelihood Security and Health Security

The community feels insecurity because chronic kidney disease threatens the life security of the community. Almost all households mentioned about chronic kidney disease as a life threat than violence or war.

The researched locations were chronic kidney disease proven areas of Sri Lanka. The results of this study showed that people who can access health facilities possess a different idea of government programs, to people who do not have accessibility to health facilities. Sri Lanka is the state of free healthcare facility from birth to death. People who were able to access the

health facilities can satisfy with the treatment they get. For instance, a female respondent of the household was satisfied with the *Ayurvedic* medicine. There are some households who were dissatisfied even though they were able to access the facilities but could not get better treatments because of inadequacy of the equipment, medicines or qualified medical personnel. Households with sick members were not satisfied with the government responses to health issues. Prioritizing economic growth leads to the ignorance of social welfare of Sri Lanka and expenditure on education and health has declined recently, and there is a necessity to increase expenditure on social infrastructure which is an investment on human capital in the long run of the economic development (Sandaratne, 2011). These findings also indicate that non-realization of minimum needs of human security for the community can cause the dissatisfaction towards government policies.

The communities of the two villages engage in more or less similar activities for the livelihood. Thus, the whole community possesses similar views on the government's response to rural issues even though they have different opportunities to access the livelihood resources.

This may be due to the fact that households are able to survive through diversified income sources such as government employment and agriculture or be taken care of by grown up children. Unemployment creates a threat to human security. Government policies concern a traditional approach of human security, overabundance of military resources in some of the Southeast Asian countries and over-burden the poor people (Nishikawa, 2010). This situation gradually makes the poor to seek riotous actions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The direction of development of Sri Lanka triggers towards economic

development. The country's development still triggers towards capital accumulation. Thus, direction towards human security to ensure human development is essential in Sri Lankan development agenda.

Present research discussed heterogeneous views, opinions and beliefs that prevail based on gender, age, education and income. Based on the differences of the community, the expectations of the people from the government is also different. Thus, the people's perception on government programmes vary in accordance with the knowledge the community possesses about the programmes, with whom that the community is going to interact to implement the programme and the benefits that the community gains.

The study reveals that community specific mechanisms to access resources and opportunities enhance the minimum human security aspects of the community. The way men get chances and resources differs from the way women seize opportunities and resources to enhance the economic security. Thus, the policy formulation of Sri Lanka should pay attention to the community based development approach to ensure rural human security.

To understand the government effort to ensure rural human security by the community, the government should increase the awareness of the policies before initiating the programme.

Programmes and policies should address the community specific demands which will satisfy the community in ensuring human security aspects such as life security, livelihood security and health security.

Limitations and Further Research

The research encountered a number of limitations which need to be highlighted. For example, the perception of the community was taken within

a short period of time. Therefore, studying community perception through a longer period will give a better understanding of the community mind set.

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