LIVELIHOOD ASPECTS OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS IN SAMURDHI PROGRAMME, AMPARA DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The following study presents the different livelihood aspects of a rural poor population in a remote district of Eastern Sri Lanka called Ampara district. The study examines the livelihood pattern and their associated vulnerability and coping strategies, profile of livelihood assets and gender differences in terms of livelihoods and assets. The study is based on the livelihood approach and its framework. Non-farm wage employment activities were found to be important livelihood strategy. Non-farm wage employment activities were depended on other agricultural activities. Among the livelihood assets components, there were high deviations in value of those holdings. Every kind of livelihood strategy of this studied sample is exposed to vulnerabilities. Among the different kind of coping strategies adopted, adoption of future plans and ideas was at low level. Gender differences in livelihood strategies reflect that female headed households were mostly included in self employed group. Most of the male headed households were included under non-farm wage employment. It was also found that male headed households had significantly higher value of assets than that of the female headed household. The qualitative and quantitative measures presented in this study represent the different denotations of poverty which is rooted in that society. People's awareness, skill training on selected livelihood strategies for identified groups, creating continuous employment to overcome the effect of vulnerabilities are important means to ensure economic security in this area.

Key words : Livelihood, Poverty, Samurdhi

INTRODUCTION

Livelihood is defined as the various economic activities carried out by people to have a meaningful life based on the assets they have (Ellis *et al.*, 2003). Ellis and Freeman (2005) mentioned that "rural livelihood raises different implications for rural development policy". They are dynamic and diverse in nature. Therefore study of different livelihood aspects of rural poor population is essential to propose development plans. Samurdhi is the anti-poverty programme in Sri Lanka. It represents the rural poor households. This study examines the livelihood aspects of the selected rural poor populace in terms of livelihood pattern and their associated vulnerability and coping strategies, profile of livelihood assets and gender differences in terms of livelihoods and assets which represents different denotations of poverty. This study was build based on the sustainable livelihoods framework (DFID, 1999). While gender aspects of livelihoods were integrated with this basic framework.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sampling and data collection

The study used the Samurdhi population of Karaitivu divisional secretariat division in Ampara district represented the Tamil ethnic. Proportional stratified random sampling was carried out to select 100 households from the total households of population. Structured questionnaires were used to directly interview households' heads. The collected qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed and interpreted using Microsoft excel and SPSS15.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study the primary type of livelihood activities carried out by the sample was divided into five main categories. They were Crop production, Livestock production, Farm wage employment, Non-farm wage employment and Self employment. Table 1 and 2 presented the different kind of livelihood strategies carried out by the sample and their relative contribution in terms of percentage of households and income respectively.

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Table 1 : Details on type of livelihood strategies

Types of livelihood main strategies	Sub livelihood strategies
Crop production	Paddy production, vegetable production
Livestock production	Rearing of cows, keeping bullock cart, raise chickens, raise pigeon
Farm wage employment	Working in the paddy field: preparing bed canals, sowing weeding (specially mentioned by women wage employers)Ploughing paddy fields using four wheel tractorCollecting waste spikelet paddy from the field after harvesting (specially mentioned by women wage employers) Fishery
Non-farm wage employment	Masontry, Carpentry, Bricks making, Road reconstruction works, Electricity cables connection repairing works Machine driving carrying materials for construction works
	Shops, Sewing, Other bonded labour services
Self employment	

(Source: Survey data, 2008)

Table 2 : Average income and percentage of contribution in each strategy

	Type of strategies					
	Crop production	Livestock production	Farm wage employment	Non-farm wage employment	Self employment	Other non-specified
Average income (LKR)	10,776	8,875	7,973	12,828*	7,101	10,000
Percentage of households adopted such strategy (%)	11.0	3.6	17.1	51.0*	15.2	2.0
Percentage of income contribution	8.8	2.9	33.9	40.6*	12.1	1.6

Average income for the sample: 10,100 LKR/household (1US $ = 106 LKR (Sri Lankan Rupees), the highest values were marked with *

SURVEYED SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS ON SELECTEDASSETCOMPONENTS

Human assets

Household head education and health condition were taken into evaluation under human assets. Household head education is ranging between the values of 0 to 13 in schooling years. It means that some household heads were uneducated. In case of health condition, the average number of days a person unable to attend to work from the survey period response was 49 days. Among the identified illness problems of diarrhoea, virus fever, chicken kunia and other unspecified, like scarcity caused by accidents, surgery and permanent body pains make them to long day absenteeism from their livelihood strategies. In this condition, contribution from other household members becomes important to these families (from spouse or children). Among the surveyed sample, only 2 percent of the population

shows this situation. Chicken kunia is the first most illness identified as serious condition made people away from working and 29 percent of the households affected by this illness. No any cholera incidence was reported during this period.

Physical assets

Asset score and money value of job related equipments were used to represent the physical assets. The information on these components were easily received. The value of job related equipments reflected the real status or position of respective livelihood strategy adopted by them.

Natural assets

Total land in operation is used as representing natural assets. The average land size per household is 0.63 acre. This size is less than 1 acre. This condition is due to

Table 3 : Surveyed sample characteristics on selected asset components

Asset type	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Human assets				
Household head education (schooling years)	0	13	7.30	3.20
Physical assets				
Asset score out of 7(count) (Electricity, Telephone, Radio, Television, Bicycle, Motor bike Newspaper at weekend)	0	7.00	3.70	1.80
Money value of job related equipments (LKR)	0	300,000	26,476	44,679.20
Natural assets				
Total land in operation (acre)	0	16.50	.603	2.10
Social assets				
Kinship score	0	13.00	5.80	3.30
Financial assets				
Amount of debt (LKR)	0	600,000	81,200	113,073.20
Additive borrowing capacity (LKR)	0	400,000	48,900	71,170.40
Money value of livestock (LKR)	0	155,000	7354.1	22,941.2

only few of the households have land ownership for operation and crop production as primary livelihood strategy. In the case of paddy land ownership, most of the rice growing farmers have the operation ownership in rent in form. Land gets its main importance for farm wage earners because farm wage earning is mainly depend on paddy farming to this studied sample.

Financial assets
In terms of financial assets, the indicator used were amount of debt (LKR), additive borrowing capacity (LKR) and money value of livestock (LKR).

Eighty percent of the households are in debt condition. People borrowed for various reasons.Job loss, investment in a livelihood strategy or buying land/building house and other non-specified expenses (borrowed for medical expenses or wedding expenses) were some of the reasons. In this studied sample 15 percent of the households which borrowed money did it because of food need, 36 percent of the households borrowed to initiate or invest in livelihood need. 33 percent did borrow for buying land or building house and 16 percent borrowed for un-specified expenses. Most of the time people use personal trustworthy (trustiness) and jewellery to borrow from money lenders or from government banks.

Social assets
In this study social asset was examined in terms of participation in social organization and by developing kinship score based on the different attributes of kinship. The distribution of these components for the studied sample is shown in Table 3.

Vulnerabilities surrounding livelihood strategies
Every type of livelihood strategies were surrounded by vulnerability context. These conditions were differing according to the type of livelihood strategy as well. There was also dependency between farm employment and non-farm employment types (e.g. after rice harvesting people start new construction activities). These conditions affected each other. The following describes some of those experienced vulnerabilities of each livelihood strategies. The common opinion among the households' were that rainy season was difficult period for most of the households as it led to the dampening of most of the livelihood strategies which had to be stopped or slowed down.

Paddy farming
The unexpected heavy rains and flooding caused losses to paddy farming. Therefore paddy farmers were fallen in debt burden. Other farm wage employment also directly affected by this situation.

Livestock production
Unexpected diseases and increased prices for feed and insufficient locking up were the vulnerabilities to livestock production.

Fishing
The risky situations affecting this livelihood included the break down of the net, windy climate making insecurityfor their life during night time fishing, hurting by fish thorns, increase in diesel and kerosene prices specifically affecting, the fishing by engine boats.

Coping strategies of household
Households went through different alternative strategies to overcome the vulnerability conditions. They pre-planned some measures such that the rice-seller milled the paddy during dry season and saved the rice sacks to sell during rainy season. Whenever the sea fishing is affected fish sellers speculated that time with stream fish. Among the four major categories of coping strategies defined during survey, the adoption rates of those were as follows: expenditure strategies 41 %, consumption strategies 33 %, income strategies 23 % and strategies on future plans and ideas 4 %.

Gender-based distribution of livelihood strategies
The following table presented the distribution of type of livelihood strategies between household head sexes. Among those strategies, female headed households had a higher percentage of self employment. This result followed the statement of Lanjow and Feder (2001). Male headed households had higher percentage level of non-farm wage employment. Percentage of those in farm wage employment was higher in male headed than female headed.

Mean value of selected assets' based variables among Gender
The following table describes the distribution of selected assets' based variables between household sexes. One wayANOVA(analysis of variance) method was used to assess the significance difference between the two groups. According to the results,female headed households' shows significantly smaller total

Table 4 : Gender-based distribution of livelihood strategies

Type of primary occupation	Male headed household	Female headed household
Crop production	13%	4%
Livestock production	4%	4%
Farm wage employment	29%	4%
Non-farm wage employment	41%	37%
Self employment	11%	48%
Other non-specified	1%	4%

household members, money value of job related equipments, asset score, amount of debt, additive borrowing capacity and household income. Female headed household head shows significantly higher level of age than male headed. This means that female-headed households were poorer and had fewer assets i.e. land, financial capital than male headed households. In this sense, in order to overcome poverty difference between male and female headed households in the society, policy makers should examine levels of assets they have and lack as an important aspect of any development project.

CONCLUSION

The surveyed sample is shown to carry out multiple livelihood strategies to sustain their life. Paddy farming and fishing are the major livelihood strategies that directly or indirectly had the impact on other livelihood strategies such as non-farm wage employment and self-employment. Paddy farming and fishing are seasonal and under the influence of natural factors. Most of the people are also wage earners. The wage earners are affected more due to the unexpected incidences in paddy farming and fishing. During the unexpected incidences on these main basic livelihood strategies, the whole society is affected. Mainly during the latter months of a year, most of the families became more vulnerable in terms

Table 5 : Mean value of selected assets' based variables among gender

Variables/assets	Male headed	Female headed	Sig.
Household head education	7.6	6.6	0.147
Young adult ratio	0.9	0.9	0.888
Total household member	4.6	3.6	0.0*
Age of household head	44.1	49.5	0.015*
Money value of job related equipments	31,713	12,900	0.063*
Asset score	4.1429	2.6296	0.00*
Total land in operation	0.818	0.046	0.099
Amount of debt	95,700	43,700	0.042*
Additive borrowing capacity	58,100	25,100	0.04*
Money value of livestock	6442.9	4948.1	0.532
Diversity index	1.3	1.3	0.963
Food sufficiency score	20.3	22.4	0.238
Household income	11,667	6,052.8	0.005*

(*significantly different at 5% significant level)

of income and food. This represents the traditional rural nature of the society in terms of productive economic activities that is usual in the rural parts of other agriculture based developing countries. Except paddy farming, agricultural production and diversification are far below than local demand for these produce along with very low level of adoption of sustainable, resource saving agricultural production practices. These conditions aggravate situations of vulnerability and make them to spend more money on food purchasing.

Non-farm wage employment has higher impact on this society. The percentage of households adopted such strategy and income contributions were found higher than other types of livelihood strategies. When the livelihood strategies looked into two major different categories of agricultural and non-agricultural strategies, their respective contribution to the studied sample became equally importance. Therefore both sectors should be developed to improve the growth of this region.

Among the components considered which representing different livelihood assets extreme situation observed among the households. This reflects the situation of high disparity in terms of asset ownership. The average operating land ownership for this studied sample is less than one acre. Households have had the opportunity to participate in social-organizations as the NGOs are working here.

Most of the households went through expenditure related strategies. Gender aspects missed to explain some of the expected traditional features of livelihood analysis. This is because of the adult working members'

contribution to the households even with the presence of female headship. These results should be taken into considerationbefore implementation of any development project or strategy.

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