

Role of the Poverty Reduction Programme (Samurdhi Credit Component) in Empowering Women.

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සංවර්ධනය වෙමින් පවතින සෙසු රටවලට සමගාමීව ශ්‍රී ලාංකීය සමාජය ද මුහුණ දෙන ප්‍රබල සමාජ ප්‍රශ්නයක් ලෙස දුගීබාවය සඳහන් කළ හැකි වේ. 2011 ජන හා සංඛ්‍යා ලේඛන දෙපාර්තමේන්තුව ඉදිරිපත් කරන දත්ත මත වතු අංශය තුළ දුගී බාවය 11.4% ද, ග්‍රාමීය අංශය තුළ 9.4% ද, සහ නාගරික අංශය තුළ 5.3% ක් වශයෙන් ද ඒ ඒ අංශයන් හි දුගීබාවය හඳුනා ගත හැකි වේ. මේ අනුව, ග්‍රාමීය අංශය තුළ දුගීබාවය ඉහළ අගයක් ගෙන ඇති බව දක්නට ලැබේ. මෙවැනි පසුබිමක ග්‍රාමීය දුගීබව පිටුදැකීම උදෙසා රාජ්‍ය අංශය විවිධ වැඩසටහන් හඳුන්වා දී ඇති අතර, 1995 දී දියත් කරන ලද සමෘද්ධි වැඩසටහන ඒ අතරින් ජාතික වශයෙන් හඳුන්වා දෙන ලද දුගීබව පිටුදැකීමේ වැඩසටහනක් වේ. සමෘද්ධි වැඩසටහන මඟින් විවිධ අංශයන් යටතේ අවශේෂ වැඩසටහන් කිහිපයක් හඳුන්වා දී ඇති අතර ඒ අතරින් සමෘද්ධි ණය වැඩසටහන වැදගත් අංශයක් වේ.

මෙම අධ්‍යයනය තුළින් ඉටු කර ගැනීමට අපේක්ෂා කරන ලද මූලික අරමුණ වූයේ සමෘද්ධි ණය වැඩසටහන ග්‍රාමීය දුගීබව අවම කිරීමේදී ලා කෙතරම් යෝග්‍ය උපක්‍රමයක් ද සහ ඒ මස්සේ ග්‍රාමීය දුගී කාන්තාව සවිබලකරණය වීමක් සිදුව තිබේ දැයි සොයා බැලීමයි. අධ්‍යයන ක්ෂේත්‍රය ලෙස උතුරු මැද පළාතේ අනුරාධපුර දිස්ත්‍රික්කයට අයත් මිහින්තලය ප්‍රාදේශීය ලේකම් කොට්ඨාසයේ 564-පොහොන ග්‍රාම නිලධාරී වසම් කෝරා ගනු ලැබීය. මෙම ග්‍රාම නිලධාරී වසම් තුළ සමෘද්ධි ප්‍රතිලාභී පවුල් අතරින් සමෘද්ධි ණය පහසුකම් ලැබූ පවුල් 50 ක් අහඹු ලෙස තෝරා ගනු ලැබීය. ප්‍රාථමික දත්ත රැස් කිරීමේ කාර්යයේ දී මූලික වශයෙන් ප්‍රශ්න මාලාවක් භාවිත කළ අතර ද්විතියික දත්ත මිහින්තලය ප්‍රාදේශීය ලේකම් කාර්යාලය මඟින් එක්රැස් කරගනු ලැබීය.

අධ්‍යයනය තුළින් අනාවරණය වූයේ සමෘද්ධි ණය වැඩසටහන යටතේ ණය පහසුකම් වැඩි වශයෙන් ලබා ගෙන ඇත්තේ කාන්තාවන් බවත් ය. එමෙන්ම එම ණය මුදල් භාවිතය හා පාලනය කිරීම ද වැඩි වශයෙන් කාන්තාවන් විසින් ම සිදු කළ බව

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දත්තවල ලැබුණි. ඊට අමතරව මෙම ණය මුදල් ආදායම් උත්පාදන ක්‍රියාවලීන්හි ආයෝජනය කිරීමට විශේෂයෙන් ස්වයං රැකියා සහ පුළුල් ව්‍යාපාර ආරම්භ කිරීම වෙනුවෙන් යොදවා තිබූ බවත් පැහැදිලි විය. මේ නිසා ශ්‍රාමීය කාර්තුවන්ගේ ආදායම් තත්වය පුළුල් වී පවුල් ඒකකය තුළ තීරණ ගැනීම, පවුල් ඒකකය සතු සම්පත් පාලනය සහ කළමනාකරණය කිරීම, සහ පුරා මූල සංවිධානවල නායකත්වයට පත්වීම වැනි හැකියාවන් පුළුල්වීමත් දත්තවල ලැබුණි. මෙවැනි පසුබිමක කාර්තුවන්ගේ සමාජ තත්වය උසුතුරු සංවලතාවකට උත්තරණය වී හේතුවෙන් පවුල තුළ පමණක් නොව සමාජය තුළ ද දැඩි ආත්ම විශ්වාසයකින් කටයුතු කිරීමේ හැකියාවක් සමෘද්ධි ණය වැඩසටහන හේතු කොට ගෙන කාර්තුවන්ට උදා වී ඇති බව නිගමනය කළ හැකිය.

Introduction

Like in other Asian countries, Sri Lanka also has a severe problem of poverty. After several decades of developments efforts, poverty still remains as a major problem in Sri Lanka. According to the Household Income and Expenditure Survey in 2009/2010, the Poverty Head Count Index has fallen to 8.9% from 15.2% in 2006/2007 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2011). Although the level of income poverty has declined over the years, the level of consumption poverty remains at a high level. Therefore, poverty can be identified as a major economic problem in Sri Lanka.

According to the ‘Poverty indicators -2011’ the report of Department of Census and Statistic, estate sector poverty is 11.4% and the rural sector 9.4% and urban poverty is 5.3% reported in 2009/10 (*Household Income and Expenditure Survey - 2009/10, Department of Census and Statistics - Sri Lanka*). When considering causes of rural poverty in Sri Lanka several factors contribute to the prevailing poverty levels in rural areas, of the main income earners in poor households were in the agricultural sector. A large majority of poor farmers were those with holdings of less than one acre, although in areas with adequate rainfall and opportunities to grow and market high value crops such as vegetables and fruits even a holding of 0.25 acre can generate enough income for a household to be out of poverty. Thus, apart from land scarcity, the productivity of land and pattern of use was a major contributory factor to the poverty of farm households. The lack of adequate housing and civic amenities such as water and sanitation were more general features of rural poverty (Quibria, 1993: 64). Therefore, it can be identified that poverty in Sri Lanka is predominantly a rural phenomenon.

In Sri Lanka, like in other Asian countries, women comprise disproportionately a larger percentage of poor. This is primarily due to gender based problems that cause women to be more deprived than men.

Many women have to face unequal sharing of food, inadequate or lack of work, unequal wages, loss of employment, and persistent verbal and physical violence. Further, mainly in the rural sector women have limited access to resources such as credit, land, inheritance, education and lack of supportive services and hence their participation in decision making is limited. Because of these gender based discriminations women are poorer than men. This phenomenon is commonly known as the “feminization of poverty” and has now become a universal phenomenon. Women to be empowered she needs access to material, human, and social resources necessary to make strategic choice in her life. Therefore, to achieve equity there is a need to focus on women and consider them as a specific target group in poverty reduction programme. At the level of development bodies, the concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference (1995). The Beijing Declaration (section 13), presents women’s empowerment as a key strategy for development. In addition, to enhance the development of all over the world, the UNO announced the millennium development goals, 1st is aimed to Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger by 2015, and 3rd is taken to promote gender equality and empower women (Gunatilaka, Wañ, and Chatterjee, 2009; 07). So reduction of poverty and empower women is very important as it appears in the millennium development goals.

Poverty Reduction Programmes in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a long history of social programme and food subsidy programmes by targeting poor people. These poverty alleviation programmes were launched as early in 1930s. Several consumption and the production oriented measures have been taken at different times. Some of these measures are food subsidy scheme in 1942, milk feeding scheme for free school children in 1944, mid day meal for school children in 1940, food stamp scheme in 1979, settlement scheme from 1930, land tenure reforms in 1953, fertilizer subsidy, credit for paddy cultivation, etc. This poverty alleviation programmes have implemented under the three major welfare reports, namely the Education Act of 1945 (Kannangara Report 1943); the establishment of the Department of Social Services, 1948 (Jennings Report 1943); and the Health Act of 1953 (Cumpston Report 1950). The implementation of these reports in public policy terms established firmly the principle of collective provision for common human and social needs through state intervention (Jayasooriya, 1996; 3-6).

The state has adopted number of Policies and strategies to reduce regional disparities especially reduce rural poverty. Successive governments have sought to reduce poverty through providing free Education and health services, targeted grants, employment creation, land redistribution and development and, since the late 1970s, through economic growth. From the 1940s to the 1970s the emphasis was on state planned and managed approaches with a commitment to universal provision of basic needs and services. The ideas of welfare, poor nutrition, small farmer's productivity, landlessness and equity informed programme design rather than a clear conceptualization of poverty). Though these different strategies have adopted they have had little visible success. Therefore, the government decided to design a better poverty alleviation programme at the national level in order to reduce poverty as much as possible. Janasaviya and Samurdhi programmes are those national level poverty alleviation programmes that have implemented under two different government regimes in Sri Lanka.

The new regime, in 1995, initiated a new poverty alleviation programme with similar principles to the former, *Samurdhi*. Various poverty reduction programmes were continued under the Department of Commissioner General of Samurdhi during 2011. Some of the major programmes were the Samurdhi subsidy programme, the nutrition allowance programme and the Samurdhi social security programme. A total number of 1.5 million families benefitted from the samurdhi subsidy programme in 2011. The total expenditure amounted to Rs. 9,043 million this period (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2011).

The Samurdhi Authority of Sri Lanka has introduced various income generations programmes, community development programmes as well as capacity building programmes during 2011 to enable the Samurdhi beneficiaries to come out of poverty. The Samurdhi social security programme was continued with a view to preventing poor families from failing in to the lowest depths of poverty due to unforeseen events such as, deaths, hospitalization, and childbirth. These disbursements amounted to Rs. 233.7 million during the year (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2011).

Samurdhi Credit Programme

Samurdhi programme has three main components, consumption grant transfer, saving and credit programme and rehabilitation and development of community infrastructure through workfare and social development

programmes. Among these programmes Samurdhi Credit Programme is a major component of the reduction of rural poverty. Samurdhi bank foundation and rural bank societies were established in 1996. Samurdhi banking system functioning under the Samurdhi authority of Sri Lanka covering 313 Divisional Secretarial Divisions (DSDs) in the country as 1034 samurdhi banking societies. Samurdhi bank issues loan facilities for their members basically for cultivation and self employment activities. Five categories of loans are provided for poor households namely, self employment, agriculture, fisheries, consumption and emergency purposes. Around 40% of loan funds distributed to the poorest 40% households. Of the total members of the creditors 62.61% are females (Samurdhi Authority of Sri Lanka; 2003).

Research Objective

According to above background, Samurdhi programme has been playing vital role for poverty reduction in Sri Lanka. In these process Samurdhi Credit programme has to played significant role for poverty reduction and women empowerment. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyse the role of poverty reduction programme (Samurdhi credit component) in empowering poor women in Sri Lanka.

Research Problem

By considering the above all facts, it is clear that poverty in rural sector is predominant is compared other two sectors. Furthermore, existing social status of women in rural sector is a key element for preventing poverty incident. Considering to the poverty reduction programmes in Sri Lanka Samurdhi credit programme has been playing vital role for reduction of rural poverty. Through this credit programme, samurdhi bank issues loan facilities for their members. Most of the credit borrowers can be identified as females. In this Background research problem of the study was formulated as follows; *Samurdhi Credit Programme is successfulness strategy for empowering poor women in Sri Lanka?*

Research Methodology

The study was implemented in Mihintale Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs) of Anuradhapura District in North Central Province of Sri Lanka. 25 Grama Niladari Divisions and 149 villages can be identified in Mihintale. Total population of Mihintale is 29814. Among them highest

number of people living in rural sector as 28024 and urban sector it gets 1790 (Anuradhapura Hand Book-2011, Department of census and statistics).

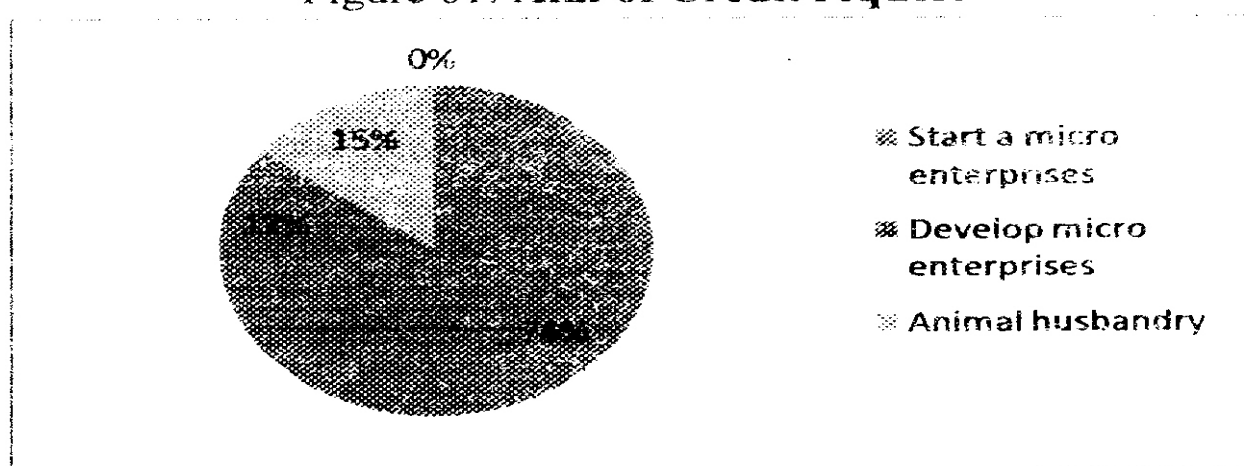
When considering the Samurdhi programme implemented by this area revealed that total number of families of Mihintale DSDs is 9179. Among them 2522 (25.57%) families are as Samurdhi beneficiaries. Two Samurdhi Zones and 25 Grama Niladari Divisions (GNDs) are included in the Mihintale. One GNDs was selected purposely one Samurdhi Zone. Samurdhi beneficiaries in 564 – Pothana GN Division in Mihintale DSDs were selected as the sample frame of this study. 50 Samurdhi creditors were selected randomly from GN division as a sample.

A questionnaire was prepared to obtain information from both creditors and non-creditors. Questions were created to collect data from the key Areas such as general information about the beneficiaries – age, sex, educational level and occupation.

Results and discussion

Samurdhi credit programme is mostly focused in obtaining credit for develop to income generating activities. Especially, enhanced to self employment is major aim of this credit programme. As a result of 73.8% of the creditors applied loans to start micro enterprises. But some creditors (11.5%) have already started micro enterprises, therefore they used credit for improvement their enterprises. In addition, 14.7% of the creditors have requested loans for animal husbandry.

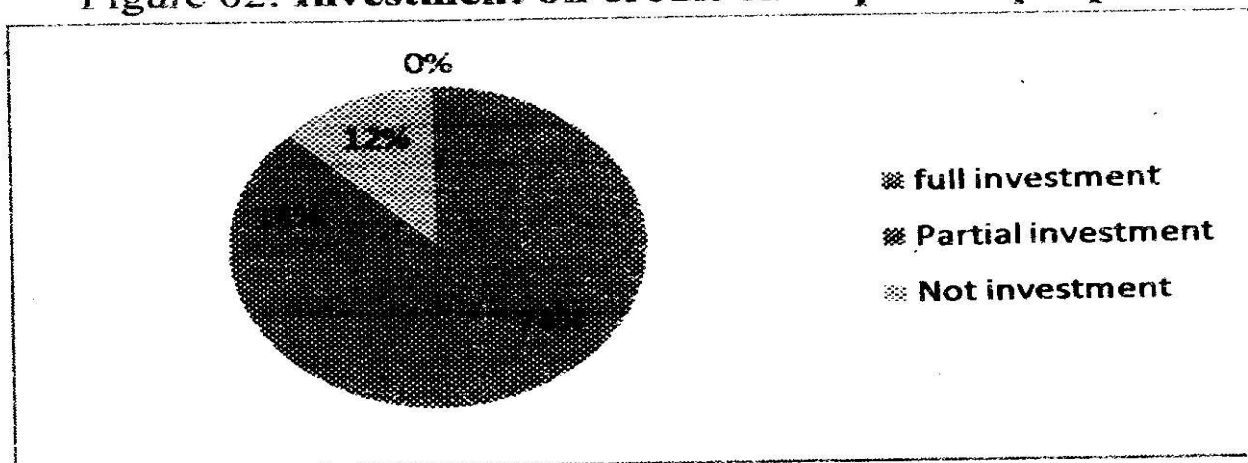
Figure 01: Aim of Credit request



According to the primary data, creditors have applied loans for investment purposes. Especially, they utilized their credits to start the income earning

activities. 74% of the borrowers have invested the total credit on that requested purpose. However, 13.6% of the creditors could be identified as partial investment. Of the total creditors 12.4% of them have not invested money on the requested purpose.

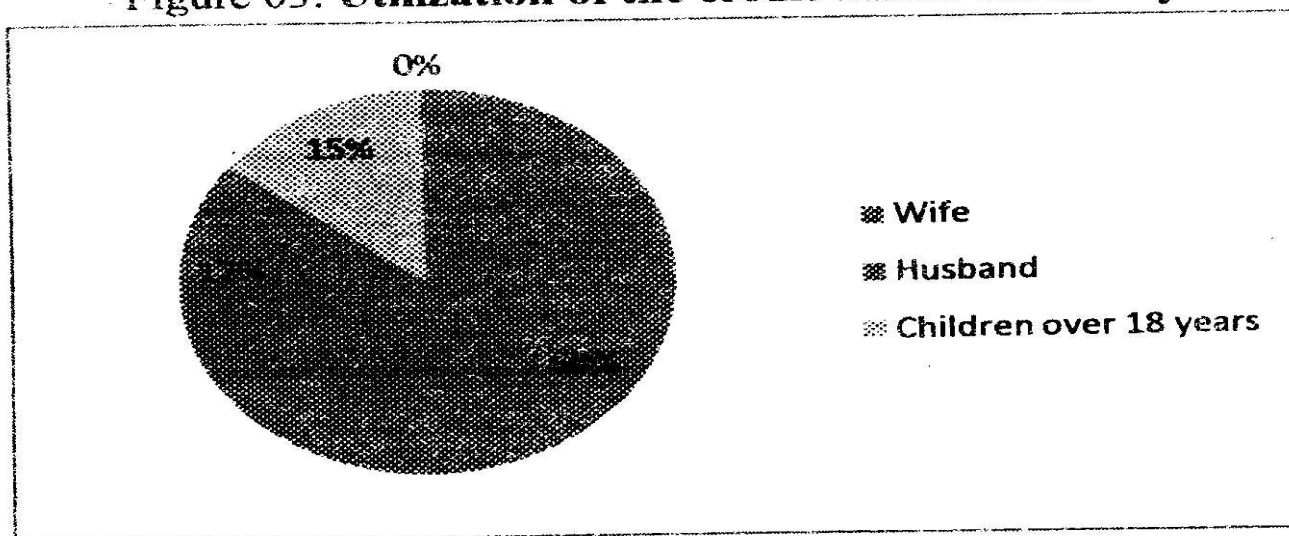
Figure 02: Investment on credit on requested purpose



According to this background, micro credit has supported to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Thus, provision of credit enables to break the vicious cycle of poverty through enhancing investment capabilities that finally enhance the household income.

When consider the credit utilization within the family, the money has been used wife, husband and their children (over 18 years). Primary data revealed that 68.3% of the credit has been controlled and utilized by wife and 17.2% of them have taken loans and given it to the husband. 14.5% of the credit utilized and controlled by children over 18 years for their enterprises.

Figure 03: Utilization of the credit within the family



Samurdhi credit programmes have helped the poor to reduce their economic difficulties in many ways. According to the figure 03, such loans have been particularly beneficial to poor women, allowing them to start a micro-enterprise and earn income, which is critical to the survival of women and their families. In order to reduction poverty among rural women and to contribute to women's economic and social empowerment are two main outcomes of women headed micro and small enterprises and it act as a main vehicle for economic growth. A reduction of women's vulnerability can sometimes also translate in to empowerment and greater financial security and she become more assertive in household and community.

Conclusion

The study was conducted in order to how Samurdhi credit programme is contributed to poverty reduction and empowering poor women in selected area. The study was revealed that the samurdhi credit programme play a major role in empowering women in Sri Lanka. Specially, the evidence suggests that access to credit for poor women has increased income in their families. Such programs mainly focused on the level of participation in household decision making, their level of access and control over family resources, their level of self-confidence, level of participation community-based organizations, and leadership development. Hence, women capacity in managing their household activities as well as other societal obligations has enhanced through these programs. Finally, it can be concluded that access to credit from the programme gave many women the opportunity to improve their social status within their family, society and build self-confidence in participation community development activities.

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