



RDTRI

Rural Development Training
and Research Institute

1st RDTRI RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM – 2026

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

**Sustainable Rural Development:
Empowering Communities for an Inclusive
and Resilient Future**



**RURAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING AND
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (RDTRI)**

Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security
and Community Empowerment

**Rural Development Training and Research Institute
(RDTRI)**



1st Research Symposium - 2026

*“Sustainable Rural Development: Empowering
Communities for an Inclusive & Resilient Future”*

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

25th August 2026



**Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and
Community Empowerment**

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Rural Development Training and Research Institute (RDTRI),

Pilimathalawa,

Message From the Minister of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment



Hon. (Dr.) Upali Pannilage

Minister of Rural Development, Social Security and
Community Empowerment
Sri Lanka

It gives me great pleasure to convey this message on the occasion of the 1st Research Symposium of the Rural Development Training and Research Institute (RDTRI), held under the timely theme, “Sustainable Rural Development: Empowering Communities for an Inclusive and Resilient Future.”

This symposium comes at an important moment in Sri Lanka’s development journey. The Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment has embarked on an ambitious programme of community empowerment through the Prajashakthi Programme, one of the Government’s major national initiatives. Its central objective is to empower communities and create opportunities for people to improve their livelihoods, overcome multidimensional poverty, and participate actively in shaping their own development.

Translating this national vision into meaningful transformation at the village and community levels is both an opportunity and a challenge. Sustainable community development cannot be achieved by government interventions alone. It requires the active participation of communities, government institutions, academia, civil society, the private sector, and development partners. Equally important are research, capacity building, knowledge sharing, innovation, and evidence-based approaches that enable us to

understand the diverse needs, resources, and opportunities of our communities.

In this context, the role of the Rural Development Training and Research Institute is particularly significant. Since its establishment in 1974, RDTRI has contributed to strengthening knowledge and capacities for rural and community development in Sri Lanka. The organisation of its first Research Symposium represents another important milestone in this journey, bringing together distinguished scholars, researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and development professionals from Sri Lanka and overseas.

I particularly appreciate the multidisciplinary character of this symposium. Sustainable rural development encompasses poverty alleviation, livelihoods, social protection, women's empowerment, agriculture, entrepreneurship, education, health, community participation, governance, environmental management, and resilience. Bringing expertise from these different fields together creates an important platform for dialogue and for developing integrated solutions to the complex challenges confronting our communities.

I congratulate the Director, Deputy Director, staff of RDTRI, the symposium organisers, keynote speaker, panelists, researchers, and all participants who have contributed to making this important academic and policy forum possible. I sincerely hope that the discussions and research presented at this symposium will generate new knowledge, practical approaches, and policy insights that can strengthen the Prajashakthi Programme and contribute to sustainable, inclusive, and resilient community development throughout Sri Lanka.

May this first Research Symposium mark the beginning of a strong and continuing partnership between research, policy, training, and community action for the advancement of rural communities in Sri Lanka.

Message from the Secretary of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment



Sampath Manthrinayake

Secretary

Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and
Community Empowerment

It is with great pleasure that I extend my warmest greetings and best wishes on the occasion of the Research Symposium on Rural Development, organized under the timely and significant theme, “Sustainable Rural Development: Empowering Communities for an Inclusive and Resilient Future.”.

Rural development occupies a central place in Sri Lanka’s policy framework which is the national development agenda of the country. A significant proportion of our population continues to live in rural areas and depends directly or indirectly on rural economies, agriculture, natural resources, and community-based livelihoods. Therefore, rural development is not merely a sectoral concern, but an essential component of achieving inclusive, balanced, and sustainable national development.

The theme of this symposium reflects the need to place rural communities at the heart of the development process. Sustainable rural development requires more than economic growth; it calls for the empowerment of communities, creation of sustainable livelihoods, reduction of poverty and inequalities, improved access to essential services and opportunities, environmental sustainability, and strengthened resilience to economic, social, and climate-related challenges. Empowered communities are better positioned to identify

their own priorities, participate in decision-making, utilize local resources effectively, and contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation.

Within the national policy framework, rural development has an important role in advancing inclusive economic growth, poverty reduction, social protection, food security, livelihood development, regional balance, environmental sustainability, and the equitable distribution of development benefits. Strengthening rural economies, promoting entrepreneurship and employment, enhancing human capital, improving infrastructure and public services, and reducing disparities between rural and urban areas are therefore fundamental to achieving broader national development aspirations.

In this context, research and evidence-based policymaking are indispensable. Rural communities are experiencing rapid changes arising from economic transformation, demographic trends, technological advancement, climate change, changing employment patterns, and evolving social needs. Research enables us to understand these dynamics, identify emerging challenges and opportunities, and develop innovative, practical, and context-specific solutions. It also provides the evidence necessary to ensure that policies and programmes are responsive to the actual needs and aspirations of rural communities.

This symposium therefore provides a valuable platform for researchers, academics, policymakers, practitioners, development partners, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, present research findings, exchange experiences, and explore innovative approaches to sustainable rural development. I am confident that the research and discussions presented under the theme “Sustainable Rural Development: Empowering Communities for an

Inclusive and Resilient Future” will contribute to strengthening the evidence base for policy formulation and programme implementation.

As we look towards the future, rural communities should not be viewed merely as beneficiaries of development interventions, but as active partners and drivers of national development. Empowering communities through knowledge, skills, economic opportunities, social inclusion, access to technology, participatory governance, and stronger local institutions will be essential to building resilient communities capable of responding to future challenges.

I am confident that this symposium will stimulate meaningful dialogue, encourage collaboration among institutions, promote new research partnerships, and generate practical recommendations for strengthening rural development policies and programmes. Most importantly, I hope that the knowledge generated through this forum will move beyond research and discussion to inform policy and translate into tangible improvements in the lives and livelihoods of rural communities.

I commend RDTRI and all the organizers for their dedication and valuable contribution towards promoting research and knowledge in rural development. I also extend my heartfelt appreciation to the organizing committee, researchers, academic institutions, government agencies, development partners, and all other stakeholders who have contributed their time, expertise, and commitment to making this event a success. Their collective efforts are commendable and reflect a shared commitment to advancing knowledge and promoting sustainable rural development in Sri Lanka.

Once again,. I wish the Research Symposium on Rural Development every success and hope that its outcomes will contribute meaningfully towards building sustainable rural communities and an inclusive, resilient, and prosperous future for Sri Lanka.

Message From the Symposium Co-Chairs



Thilini Surangika Karasnagoda
Director, (Symposium Co-Chairs)
Rural Development Training and Research Institute



W. K. N. N. Kaushalya
Deputy Director, (Symposium Co-Chairs)
Rural Development Training and Research Institute

It is with great pleasure that we welcome you to the 1st Research Symposium of the Rural Development Training and Research Institute (RDTRI) – 2026, an important milestone in the Institute’s ongoing journey to strengthen research, knowledge creation, capacity development, and evidence-informed practice in rural development.

As the national institution dedicated to training, research, and capacity development in rural development, RDTRI plays a key role in connecting research, public policy, institutional practice, and the lived realities of rural communities. This inaugural Research Symposium marks an important step towards strengthening that role and positioning RDTRI as a national platform for knowledge exchange, dialogue, collaboration, and innovation in rural and community development.

The Symposium is held under the timely theme, “Sustainable Rural Development: Empowering Communities for an Inclusive & Resilient Future.” This theme reflects the growing recognition that sustainable rural

development extends beyond economic advancement alone. It requires strengthening livelihoods and human capabilities, promoting social inclusion and community participation, improving institutional effectiveness, ensuring environmental sustainability and resilience, and creating opportunities for people to shape their own development futures. This is particularly relevant to Sri Lanka, as the country seeks development pathways that can address multidimensional poverty while building empowered, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities.

An important objective of this initiative is to strengthen the relationship between research and action. Research achieves its greatest value when knowledge moves beyond academic discussion and contributes to better policies, stronger institutions, improved programmes, and meaningful change in communities. The Symposium therefore seeks to promote a continuous process in which research generates knowledge, knowledge informs policy, policy strengthens practice, and practice contributes to community transformation.

The inaugural session of the 1st RDTRI Research Symposium-2026, is honoured by the participation of Hon. (Dr.) Upali Pannilage, Minister of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, as the Chief Guest, and Mr Sampath Manthrinayake, Secretary to the Ministry, as the Guest of Honour. The Keynote Address will be delivered by Professor N. S. Cooray, Professor of Economics at the Graduate School of International Relations, International University of Japan. Their participation, together with representatives of government institutions, universities, research organisations, development agencies, and professional communities, reinforces the Symposium's important role in bringing research, policy, and practice together in support of sustainable rural development.

Following a nationwide call for papers, the Symposium received research contributions from academics, researchers, public-sector officers, development practitioners, and other professionals across Sri Lanka. Each submission underwent peer review by reviewers with relevant academic and professional expertise, and authors were encouraged to address reviewers' observations and strengthen their work before inclusion in the Symposium.

The technical sessions are organised around six broad thematic areas: Poverty, Livelihoods and Social Protection; Women, Gender and Inclusive Development; Agriculture, Fisheries, SMEs and Entrepreneurship; Education, Youth, Health and Well-being; Community Participation, Governance and Praja Shakthi; and Environment, Water, Waste and Disaster Resilience. These themes illustrate the multidimensional nature of rural development and remind us that sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated sectoral interventions. It requires integrated, interdisciplinary, institutionally coordinated, and community-centred approaches that recognise the interconnections among the economic, social, human, environmental, and institutional dimensions of development.

A further highlight of the Symposium is the Panel Discussion on Sustainable Rural Development, which brings together distinguished academics and development specialists from Sri Lanka, India, Japan, and the United Kingdom. The participation of scholars from the University of Colombo, Centurion University of Technology and Management, the University of Sri Jayewardenepura, the Indian Institute of Science, the University of Peradeniya, the University of Sheffield, and the International University of Japan gives this dialogue an important national and international dimension. Such engagement offers an opportunity to exchange perspectives across disciplinary, institutional, and national boundaries, while strengthening

opportunities for research collaboration, professional engagement, institutional learning, and policy dialogue.

The significance of this Symposium therefore extends beyond a single academic event. It offers an opportunity to build stronger, more enduring connections among government, universities and research institutions, development practitioners, civil society, communities, and other stakeholders. Such partnerships are increasingly essential to addressing complex rural development challenges and translating knowledge into practical solutions that improve the well-being of people and communities.

This Book of Abstracts brings together the research presented at the 1st RDTRI Research Symposium – 2026. It is more than a record of the Symposium; it is an emerging knowledge resource that contains evidence, experiences, innovations, and perspectives relevant to Sri Lanka’s rural development agenda. We hope that these contributions will stimulate further research, encourage the systematic documentation of lessons from development practice, strengthen dialogue between researchers and practitioners, and inform evidence-informed policy and programme development.

I express my sincere appreciation to all authors, reviewers, session chairs, panellists, resource persons, participating institutions, and members of the organising team, whose dedication and cooperation have made this inaugural Research Symposium possible. Their contributions have been invaluable in establishing a meaningful platform for scholarly, professional, and policy engagement in rural development.

As we inaugurate the 1st RDTRI Research Symposium – 2026, we sincerely hope this initiative will evolve into a sustained national platform where research informs policy, policy strengthens practice, and knowledge contributes to the transformation of rural communities. We further hope that

the partnerships, ideas, and professional networks generated through this Symposium will endure beyond the event and help build empowered, inclusive, resilient, prosperous, and sustainable rural communities across Sri Lanka.

**From Prajashakthi to Sustainable Community Transformation: An
Integrated Eight-Capital Approach to Rural Development**

Keynote Address Summary

Professor N. S. Cooray

*Professor of Economics, Graduate School of International Relations,
International University of Japan, Niigata, Japan*

Sri Lanka's Prajashakthi (Community Empowerment) Programme offers an important opportunity to rethink how the country pursues rural and community development. Conceived as a national movement for poverty eradication, Prajashakthi emphasises social solidarity, empowerment, social justice, inclusion, participation, environmental sustainability, and an integrated approach to improving people's quality of life. Importantly, it seeks to establish a citizen-centred development structure that enables people to identify their needs and development priorities.

The institutional foundations for taking this vision to the grassroots are already substantial. By now, Community Development Councils (CDCs) had been established across Sri Lanka's 14,008 villages. Yet establishing village-level institutions alone will not automatically produce community transformation. The critical challenge is to translate the national vision of Prajashakthi into a practical development process that communities can understand, own, implement, and sustain. In this sense, Prajashakthi has considerable transformative potential, but its success ultimately depends on whether it can become a genuinely village-centred development process rather than remaining primarily a national programme or a collection of individual projects.

This keynote proposes the Integrated Eight-Capital Approach as a practical framework for this transition. The approach recognises that every community possesses eight interconnected forms of capital: Human, Social, Natural, Physical, Financial, Institutional, Cultural, and Technological Capital. Rural poverty and vulnerability are multidimensional; consequently, sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated sectoral interventions or an excessive emphasis on physical infrastructure. Community development should instead be understood as an ongoing process of identifying, mobilising, strengthening, and integrating these eight forms of capital.

The approach therefore shifts the fundamental planning question from “What projects does this village need?” to “What kind of community do we want this village to become, which capitals must be strengthened to reach that future, and what combination of actions and partnerships will achieve it?” A Five-Year Integrated Village Development Plan can operationalise this thinking through a systematic process of village diagnosis → eight-capital assessment → stakeholder mapping → prioritisation → integrated village planning → implementation → monitoring and learning. Such planning begins with community assets and capabilities, as well as needs and deficiencies, recognises the interdependence among capitals, and encourages interventions that can strengthen several dimensions of community well-being simultaneously.

Within this framework, Community Development Councils can become institutional catalysts for transformation, bringing together communities, government agencies, local institutions, the private sector, civil society, universities and other knowledge institutions, and development partners. Similarly, public officials should extend their role beyond administering projects. They should increasingly act as facilitators and catalysts for

sustainable community transformation, helping communities identify assets, address capital gaps, coordinate institutions, mobilise resources, develop partnerships, and monitor outcomes.

The central argument of this keynote is that Prajashakthi already provides Sri Lanka with a potentially powerful national platform for community empowerment; the Integrated Eight-Capital Approach can offer a practical pathway to localise that vision at the village level. By shifting from fragmented projects to integrated capital formation, from top-down delivery to community participation, and from measuring activities to measuring improvements in community capabilities and well-being, Prajashakthi can evolve into a powerful vehicle for reducing multidimensional poverty and building resilient, inclusive, empowered, and sustainable rural communities across Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Prajashakthi; Integrated Eight-Capital Approach; Community Development Councils; rural development; multidimensional poverty; village development planning; community empowerment; sustainable community development

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10.30 a.m – 10.45 a.m.	Morning Tea
10.45 a.m. – 12.45 p.m.	Sustainability Forum – Panel Discussion
12.45 p.m. – 1.30 p.m.	Lunch Break
1.30 p.m. – 4.30 p.m.	Research Presentation Sessions
4.30 p.m. – 4.45 p.m.	Award Ceremony
4.45 p.m.– 5.00 p.m.	Closing Ceremony

CONGRESS THEMES

(TECHNICAL SESSIONS)

- I. Poverty Alleviation Livelihoods & Social Protection
- II. Women’s Empowerment, Gender & Inclusive Development
- III. Agriculture, Fisheries, SMEs & Rural Entrepreneurship
- IV. Education, Youth Health & Social Well-being
- V. Community Participation & Governance
- VI. Environment, Water, Waste Management & Disaster Resilience

Rural Development Training and Research Institute

25th August 2026

PROGRAMME

Inaugural Session

Time : 09.00 a.m. – 10.30 a.m.

Venue : Conference Hall - RDTRI

Time	Programme Event
8.30 – 9.00 a.m.	Registration of Participants and Arrival of Guests
9.00 – 9.05 a.m.	Lighting of the Traditional Oil Lamp
9.05 – 9.10 a.m.	Welcome Address — Ms. Thilini Surangika Karasnagoda, Director, RDTRI
9.10 – 9.15 a.m.	Opening Remarks & Symposium Overview — Ms. W. K. N. N. Kaushalya, Deputy Director, RDTRI
9.15 – 9.25 a.m.	Address by the Guest of Honour — Mr. Sampath Manthrinayake, Secretary, Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment
9.25 – 9.35 a.m.	Address by the Chief Guest — Hon. Dr. Upali Pannilage, Minister of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment

9.35 – 10.30 a.m.	Keynote Address — Prof. N. S. Cooray, Professor, Graduate School of International Relations, International University of Japan
10.30 – 10.45 a.m.	Morning Tea
10.45 – 12.45 p.m.	Sustainability Forum – Panel Discussion
12.45 – 1.30 p.m.	Lunch Break
1.30 – 4.30 p.m.	Research Presentation Sessions
4.30 – 4.45 p.m.	Award Ceremony
4.45 – 5.00 p.m.	Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks

Theme I: Poverty Alleviation Livelihoods & Social Protection

Technical Session I

Venue: A

Session Chair: Dr. A. M. P. Arandara

Co-Chair: Ms. P. Anusha

Paper ID	Presentation
RDTRI/PLS/001	From welfare Dependency to Livelihood Empowerment: Strengthening Agriculture Based Livelihood among Aswesuma Recipient Households through Community Partion in Kidepitiya GN Division in Sri Lanka. <i>Lakshan, D</i>
RDTRI/PLS/002	Impact of Psychological Counseling on Rural Community Empowerment: A Field Study Centered on "Praja Shakti" Beneficiaries <i>Jariya, I.L.S.</i>
RDTRI/PLS/003	Prajashakthi Approach of Alim Nagar (224 B) Village for Rural Poverty Alleviation & Livelihood Development <i>Ankayan, S.; Jeyaruban, R.</i>
RDTRI/PLS/004	A Study on the Livelihood Development of Families Below the Poverty Line in Mellapoththa Village <i>Rakeeza, M.M.P; Nimshath, M.Y.M.</i>

RDTRI/PLS/005

Social Security and Dependency Among
Elderly Plantation Workers in Thalawakele,
Nuwara Eliya District

Prasanna, W.M.S; Premarathne, H.D.P

Theme II : Women’s Empowerment, Gender & Inclusive Development

Technical Session I

Venue : B

Session Chair: Dr. Priyadarshani Premarathne

Co-Chair:: Mrs. Ishari Gunarathne

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RDTRI/GEN/001	Home - Based Income and Community Support Model for Single - Parent Families in Kothmale : A Social Entrepreneurship Approach to Reducing Multidimensional Poverty <i>Roopasinghe, K.G.H.Y.</i>
RDTRI/GEN/002	Multidimensional Poverty and Proposed Social Work Interventions among Rural Female-Headed Households: A Study of Athugala Village (272) <i>Sanujan, S.; Jeyaruban, V.</i>
RDTRI/GEN/003	Empowering Vulnerable Women and Minority Inland Fishing Communities through Community Development in Periyapalam (224A), Muthur, Sri Lanka <i>Farzana, K.F; Jeyaruban, V.; Yaseer, M. M.</i>
RDTRI/GEN/004	Social Work Intervention through Social Action for the Establishment of a Public Cemetery: A Case Study of Upparu GN Division, Kinniya, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

- Waseem, M.U.M.; Jeyaruban, V.***
RDTRI/GEN/005 The Distinctive Role of the Prajashakthi
Movement in Preventing Domestic Violence in
Sri Lanka
- Hulugalla, W. M. N***
RDTRI/GEN/006 Women's Empowerment and Community
Leadership in Rural Sri Lanka: A Narrative
Review of Secondary Evidence
- Gnanaprakasham Sideesana***

Theme III: Agriculture, Fisheries, SMEs & Rural Entrepreneurship

Technical Session I

Venue : C

Session Chair: Dr. Susantha Rasnayake

Co-Chair: Ms. Uresha Obesekara

Paper ID	Presentation
RDTRI/AGR/001	Digital Technology Adoption among Paddy Farmers in Giribawa, Sri Lanka: Usage, Economic Benefits, and Adoption Barriers <i>Pavithrani, A.D.S.</i>
RDTRI/AGR/002	Post Evaluation of a Government Subsidized Scheme for Dairy Cattle Acquisition and its impact on smallholder dairy livelihoods in Uva Province, Sri Lanka <i>Ranaweera, K.K.T.N.; Tharangani,R.M.H.; Fernando,A.G.;Weerasinha,W.M.N.; Samarakoon, S.J.M.R.R. ; Wanasinghe N.P. ; Bandara, K.M.W.R.</i>
RDTRI/AGR/003	Micro-credentials as a Capacity-Building Tool for Rural Entrepreneurship Development <i>Imbulpitiya, V.S.; Jayalath, J.; Manawadu, G.M.S.R.G.</i>
RDTRI/AGR/004	Globalization and Opportunity-Driven Entrepreneurship: Implications for Sri Lanka from High- and Middle-Income Countries <i>Kaushalya, W.K.N.N.; Cooray, N.S.</i>

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Technical Session I

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Session Chair: Prof. W. M. S. M. Kumari Thoradeniya

Co-Chair: Mr. K. G. Anjana Kodithuwakku

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RDTRI/EDU/002	Pattern of Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Expenditure among Older Adults from Low-Income Households in Vadamarachchi North, Sri Lanka <i>Kamaleswaran, S ; Premarathne, H.D.P</i>
RDTRI/EDU/003	Financial Literacy and Fraud Victimization Among Older Adults: A Study of Warakapola Divisional Secretariat Division, Sri Lanka. <i>Udayanga, T. M. I ; Premarathne, H.D.P</i>
RDTRI/EDU/004	Development of a Mobile Learning Platform for Rural Community Development and Vocational Training through Public Participation“New colors in the world of toddlers”. <i>Lokuwellage, A.O.</i>

RDTRI/EDU/005:

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Co-Chair: Ms. Sachini Geethanjalee

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RDTRI/GOV/002	Participatory Governance and Community-Led Development: Lessons from the Grama Prabodha Programme in the Western Province of Sri Lanka <i>Kumari,R.M.D.P.</i>
RDTRI/GOV/003	A Study on the Implementation Effectiveness of the “Praja Shakthi” Programme in the RDS Sambunagar Area Based on Social Empowerment and Livelihood Development <i>Naseer Niflan</i>

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- RDTRI/GOV/005 Intertwined Dynamics of Self Governance and Community Participation: The Case of Labour Bank
Gurtoo, A.; Baligar, S
- RDTRI/GOV/006 Barriers to Community Participation in Community Development Initiatives: A Case Study of Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari Division, Doluwa, Kandy, Sri Lanka
Sandaruwan N.L.D. ; Wijerathna L.P.S.D.N.

Theme I : Environment, Water, Waste Management & Disaster Resilience

Technical Session I

Venue : F

Session Chair: Ms. Dinushika Yapa Abeywardhana

Co-Chair: Ms. E.G.I.Sevwandi

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RDTRI/ENV/002	Smart Village Project: A Community Centered Approach for Sustainable Rural Development In Sri Lanka <i>Srikumara, S; Vasudevan, G; Bandara, J</i>
RDTRI/ENV/003	Community Mobilization for Sustainable Waste Management: From Needs Assessment to Collective Action in 759- Wellawa Grama Niladhari Division <i>Kobbekaduwa, K.M.R.S; Herath, H.M.D.S</i>
RDTRI/ENV/004	Human-Elephant Conflict and Poverty: A Study of Socioeconomic Vulnerability and Wellbeing among Rural Households in Aralaganwila <i>Meegaswila, R.P.D.G.T; Premarathne H.D.P.</i>

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From Welfare to Empowerment: Strengthening Agriculture-Based Livelihoods among Aswesuma Recipient Households in Kidelpitiya GN Division, Sri Lanka.

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Introduction

Rural poverty and livelihood insecurity continue to challenge sustainable community development, particularly in developing countries where vulnerable households often experience limited opportunities for sustainable income generation. Recent evidence suggests that agriculture-based livelihood development, institutional support, and community participation play important roles in strengthening household resilience and reducing long-term rural poverty (Ongachi & Belinder, 2025; Der Tambile et al., 2024).

Kidelpitiya 629 Grama Niladhari Division, located within the Horana Divisional Secretariat Division, represents a rural community characterized by both livelihood potential and economic vulnerability. The division consists of 948 households with a population of 3,165 and includes 254 Aswesuma recipient households, the highest number of beneficiaries reported within the Horana Divisional Secretariat area (Horana Divisional Secretariat, 2025). Despite the availability of cultivable land and other livelihood resources, many households continue to experience financial insecurity and dependence on welfare assistance, indicating a gap between available community assets and their productive utilization.

This study was conducted under the Prajashakthi National Movement of the Presidential Secretariat of Sri Lanka as part of a community work intervention implemented in collaboration with the Horana Divisional Secretariat. The study sought to identify priority needs among vulnerable households, examine factors contributing to livelihood insecurity, and explore opportunities for sustainable livelihood development within the community. Consistent with Bradshaw's (1972) view that effective interventions should be based on systematically identified needs, the study focused on understanding the actual circumstances and priorities of community members before planning interventions. Aswesuma recipient households were identified through the preliminary assessment as a priority vulnerable group requiring further investigation.

Methodology

The study adopted a community-based participatory mixed-methods needs assessment to identify priority community needs and inform the design of an agriculture-based livelihood intervention. The needs assessment was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved a preliminary community assessment among 50 community members using a structured questionnaire. Additional qualitative information was gathered through field observations, home visits, informal discussions, focus group discussions, stakeholder consultations, and interactions with community members. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS, while qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Findings from the preliminary assessment were used to identify vulnerable groups within the community. Consequently, Aswesuma recipients were selected as the target group for a second-stage focused assessment. Data were collected from 50 Aswesuma recipient households through a structured

Google Form survey and qualitative inquiry methods. The assessment incorporated stakeholder consultations and community participation throughout the data collection process. Consistent with community organization principles (Ross, 1967), community members participated in identifying priority issues and potential solutions. Data triangulation was employed to enhance the validity and credibility of findings.

Results and Findings

The findings revealed substantial livelihood insecurity among Aswesuma recipient households. Approximately 96% of respondents reported that their household income was insufficient to meet daily needs, while 92% identified welfare assistance as an important source of household income. Furthermore, 75% reported that they had not attempted to improve their household income during the previous six months due to various economic and social constraints. These findings indicate a high level of economic vulnerability within the target group.

A notable finding was the coexistence of economic hardship and access to productive resources. While 92% of respondents reported ownership or access to cultivable land, effective utilization of these resources remained limited. Qualitative findings suggested that inadequate capital, health-related burdens, fear of losing welfare benefits, limited technical knowledge, and uncertainty regarding market opportunities acted as barriers to livelihood engagement. As a result, available resources were often underutilized despite their potential to contribute to household income generation.

Participatory needs prioritization further confirmed that low household income, underutilization of cultivable land, welfare dependency, and limited livelihood opportunities were the priority concerns affecting Aswesuma recipient households. The assessment also identified community strengths,

including underutilized resources, agricultural experience, and access to agricultural services. These strengths highlighted the potential for agriculture-based livelihood development initiatives within the community.

Based on the findings, community-level interventions were initiated through collaboration with agricultural authorities, local leaders, and relevant government institutions. These interventions focused on productive land utilization, promotion of tea and export crop cultivation, farmer mobilization, and strengthening linkages between vulnerable households and institutional support services.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that livelihood insecurity among Aswesuma recipient households is primarily associated with the underutilization of available livelihood resources and multiple socio-economic barriers rather than the complete absence of productive assets. The study further demonstrates that a participatory community needs assessment can effectively identify both community challenges and existing strengths, providing a practical foundation for designing locally appropriate agriculture-based livelihood interventions. The findings suggest that rural development initiatives should move beyond welfare provision by integrating agriculture-based livelihood development, community participation, and institutional collaboration to strengthen long-term household resilience and community empowerment.

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**Impact of Psychological Counseling on Rural Community
Empowerment: A Field Study Centered on "Praja Shakti"**

Beneficiaries.

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Keywords: *Rural Community Empowerment, Psychological Counseling, Praja Shakti, Livelihood Development, Capability Approach.*

Introduction

Government poverty alleviation and social empowerment programs in Sri Lanka heavily emphasize on material aid and financial subsidies; however, structural poverty, household vulnerabilities, and psycho-social distress significantly hinder beneficiaries' agency and long-term decision-making capacities. While existing literature extensively documents financial assistance models, a critical research gap remains regarding the integration of structured psychological counseling into state-led livelihood development frameworks. Grounded in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach (1999), this study asserts that true social empowerment requires enhancing individual psychological capabilities and agency, rather than merely distributing material assets. Therefore, the primary objective of this qualitative field study is to critically evaluate the psycho-social impact, coping mechanisms, and livelihood outcomes generated by structured counseling services provided to selected beneficiaries under the "Praja Shakti" project in the Nintavur Divisional Secretariat (World Bank, 2020)

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to facilitate an in-depth examination of personal transformations. Five (5) active beneficiaries under

the "Praja Shakti" project were selected using purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required participants to be registered as "Praja Shakti" beneficiaries who had received both financial livelihood support and a minimum of three structured counseling sessions, while non-recipient beneficiaries and individuals unable to give informed consent were excluded. Primary data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, direct field observations, and detailed field notes. The collected empirical data were systematically organized and analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, guided by Braun and Clarke's qualitative framework and corroborated with existing psychological empowerment literature.

Results / Findings

The thematic analysis revealed four core findings:

- **Overcoming Psychological Barriers:** Initial assessments revealed low self-esteem, chronic family pressure, and social anxieties among beneficiaries, which previously rendered them inactive in livelihood initiatives. Post-counseling interventions demonstrated marked improvements in self-efficacy and emotional resilience.
- **Enhanced Asset Utilization:** Psychological empowerment enabled beneficiaries to efficiently utilize state-allocated financial assistance and livelihood equipment, translating capital support into active income generation
- **Empowerment in Female-Headed Households:** Female beneficiaries, particularly heads of households, demonstrated enhanced independent decision-making capabilities, financial management, and active community participation
- **Sustainability of Self-Employment:** Beneficiaries receiving combined psycho-social counseling and material aid exhibited significantly higher

business continuity and lower dropout rates compared to those receiving economic aid alone.

Conclusion

This study concludes that sustainable rural community empowerment and poverty alleviation cannot be achieved solely through material distribution; rather, integrating structured psychological counseling is vital to building internal resilience, agency, and social participation among "Praja Shakti" beneficiaries. Addressing mental health vulnerabilities directly reinforces the long-term sustainability of state-funded livelihood interventions. Based on these insights, it is recommended to: (1) mandate early-stage psychological counseling in national livelihood projects; (2) deploy Training of Trainers (TOT) certified officers as specialized guidance facilitators; (3) institutionalize a TOT counseling module across Divisional Secretariats; and (4) establish an inter-institutional Collaborative Network to monitor and support "Praja Shakti" livelihood beneficiaries.

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**Prajashakthi Approach of Alim Nagar (224 B) Village for Rural
Poverty Alleviation & Livelihood Development.**

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Keywords: *Rural, Poverty eradication, Livelihood development, Alim Nagar (224B), Praja Shakthi, Approach.*

Introduction

In today's global context, poverty is a complex social and economic issue that is seen as a major obstacle to human progress. Although traditionally poverty was considered merely as a lack of income or a shortage of economic resources, recent studies describe it as a multidimensional phenomenon. That is, deprivations in areas such as education, health, food security, housing, employment, and social security are all considered part of poverty.

The Capability Approach theory put forward by (Sen, 1999) has gained significance in the study of poverty. According to this, poverty is not just an income deficit, but its fundamental cause is the limitation of human capabilities and livelihood opportunities. Based on this, the (UNDP, 2010) introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), which evaluates poverty based on various dimensions such as education, health, and living standards.

Regarding Sri Lanka's recent economic environment, poverty has emerged as a severe problem. According to the (World Bank, 2023) report, due to the economic crisis during the 2022–2023 period, many families are facing challenges such as loss of income, reduced employment opportunities, and an

increased cost of living. As a result, the poverty rate has increased. Specifically, the social and economic impacts are observed to be higher in rural areas.

Data published by the (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2020) also shows an increase in low-income families and a rise in issues related to food security and other basic needs. Under these circumstances, traditional welfare programs alone are insufficient to eradicate poverty; social empowerment and sustainable development approaches have become essential.

Social empowerment is considered a crucial tool in poverty eradication (Narayan, 2022), his study points out that social participation, the utilization of local resources and social capital play a vital role in reducing poverty. Similarly, (Chambers, 1995) emphasized on the Participatory Development approach, stating that sustainable development is possible only when people themselves identify their needs and formulate solutions.

Based on these theories, the 'Praja Shakthi' program introduced in Sri Lanka is seen as an integrated approach to poverty eradication and social empowerment. This program operates by integrating social security, livelihood development, skills development, and digital infrastructure/databasing. The (Asian Development Bank, 2023) report notes that such integrated programs are highly effective in reducing poverty.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted to examine social empowerment and livelihood development based on the 'Praja Shakthi' program in the Alim Nagar (224B) Grama Niladhari division, located within the Muthur Divisional Secretariat division of the Trincomalee District. In accordance with the research objectives, a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods was employed.

Furthermore, this research serves as both a descriptive study and a case study. Specifically, the Alim Nagar village was treated as a distinct community, and its social, economic, and livelihood conditions were examined in detail.

Findings

Due to recent economic changes in Sri Lanka, poverty levels have increased in rural areas, and issues such as low income and lack of employment opportunities are observed in the Alim Nagar Grama Niladhari division. There is a high concentration of socially vulnerable groups living here, including 134 female-headed households, 24 families with persons with disabilities, and 10 single-parent families. This acts as a factor affecting social and economic equality of life. Although livelihood opportunities such as agriculture and small-scale industries exist in the village, they face significant challenges in providing a stable income to the people. Even though the 'Praja Shakthi' program has been implemented with the aim of reducing poverty, there is a lack of clarity regarding how well it fulfills the actual needs of the people at the local level.

Conclusion

This study, focused on rural poverty eradication and livelihood development in the Alim Nagar (224B) Grama Niladhari division, clearly highlights the necessity for local-level planning amidst the current economic crisis. Poverty is not merely a lack of income but a multidimensional issue encompassing education, health, food security, and standard of living.

In the Alim Nagar village, which has been heavily affected by Sri Lanka's recent economic challenges, it has been found that the livelihood sustainability of 164 families belonging to socially vulnerable groups - particularly female-headed households and persons with disabilities—has become a major challenge. In such a context, it is imperative that the 'Praja Shakthi' program, introduced at the national level for poverty eradication, does not merely reduce

itself to a traditional welfare scheme, but operates by accurately identifying the actual needs and resources of the local community.

The data collected using the mixed-methods approach, as per the research methodology, serves as scientific evidence to convey the hidden challenges of this village—especially the voices of women and youth—to policymakers. Ultimately, a self-sufficient society with sustainable development that does not rely on external aid can be created only by integrating the traditional agriculture and small-scale business opportunities available in Alim Nagar village with skill development, and by properly utilizing local resources

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A Study on the Livelihood Development of Families Below the Poverty Line in Mellapoththa Village.

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Keywords: *Poverty Alleviation, Sustainable Livelihood Approach, Mellapoththa Village, Rural Development, Samurdhi Assistance Programmes, Aswesuma Welfare Programme, Praja Shakthi Employment Programme, Integrated Development*

Introduction

Mellapoththa Village, which is located within the Wariyapola Divisional Secretariat Division in Kurunegala District of the North Western Province of Sri Lanka, is a traditional agricultural village. Although agriculture is the primary source of income, poverty continues to persist due to small and fragmented landholdings, limited access to markets, restricted employment opportunities, low youth participation, and declining agricultural knowledge. Rural poverty has remained a long-term challenge in Sri Lanka (World Bank, 2016). According to national statistics, the poverty rate in rural areas remains higher than that in urban areas (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2023).

This study assesses the livelihood conditions of households living below the poverty line and proposes intervention strategies based on the Sustainable Livelihood Approach of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank. Although national programmes such as Samurdhi and Divinaguma were implemented initially (Fernando et al., 2020; Herath, 2023; Navirathan, 2016), comprehensive studies on their effectiveness remains

limited. Therefore, this study examines the socio-economic conditions of the village and provides useful recommendations for policymakers.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach. Primary data was collected from 30 households living below the poverty line in Mellapoththa Village using a questionnaire. Interviews were conducted using structured questionnaires, and a focus group discussion was also conducted with six key informants. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. Secondary data was obtained from reports of the Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, Samurdhi programme documents, and previous research studies. Quantitative data was analysed using an Excel spreadsheet. Triangulation was employed to ensure the reliability of the data. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality of participants, were strictly maintained.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate that poverty among households living below the poverty line in Mellapoththa Village is severe and persistent. Approximately 68% of households depend mainly on agriculture and daily wage labour for their livelihoods. The economic participation of women is only 22%, while the unemployment rate among youth is 42%. Although water resources are abundantly available around the village, its underutilisation, limited market linkages, and lack of skills were identified as major challenges. Although Samurdhi and Aswesuma assistance programmes are available to address the needs of people living below the poverty line, livelihood improvement through market-oriented approaches remains limited.

Conclusion

This study, which assessed the livelihoods of families living below the poverty line in Mellapoththa Village, confirms that poverty continues to be severe due to the underutilization of available resources, low economic participation of

women, high youth unemployment, and limited market linkages. Although national welfare programmes such as Samurdhi and Aswesuma are being implemented, their impact on poverty alleviation remains limited because they are not adequately integrated with market opportunities and skills development. Therefore, rather than relying solely on welfare assistance, it is essential to move towards an integrated livelihood approach that makes optimal use of local resources in order to achieve sustainable poverty alleviation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

Available irrigation and water resources in the village should be properly utilised by promoting home gardening and the cultivation of high-value agricultural crops. Technical and vocational training should be provided to women, whose economic participation remains low at 22%, together with opportunities for self-employment and access to small-scale credit facilities. Technical and vocational training programmes should be introduced for unemployed youth, particularly considering the 42% youth unemployment rate, to improve their employability and encourage entrepreneurship. Direct connections between local producers and markets should be strengthened to ensure that farmers receive fair prices for their agricultural products. Microfinance programmes should be integrated with appropriate market opportunities, skills development, and entrepreneurship support rather than providing credit alone. Samurdhi, Aswesuma, Praja Shakthi, and other rural development programmes should be coordinated with livelihood development, skills training, agricultural production, and market access to achieve sustainable poverty reduction.

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**Social Security and Dependency Among Elderly Plantation Workers in
Thalawakele, Nuwara Eliya District**

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Keywords: *Elderly Plantation Workers; Social Security Access; Economic Dependency; Social Dependency; Caregiver Burden; Wellbeing.*

Introduction

Elderly plantation workers in Sri Lanka represent a socially and economically marginalized population whose vulnerability is rooted in the historical development of the plantation sector and longstanding structural inequalities. Descendants of Indian Tamil laborers brought during the colonial period, plantation communities experienced prolonged exclusion from citizenship, social rights, and adequate social protection (Jayawardena & Francis, 2024). Although Sri Lanka has developed social security mechanisms such as the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), Samurdhi, and Aswesuma, significant gaps remain in coverage and adequacy (Info 2interact, 2025; Ekanayake, 2025). For elderly plantation workers, inadequate pensions, limited savings, low-paid informal employment, and declining family support may increase economic and social dependency (Perera, 2011; Asanka, 2025). These conditions can adversely affect wellbeing in later life. However, limited research has examined social security access, economic and social dependency, caregiver burden, and wellbeing together among elderly plantation workers. Therefore, this study aims to assess social security access, examine dependency and caregiver burden, and analyze their relationship with the wellbeing of elderly plantation workers in Thalawakele, Nuwara Eliya District

Methodology

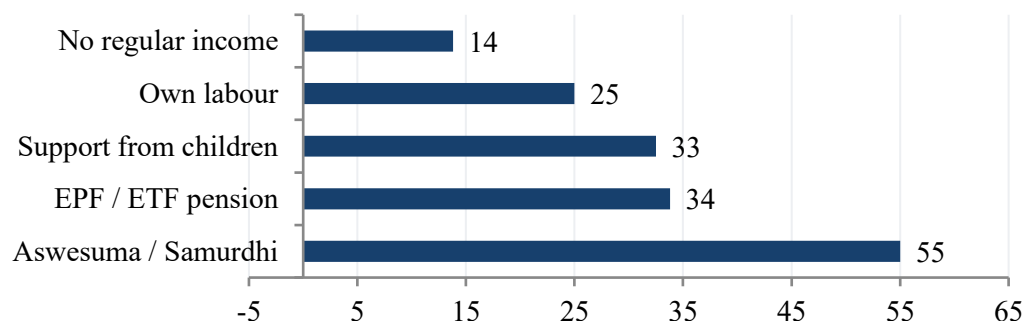
A mixed-methods, cross-sectional research design was employed to examine social security access, economic and social dependency, caregiver burden, and wellbeing among elderly plantation workers in Thalawakele, Nuwara Eliya District. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 80 purposively selected plantation workers aged 45 years and above. The questionnaire covered socio-demographic characteristics, employment history, household income, social security enrolment and benefit receipt, health status, dependency, and wellbeing.

To provide deeper insights into participants' experiences, qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with five family caregivers and one focus group discussion. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 22, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Results and Discussion

The study comprised 80 elderly plantation workers, of whom 53.8% were women and 40.0% were aged over 60 years. More than half (52.5%) were widowed, 38.8% lived with their children, and 57.5% identified as Indian Tamil. A similar proportion (57.5%) were fully retired, with an average of 26.9 years of plantation-sector employment ($SD = 9.98$) and a mean household size of four. Figure 1 indicates that most respondents were enrolled in government social protection programmes, particularly Aswesuma and Samurdhi

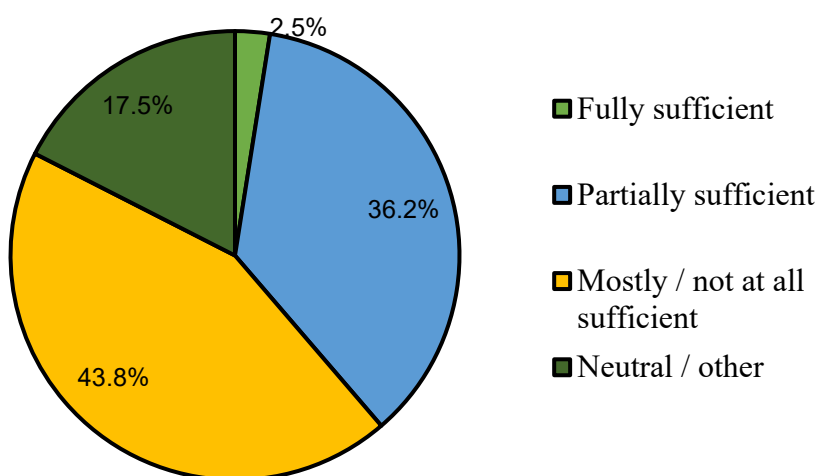
Chat: 1 Household Income Sources (multiple response)



(Source: Field Data, 2026).

Despite the relatively high level of social protection coverage, economic vulnerability remained evident. Figure 2: Perceived Sufficiency of Income for Basic Needs shows that 80.0% of respondents reported some difficulty meeting their basic needs, suggesting that access to welfare programmes does not necessarily ensure adequate economic security.

Chat 2: Perceived Sufficiency of Income for Basic Needs



(Source: Field Data, 2026).

Although 90.0% were enrolled in social security schemes, only 57.5% were receiving benefits, and only 12.5% of EPF/ETF contributors reported receiving their full entitlement. Reported barriers included limited awareness, missing documentation, travel costs, and language difficulties. This enrolment–receipt gap highlights the difference between formal coverage and effective access to social protection.

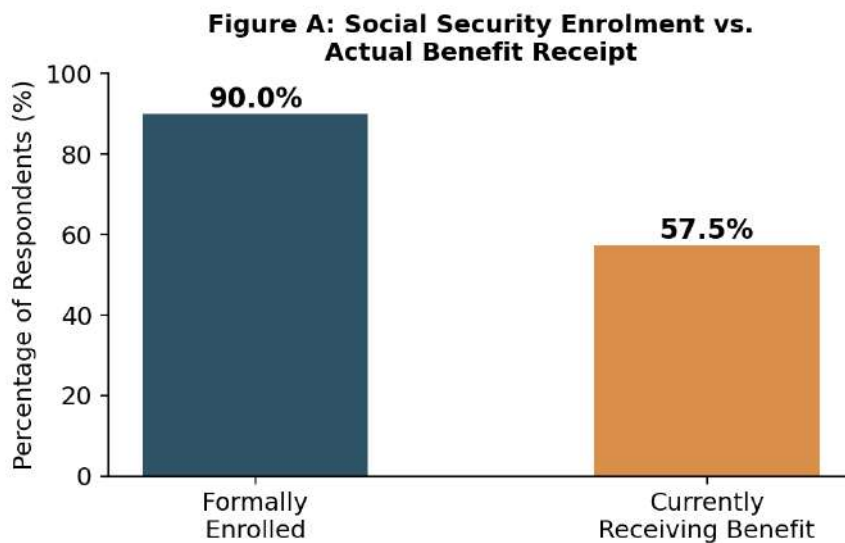
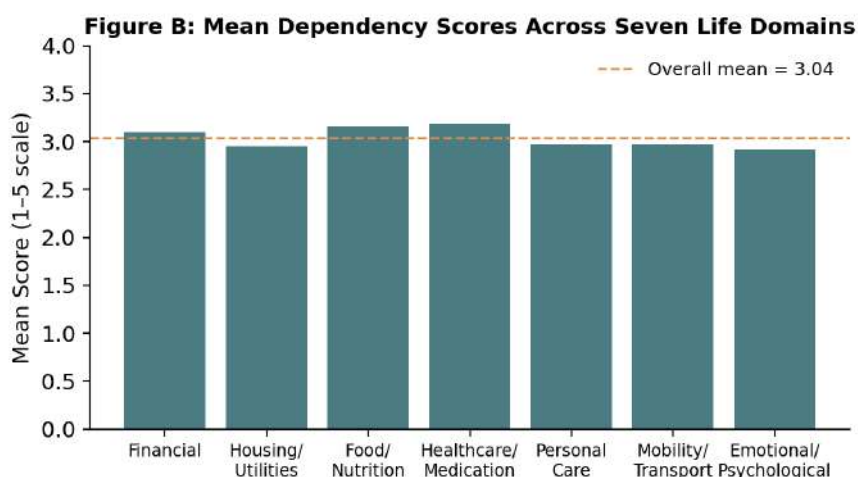


Figure A: Social Security Enrolment vs. Actual Benefit Receipt

(Source: Field Data, 2026).

Dependency was multidimensional, covering financial, health, mobility, and emotional domains (Dependency Index: $M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.49$). Half of the respondents reported financial dependence on relatives, while more than half



indicated that younger household members had moved elsewhere for employment, potentially reducing informal family support.

Figure B: Mean Dependency Scores Across Seven Life Domains

(Source: Field Data, 2026).

Benefit recipients had significantly lower dependency than non-recipients ($M = 2.94$ vs. 3.18 ; $t(78) = 2.23$, $p = .029$). Benefit receipt was also associated with education level ($\chi^2 = 12.18$, $p = .032$), but not with overall wellbeing ($t(78) = -0.07$, $p = .942$). Thus, social security benefits may reduce dependency without necessarily improving broader well being

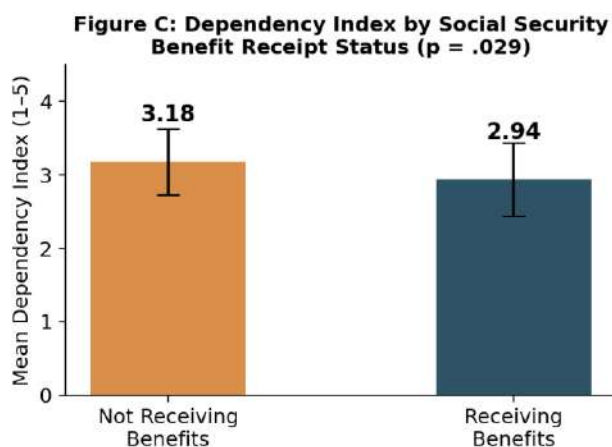


Figure C: Mean Dependency Index by Social Security Benefit Receipt Status
(Source: Field Data, 2026).

Qualitative findings reinforced these results, highlighting caregiver burden, financial strain, administrative complexity, language barriers, perceived favouritism, and emotional distress. Overall, vulnerability appears to be shaped by the interaction of economic insecurity, changing family support, and institutional barriers rather than by individual circumstances alone.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that formal social security coverage does not necessarily translate into effective protection for elderly plantation workers. The substantial enrolment–receipt gap and continued economic and multidimensional dependency indicate limitations in accessibility and adequacy. The study recommends simplified and mobile application procedures, consistent Tamil-language support, transparent eligibility criteria, and greater recognition of family caregivers through financial or respite support. Strengthening these mechanisms could promote more equitable, accessible, and responsive social protection for elderly plantation communities.

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**A Home-Based Social Entrepreneurship Model for Reducing
Multidimensional Poverty Among Single-Parent Families in Kothmale,
Sri Lanka.**

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Keywords: *Single-parent families, Multidimensional poverty, social entrepreneurship, Home-based income, Community empowerment*

Introduction

Single-parent families in rural Sri Lanka frequently experience severe multidimensional poverty. They routinely lack secure income, stable housing, adequate healthcare, and formal educational opportunities for their children. This socioeconomic vulnerability intensifies drastically when a single parent is restricted from seeking external employment due to chronic illness, physical disability, or heavy domestic caregiving responsibilities. Consequently, these isolated households suffer from acute emotional stress, social alienation, and an unsustainable reliance on limited state welfare. In the Kothmale area of the Nuwara Eliya district, this structural crisis is further compounded by localized natural disasters, such as by the Ditwa cyclone, which destroyed existing household assets and localized safety nets.

While diverse social entrepreneurship frameworks exist, including employment-based enterprises, fee for service structures, and low-income client models they fundamentally assume that participants possess physical mobility and the capacity to commute to external markets. A distinct research gap persists regarding tailored interventions for the highly vulnerable, home-bound single parents. This study addresses this gap by creating an integrated,

home-based income generation framework engineered specifically for single parents bound to the domestic sphere. The core objectives of this research are: (1) To examine the distinct structural characteristics, its underlying causes, and living perspectives of poverty stricken single-parent households in Kothmale; and

(2) To design a sustainable social entrepreneurship model that facilitates localized home-based income generation while ensuring active social integration.

Methodology

This study utilized a qualitative casework design to examine family dynamics across seven relevantly selected single-parent households in the Kothmale West Divisional Secretariat division. Primary data was collected in April 2026 through face-to-face, semi structured interviews with household heads. The purposive sample captured diverse axis of marginalization, including widowhood, spousal abandonment, child disability, and climate-induced displacement from the Ditwa cyclone. Inductive thematic analysis was employed to systematically isolate core poverty characteristics, structural root causes, experiential perspectives, and viable community-led interventions within the cohort. Although the purposive sample of seven households is limited in size, it was deliberately kept small to allow rich, in-depth exploration of individual family circumstances; this depth is appropriate for the exploratory, casework-based nature of this study, and future research would extend the sample for greater generalization.

Findings

The thematic analysis unveiled cross-cutting dimensions of deprivation is shared across all seven case studies. Crucially, none of the households owned productive capital or agricultural assets, and their financial streams were

highly irregular, derived from volatile daily wage labor or minimal welfare allowances. Daily material insecurity was pervasive, with families

consistently unable to guarantee nutritional security, basic medical care, or school supplies. Psychosocially, household heads expressed profound feelings of guilt, hopelessness, and systemic entrapment due to their physical inability to work externally while ensuring family survival.

The structural reasons for poverty clustered around intersecting vulnerabilities: sudden spousal death, abandonment due to severe substance abuse, sudden onset of critical illnesses (such as breast cancer or cardiovascular diseases), and the full-time healthcare demands of children with chronic conditions like Downs syndrome or muscular dystrophy. Furthermore, the Ditwa cyclone completely dismantled the economic foundations of two families through displacement and structural housing damage. Despite diverse paths into poverty, all seven families articulated identical structural needs: a desperate requirement for home-compatible income streams, localized childcare assistance, targeted psychosocial relief, and direct structural linkages to corporate markets and broader social protection networks.

Table 1. Summary of Seven Single-Parent Family Case Studies

Case	Family Type	Main Cause of Poverty	Key Features
1	Widow mother	Husband's death (drug poisoning)	Sold cows, part-time tea plucker
2	Father with disabled child	Child's chronic muscle disease	Full-time caregiving, no income

3	Breast-cancer survivor mother	Husband's death + mother's illness	Cannot work hard, two children
4	Cardiovascular-patient mother	Husband abandoned + mother's illness	Cardiovascular- 3 children, cannot do heavy work
5	Father with Down-syndrome child	Wife's death (vehicle accident)	Full-time caregiver, no income
6	Ditwa cyclone widow mother	Husband's death in cyclone	House damaged, 3 children
7	Ditwa cyclone widower father	Wife's death in cyclone	House severely damaged, 2 children

Source: Primary data collected by author (2026).

To resolve these interconnected needs, an integrated **Home-Based Income and Community Support Social Entrepreneurship Model** was formulated. The economic engine of this model incorporates low capital, home bound micro ventures: backyard poultry for scalable egg production, and small-scale mushroom cultivation paired with home gardening. Financial capital and foundational technical training are facilitated via an external non-governmental organization, the Pharm Foundation. Crucially, sustainable economic viability is secured through direct institutional market linkages with regional corporate buyers, specifically Crysbo Company for egg distribution and Food City Kothmale for agricultural produce. To address the social dimensions of poverty, the model embeds essential community driven support systems, establishing monthly peer led single parent support groups,

collaborative childcare circles, and dedicated care networks for families managing severe disabilities or ongoing disaster recovery.

Regarding financial sustainability, indicative income estimates drawn from partner-organisation reports suggest that a backyard poultry unit of 10-15 layer hens can generate a modest but steady weekly income through egg sales to Crysbo Company, while mushroom cultivation and home-garden produce sold through FoodCity and Kothmale provide a complementary, diversified income stream that reduces dependency on any single market. Sustainability of the model is further reinforced through phased implementation, ongoing technical monitoring by the Pharm Foundation, and monthly peer support groups that allow households to share resources, labour, and market information, thereby spreading individual-level risk and reducing long-term dependency on state welfare.

Conclusion

The seven case studies confirm that single-parent households in Kothmale face compounding structural barriers, irregular income, absent productive assets, psychosocial distress, and for two families, disaster-induced asset loss from the Ditwa cyclone, that conventional, mobility-dependent social entrepreneurship strategies cannot address. Directly responding to these findings, the proposed Home-Based Income and Community Support Model combines low-barrier home-based micro-ventures (poultry, mushroom cultivation, and home gardening) with corporate market linkages and community-based psychosocial support, targeting each dimension of deprivation identified in the case studies. By embedding local corporate supply chains and phased, monitored implementation, the model offers a practical and scalable pathway for transitioning these households away from

chronic welfare dependency and push towards a sustainable economic self-reliance, psychological resilience and a restored social dignity.

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**Multidimensional Poverty and Proposed Social Work Interventions
among Rural Female-Headed Households: A Study of Athugala Village
(272)**

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Introduction

Poverty alleviation among vulnerable and marginalized social groups is regarded as one of the foremost objectives of current rural community development policy. Within the field of social work, poverty is narrowly defined merely as a shortfall in income; rather, it is understood as a condition of multiple deprivations, including the denial of opportunities for a healthy life, education, adequate social protection, and livelihood choices (Chambers, 2006). In particular, because female-headed households in rural settings must bear economic burdens and family responsibilities alone as single parents, they constitute a vulnerable group that is highly susceptible to the severe impact of poverty (Alailima, 2018). Assessing the distinct needs of such vulnerable groups and integrating them into the social mainstream requires coordinated rural development approaches, such as the “Prajashakti” program, together with focused social work interventions.

Much of the existing literature on rural poverty in Sri Lanka examines income deprivation at a general household level but rarely combines

multidimensional poverty assessment with concrete, household-level social work intervention planning specifically for female-headed households. This study addresses that gap, generating localized, practice-oriented evidence to inform social work practice and the wider discourse on social protection and poverty alleviation policy for female-headed households across Sri Lanka.

Against this background, the primary objective of this study is to identify the multidimensional poverty situation, financial difficulties, and health problems of female-headed households in Sandhupitiya GN Athugala village (272), Welikanda Divisional Secretariat, and to propose practical social work strategies to improve their livelihoods, with findings intended to female-headed household poverty in Sri Lanka more broadly.

Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design, in which quantitative data from structured questionnaires and qualitative data from community meetings and key informant interviews were collected concurrently and integrated at the analysis stage. Quantitative responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while data from community meetings and key informants were thematically analyzed to contextualize the numerical findings. Of the 74 female-headed households identified in Athugala village, 54 were selected through convenience sampling to participate in the structured questionnaire, based on their accessibility and willingness to participate within the study's available timeframe and resources. While practical, given the study's scope, this approach does not allow findings to be statistically generalized beyond the sample; probability-based sampling is recommended in future research to strengthen representativeness

Results/Findings

The key findings show that 77.8% (n=42) of the beneficiaries studied were widows, with the remainder divorced or abandoned by their husbands; all

respondents (100%, n=54) belonged to a minority Islamic community background. Regarding education, 48.1% (n=26) had no formal schooling, and 44.4% (n=24) had received only primary education (grades 1–5); this low education level has substantially constrained their social awareness and employment capacity.

Economically, 59.3% (n=32) had no stable household income, while 68.5% (n=37) of families reported monthly income under Rs. 5,000. To cope with severe income deficiency, 75.9% (n=41) of families depended on others, and 64.8% (n=35) had become trapped in a cycle of borrowing for daily needs. Despite this acute poverty, 83.3% (n=45) of families received no current government social protection assistance such as Samurdhi or Aswesuma a gap consistent with documented national targeting and coverage shortfalls in the Aswesuma program (Amarasinghe, 2025) - and 85.2% (n=46) received no support from any non-governmental organization. Health-wise, 44.4% (n=24) were affected by chronic illnesses, and 64.8% (n=35) reported being unable to access proper healthcare due to insufficient funds (29.6%, n=16) and lack of transport (35.2%, n=19). Nonetheless, 64.8% (n=35) expressed strong interest in economic self-improvement through self-employment — particularly tailoring and small-scale food production — given proper livelihood capital guidance and vocational training.

Conclusion

The findings make clear that temporary relief measures alone are insufficient to lift Athugala village’s female-headed households out of poverty. Rather than reflecting on interventions already implemented or evaluated, the following are proposed, evidence-based recommendations arising directly from the findings: integrating households under the “Prajashakti” program as organized women’s self-help groups; providing interest-free or low-interest micro-finance to reduce reliance on local moneylenders, given the high proportion

of women trapped in debt cycles; strengthening savings habits; developing simple livelihood skills, such as tailoring and small-scale food production, matching participants' educational level and expressed interest in self-employment; and promptly securing "Aswesuma" coverage, via the Welikanda Divisional Secretariat, for the 68.5% of families currently excluded. By linking multidimensional poverty assessment to household-level social work intervention planning in a rural Sri Lankan setting, this study contributes context-specific evidence to a literature where such integrated approaches for female-headed households remain limited, and points toward a sustainable bridge between local community needs and rural development policy.

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**Empowering Vulnerable Women and Minority Inland Fishing
Communities through Community Development in Periyapalam (224A),
Muthur, Sri Lanka**

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Introduction/Background

Periyapalam (224A) Grama Niladhari Division in Muthur, Trincomalee, is a rural community where seasonal inland fishing, agriculture and informal livelihoods are affected by unstable income, limited market access, financial constraints, gendered economic participation and climate-related risks. Although participatory and empowerment-oriented community development approaches are established in social work practice, there is limited practice-based evidence documenting an integrated community-led livelihood intervention for vulnerable women and inland-fishing households in this rural context (Ife, 2016; Rothman, 2001). This study therefore examined a participatory community development intervention designed to strengthen sustainable livelihoods, women's economic participation, financial literacy, market access, climate resilience and community-based governance.

Methodology

A mixed-method community assessment and intervention evaluation was undertaken. The needs assessment surveyed 50 households using simple random sampling from the voter list and Samurdhi beneficiary list, covering both Periyapalam and Hairiya Nagar. Key informant interviews (n=11), semi-structured interviews (n=7), focus group discussions and Participatory Rural Appraisal tools were also used. FGDs involved youth/children's groups, women's groups and community members, generally with 8–12 participants per group, and were conducted in Tamil for approximately 60–90 minutes. The intervention directly targeted approximately 50 vulnerable households, giving priority to women-headed households, widows and vulnerable women, minority inland-fishing families, economically disadvantaged households, and households affected by seasonal or climate-related livelihood insecurity. Monitoring and evaluation used an agreed indicators covering household income trend, livelihood models operationalised, households trained, female participation, market linkages and functioning community structures. Baseline information was established before implementation; midline monitoring reviewed participation and activity progress; endline assessment combined indicator review with participant feedback, home visits, observation, document analysis and community participatory evaluation.

Results / Findings

The community prioritisation process identified 13 needs, with sustainable livelihood support for inland fishing communities and women's economic empowerment among the highest priorities (Bradshaw, 1972). During implementation, 50 households completed livelihood and financial-literacy training, approximately 60% female participation was achieved, two of three targeted livelihood production models were operationalized (inland fish farming and poultry-based micro-enterprise), and two initial buyer linkages

were secured. Three community-based livelihood/action groups the Youth Volunteer Group, Women's Group and Fishermen's Action Group were functioning under community and CDC oversight. Monitoring records indicated a moderate upward trend in household income, with some households reporting direct increases; however, the project period was too short to establish long-term or causal income effects. Financial-literacy activities strengthened knowledge of budgeting, savings and financial services, while climate-risk sessions increased awareness of climate-resilient livelihood practices.

Conclusion

The intervention demonstrated that a participatory, empowerment-oriented community work process can strengthen livelihood knowledge, women's participation, financial literacy, community organisation and early market-linkage opportunities among vulnerable rural households. The findings also show the importance of distinguishing project activities from measured outcomes and of allowing sufficient time for livelihood and income effects to mature. Continued monitoring by the Community Development Council and local groups is therefore necessary to assess longer-term livelihood, income and sustainability outcomes. The practical contribution of the study lies in documenting an integrated community-development approach that links livelihood empowerment, financial inclusion, climate resilience and local governance within an inland-fishing community in Eastern Sri Lanka.

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**Social Work Intervention through Social Action for the Establishment of
a Public Cemetery: A Case Study of Upparu GN Division, Kinniya,
Trincomalee, Sri Lanka**

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Introduction / Background

Equitable access to basic facilities and public services in rural and resource-constrained communities is essential for promoting social development, social justice, and human dignity. The absence of a designated public cemetery for the dignified burial of deceased persons is not merely an infrastructural deficiency; it can also create significant social, economic, and psychological challenges for affected communities.

The Upparu Grama Niladhari (GN) Division, located within the Kinniya Divisional Secretariat Division of Trincomalee District, had experienced the absence of a public cemetery as a long-standing community need. Consequently, residents were required to depend on cemeteries in neighbouring areas and seek permission for burials, creating practical difficulties and additional burdens, particularly for socio-economically disadvantaged families

During the Community Work Fieldwork Practicum of the Bachelor of Social Work programme at the National Institute of Social Development (NISD), a systematic needs assessment identified multiple community needs, which were subsequently prioritised through direct community participation. The establishment of a public cemetery emerged as the primary community priority.

This study examines the process and outcomes of a social work intervention based on Social Action undertaken to address this need. It further explores how community participation, empowerment, collective action, advocacy, and institutional coordination can contribute to addressing long-standing needs within rural communities.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the community problem, residents' experiences, and their perceived needs. A participatory needs assessment and a Social Action-based social work intervention process were integrated into the study.

Primary data were collected through home visits to 15 families from different areas of the Upparu GN Division. Key informant interviews were conducted with eight individuals, including community elders, the Grama Niladhari, and religious leaders. A focus group discussion involving 16 participants, including women and youth, was also conducted. In addition, a community meeting and direct observation were employed to obtain broader community perspectives. Secondary data were obtained through a review of the Village Development Plan and relevant government administrative documents.

Based on the collected information, identified needs were prioritised through direct community participation. Following the selection of the public cemetery as the priority need, a United Community Action Committee comprising community representatives was established. Community mobilisation, awareness raising, advocacy, documentation, and coordination with relevant government institutions were subsequently undertaken. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis. The Social Action approach and an empowerment perspective provided the theoretical and practice foundation for understanding collective participation, mobilisation, advocacy, and community capacity development.

Findings

The needs assessment identified several community concerns, including inadequate access to safe drinking water, road and transportation difficulties, and the absence of preschool, maternal and child health facilities. However, through participatory prioritisation, the absence of a public cemetery was identified as the most urgent community need.

Dependence on cemeteries outside the community created practical difficulties, financial burdens, and emotional distress for families during bereavement. These difficulties particularly affected resource-constrained households and demonstrated broader concerns relating to human dignity, social justice, and equitable access to essential community resources.

The Social Action intervention facilitated community mobilisation and the establishment of the United Community Action Committee. This shifted the issue from being perceived as an individual or household concern to a collectively recognised community need. The process strengthened community participation, collective decision-making, leadership, awareness of rights, and the capacity to engage with relevant government institutions.

Document review and institutional engagement further revealed that two acres of land had previously been allocated for a public cemetery, although the administrative process required for its release for community use had not been completed. A petition supported by community signatures and relevant documentation was submitted to the responsible authorities, followed by advocacy, institutional coordination, and follow-up actions.

Although the complete administrative process for releasing the land could not be finalized within the six-month field practicum period, the intervention strengthened the community and institutional foundation necessary to

continue pursuing the initiative and facilitated continued follow-up through the relevant local authorities.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that a Social Action-based social work intervention can provide an effective macro-level approach for addressing long-standing needs in rural communities. Participatory needs identification and prioritisation, community mobilisation, collective decision-making, advocacy, and institutional coordination contributed to community empowerment and strengthened the community's collective capacity to engage with formal administrative structures.

The Upparu experience extends beyond an initiative to establish a public cemetery. It demonstrates the potential role of professional social work in transforming an individually experienced concern into collective community action and connecting underserved communities with local governance structures. Integrating community participation, empowerment, evidence-informed advocacy, and institutional coordination therefore offers a potentially useful practice approach for participatory rural development and sustainable community-level change.

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The Distinctive Role of the Prajashakthi Movement in Preventing Domestic Violence in Sri Lanka

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Introduction / Background

Domestic violence is a complex social and public health crisis encompassing physical, psychological, sexual, and economic forms of abuse within the family system. In Sri Lanka, the persistence of patriarchal social structures and the traditional cultural norm of keeping “family matters within the family” often causes domestic violence to remain hidden within private spheres. Therefore, this crisis cannot be addressed solely through legal reforms or punitive measures; rather, a community-based and participatory development approach is essential.

The Prajashakthi Movement in Sri Lanka represents a potentially effective and sustainable model of social transformation that brings together community-based organizations, government institutions, and civil society. Its extensive grassroots presence provides a valuable institutional platform through which domestic violence can be prevented, identified, addressed, and referred to appropriate support services.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on a secondary data analysis. The analysis draws upon international literature and established frameworks, including CEDAW, the Duluth Model, and the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC), as well as Sri Lankan legal and

statistical sources, including the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act, No. 34 of 2005, and relevant studies published in BMJ Open and BMC Public Health. The study also considers the operational plans and strategic approaches of the Prajashakthi National Movement.

The collected information was thematically analyzed from a sociological perspective to assess the nature and extent of domestic violence in Sri Lanka and to examine the potential practical effectiveness of the Prajashakthi approach as a community-based mechanism for prevention and response.

Findings

Research indicates that 38.6% of pregnant women in Sri Lanka have experienced some form of domestic violence during their lifetime, while 15.9% have experienced domestic violence during pregnancy. These figures are reported to be particularly high among women in the plantation sector and marginalized rural communities (Guruge, S. et al., 2018).

However, research on barriers to seeking assistance indicates that a significant proportion of domestic violence incidents occurring within families are neither reported to law enforcement authorities nor brought to the attention of health services. Fear, shame, concerns about social stigma, economic dependence, and a lack of confidence in legal procedures are among the major factors contributing to this underreporting (Haj-Yahia, M. et al., 2022).

This situation has serious consequences for the mental health and overall well-being of survivors. A recent study published in BMJ Open (2025) reports a positive association between domestic violence and self-harm,

particularly self-poisoning, suggesting that prolonged exposure to violence and psychological distress may contribute to survivors reaching situations of severe emotional crisis.

Furthermore, research on the impact of domestic violence on children, including studies published in the Journal of Interpersonal Violence (2025), indicates that children who repeatedly witness or experience domestic violence may suffer significant adverse consequences in cognitive development, behavioral patterns, educational attainment and social skills.

These findings demonstrate that domestic violence is not merely a private family matter. It is a broader social development in, public health, child protection, gender equality, and human rights concerns that requires coordinated intervention at community, institutional, and national levels.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

By further strengthening the services and institutional mechanisms of the Prajashakthi Movement, the following policy measures are recommended to establish it as a leading community-based mechanism for preventing and responding to domestic violence in Sri Lanka:

Establishment of Specialized Domestic Violence Prevention Units:

Expansion of Economic Empowerment Programmes:

School-Level Awareness and Prevention Programmes:

Strengthening the Data Management System:

Strengthening Institutional Partnerships:

Domestic violence represents a serious and largely hidden crisis that undermines not only the stability and well-being of families but also the broader human capital and social development of Sri Lanka. Legal frameworks and judicial interventions alone are insufficient to address the multidimensional nature of this problem. Sustainable solutions must be developed through the social fabric of communities, with the active participation and empowerment of community members.

Given its grassroots institutional presence, participatory development orientation, and capacity for multi-institutional coordination, the Prajashakthi Movement has significant potential to serve as one of the most practical and effective community-based mechanisms for preventing domestic violence in Sri Lanka. By integrating prevention, early identification, survivor support, economic empowerment, awareness creation, data-driven decision-making, and institutional coordination into its existing community development framework, Prajashakthi can contribute substantially in creating safer families, empowered communities, and a more inclusive and resilient Sri Lankan society.

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**Women's Empowerment and Community Leadership in
Rural Sri Lanka: A Narrative Review of Secondary
Evidence**

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Keywords: *Women's Empowerment, Community Leadership, Rural Development, Gender Equality, Social Inclusion.*

Abstract

leadership roles in rural communities as evidenced by a secondary analysis of the Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (2016), UNDP reports, World Bank documents, assessments from the Asian Development Bank and academic literature. The research is framed by both Capabilities Approach and the Social Exclusion Framework and aims to determine how socio-economic conditions, societal gender roles, social capital, and empowerment programs affect women's participation in decision-making processes. The results show that women in rural areas continue to be denied the opportunity to be leaders for a variety of reasons, including patriarchal views, unequal access to resources, an excessive amount of unpaid domestic work, and restrictions on mobility. The study did show that women have gained leadership skills through programs such as self-help groups, microfinance, and local government gender quotas. The study concludes that while there has been some progress made, for women to be meaningfully empowered requires addressing the structural inequalities that exist and through increasing institutional support and promoting inclusive governance at the local community level, will enable women to participate substantively in rural development.

Background

Women's empowerment has become a key component of sustainable development discourse in South Asia, yet women in rural Sri Lanka continue to encounter structural, cultural, and institutional obstacles that limit their engagement in community-level leadership. Sri Lanka is the only South Asian country classified under "High Human Development" in the UNDP's 2023/2024 Human Development Report, with India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Myanmar all falling into the "Medium Human Development" category. This standing is supported in part by strong social indicators: the World Bank and UNESCO report adult female literacy at approximately 91–93%, alongside near-universal primary enrolment and low maternal mortality. This social development record makes Sri Lanka's record on women's political representation especially striking. Prior to 2016, women held approximately 1.9 - 2% of seats in local government bodies, one of the lowest rates of local political representation in the world, and a figure that had not risen meaningfully since independence in 1948 despite women gaining the right to vote in 1931. The Local Government (Amendment) Act No. 1 of 2016 and the Local Authorities Elections (Amendment) Act No. 16 of 2017 introduced a mandatory 25% quota for women, implemented at the 2018 local elections. This raised women's representation in local authorities to approximately 22.8% (Election Commission of Sri Lanka, 2018) , more than a tenfold increase, though still short of the legal target. At the national level, however, progress has been far slower: women held only about 5.3% of parliamentary seats after the 2020 general election, rising to roughly 9.7% by 2024 (Election Commission of Sri Lanka, 2024), leaving Sri Lanka behind regional neighbours such as India, Bangladesh, and Nepal on this specific measure, despite its stronger overall human development ranking. This divergence between social development, local-level gains, and persistently low national political representation sometimes described in the literature as Sri Lanka's

political "gender paradox" is the central puzzle this review engages with, since women constitute roughly 51.6–51.8% of the population (Department of Census and Statistics, 2018, 2021) but remain structurally underrepresented in the institutions that govern their communities.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this review is a combination of two frameworks. These include the Capabilities Approach which was formulated by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000). It sees empowerment not only as resource provision but as freedom to choose what affects their lives. In addition, the Social Exclusion Framework (Kabeer, 1999) helps in understanding how multiple forms of discrimination through gender, ethnicity, caste and geographical discrimination prevent rural women from leadership roles. Both these frameworks have helped in explaining why the formal legal equality that has been promised through Article 12 of the Constitution of Sri Lanka has not provided them with substantive equality in leadership positions.

Objectives

The objectives of this review are as follows:

1. Evaluation of social, economic, and cultural determinants that favor or hinder women's involvement in rural community leadership.
2. Review of government and NGO led empowerment programs that affect women's leadership outcomes.
3. Effectiveness of microfinance, self-help group activities and social capital on women's involvement in community and economic activities.

Methodology

This paper is a narrative (non-systematic) review of secondary sources; it does not follow a PRISMA-style systematic protocol, and findings should be read

as a synthesis of existing evidence rather than an exhaustive or statistically pooled analysis. Sources were identified through the Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (2016) microdata summaries, institutional publication archives (World Bank Gender Data Portal, UNDP Sri Lanka, Asian Development Bank evaluation reports, Sri Lanka Election Commission, Department of Census and Statistics), and academic databases (Google Scholar, JSTOR) searched using combinations of the terms “women,” “empowerment,” “leadership,” “rural,” “Sri Lanka,” and “local government.” The review covers sources published between 2000 and 2023, with priority given to Sri Lanka-specific evidence. Sources were included if they addressed rural women's civic, economic, or political participation in Sri Lanka and were either peer-reviewed or published by a recognised government or multilateral institution; sources without a clear methodology or publication provenance were excluded. Fourteen core sources met these criteria (listed in the References). Evidence was organised thematically structural barriers, institutional enablers, and intra-household dynamics and cross-checked against at least one other source where possible; findings for which independent corroboration could not be found are flagged as such in the text below

Secondary Data Sources and Evidence

The Sri Lanka Demographic and Health Survey (2016) indicates that women in the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces report lower participation in household financial decisions and community meetings than women in urban areas. Patriarchal household norms and a gendered division of labour mean that a large share of women's time is spent on unpaid care work, which constrains time available for civic engagement.

The Samurdhi programme, historically Sri Lanka's largest social protection scheme, supported approximately 1.8 million beneficiary households as of 2020 (a figure that should be treated as approximate, since programme rolls

have fluctuated over time and by source). It is important to note, for currency, that Samurdhi has since been substantially superseded by the means-tested Aswesuma programme introduced from 2023, which absorbed a large share of former Samurdhi beneficiaries; readers should treat Samurdhi-specific findings below as describing conditions up to that transition rather than the present-day social protection landscape. According to an Asian Development Bank (2019) evaluation, women participating in Samurdhi self-help groups (SHGs) reported higher financial literacy, improved savings behaviour, and greater confidence in public speaking, alongside higher rates of local leadership. However, the same evaluation cautions that women who rose to leadership within these groups typically already held social capital through family networks or prior education meaning SHG participation appears to reinforce existing advantage more often than it redistributes it, and should not be assumed to shift underlying social hierarchies on its own.

Key Themes Emerging from the Literature

Several overall patterns can be seen in the gathered secondary data. Firstly, different types of barriers, for instance, impediments to land ownership, mobility restrictions, inequality in the access to secondary and higher education in rural regions and biased rules of conduct are always related to the issues of leadership for women in rural areas. Secondly, although decentralization, quota arrangements, and programs aimed at increasing the capacities of NGOs lead to some positive changes, however, these changes have a limited effect in some regions, due to complicated circumstances connected to geography. Lastly, the intra-household aspect should be taken into account, as unsupported women tend to have certain opportunities for becoming leaders.

Objective	Key Secondary Sources	Key Finding
The social and cultural backgrounds, which influence women participating in the leadership role	Sri Lanka DHS (2016); Department of Census and Statistics (2021); de Silva (2018)	Domestic norms, uncompensated caregiving duties, limited mobility, and unequal property ownership inhibit the act of getting involved in community activities; the situation worsens for Tamil and Muslim females residing in the North and East of the country.
The involvement of government/NGO empowerment programs impact women's participation in leadership	ADB (2019) evaluation; UNDP Sri Lanka (2017-2022); Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2020).	Although the local authority quota introduced in 2016/2017 (25 %) boosts the numbers of women representatives, the situation is not great, as there is evidence that many elected women officials are assigned low authority jobs (e.g., social welfare) instead of getting involved in such sectors as finance and construction.
The effects of microfinance, self-help groups, and social capital contribute to women's empowerment in Sri Lanka.	ADB (2019) Samurdhi SHG evaluation; UNDP Sri Lanka (2017-2022); Bandara & Edirisuriya (2014).	Samurdhi self-help groups have a positive impact on financial literacy, savings tendencies, and public speaking skills; however, female group leaders have the advantage of already having some social capital, which limits the redistributive effect.

Significance and Policy Implications

The review helps in offering contributions to gender and governance scholarship in South Asian countries by highlighting that women's empowerment in rural Sri Lanka is not a straightforward process. The reform regarding the quota in the local government services during 2016/2017 has been meaningful being an accomplishment in numerical terms. However, it should be noted that the findings presented in the literature reviewed suggest that having women in the regulatory framework does not mean having the ability to make a decision. Previous studies (Jayaweera & Sanmugam, 2002; de Silva, 2018) reveal the information regarding the possibility for Tamil and Muslim women to face double barriers, and they refer to a governmental setting characterized by gender and ethnicity-related difficulties in the post-conflict period. The Women's Parliamentary Caucus (2020) mentions that having a 25% quota of women in local councils has led to a greater number of women elected. However, it reports that mostly women politicians take positions of lesser power in such spheres as social welfare, rather than finance or infrastructure, where significant resource allocation is carried out. UNDP Sri Lanka (2017–2022) also states that the existence of strong networks within society, for instance, temple organizations of women, leads to higher levels of interest in leadership among women as well, while physical isolation in terms of geographical location, for instance, within tea plantation communities decreases women's chances to obtain leadership positions. Policies such as ensuring women's land rights, childcare facilities, and digital access, and providing training for men could contribute to overcoming the obstacles discussed in this study.

Conclusion

There is an important moment for women's empowerment and leadership in Sri Lanka, particularly in the rural areas. While certain national gender equality criteria have improved, women are still facing many issues on this

level. The review of secondary data indicates that legal changes might face obstacles at the institutional level, and grassroots women's resilience might not fully explain the gender gap situation. While it can indicate that more primary and longitudinal research is necessary to better establish a causal relationship between the existing discrepancies in gender equality and women's behavior, the evidence collected is only based on secondary sources.

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Digital Technology Adoption among Paddy Farmers in Giribawa, Sri Lanka: Usage, Economic Benefits, and Adoption Barriers

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Key words: *Digital technology, paddy, Giribawa*

Introduction

The employment rate in agriculture in Sri Lanka is 25.8%. (Department of Census and Statistics, 2025) Several economic, social and environmental factors affected for this low percentage of job enrollment. According to Abeyaratne (2026) the contribution of young generation is significantly declining because of lack modernization in the agricultural sector.

Digital technology assists farmers to identify crops for cultivation, obtaining historical metrology information, identify prevailing resources and thereby make appropriate decisions. (Rahman, 2009) Meanwhile digital technology supports farmers for filling information gaps and brings high market prices without intermediaries through proper planning (Anoop et al., 2015), and research has identified that digital literacy can increase farmer income (Wang & Long, 2026).

Previous research has examined the use of ICT and smart farming technologies in different agricultural contexts; however, limited empirical evidence is available regarding the actual use of digital technologies, perceived economic benefits, and adoption barriers among paddy farmers in the Giribawa. Therefore, this study investigates these areas.

Although digital technology possesses the potential to enhance farmers' income and productivity, the adoption of digital technology among paddy

farmers in rural areas such as Giribawa remains minimal. Despite farmers' recognition of the significance of technology, the main research problem lies in their inability to leverage these technological benefits for direct economic gains due to infrastructure limitations, knowledge gaps, and language barriers.

Objectives

- To identify
 - the current level of digital technology adoption for agricultural activities among paddy farmers in the Giribawa.
 - the perceived economic benefits among farmers resulting from the use of digital technology in paddy farming.
 - the key barriers and challenges faced by rural paddy farmers in adopting digital technology.

Research Questions

- To what extent do paddy farmers in the Giribawa Divisional Secretariat Division utilize digital tools and services for agricultural activities?
- According to paddy farmers, what is the potential of using digital technology to reduce production costs and increase their income?
- What are the technical, infrastructural, and knowledge-related barriers hindering farmers from effectively using digital technology in paddy farming?
- **Methodology**
- This study adopted a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data (to measure adoption levels and demographics) with qualitative insights (to uncover practical field challenges).

- **Sampling:** A sample of 57 active paddy farmers was selected from the Giribawa Divisional Secretariat Division using simple random sampling.
- **Data Collection:** Primary data were gathered via a structured questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions.
- **Data Analysis:** Responses were organized in MS Excel and analyzed using descriptive statistics, primarily frequencies and percentages. For presenting data, charts are used.

Result

Sample Demographics & Access

- **Gender:** 91% male ($n=52$), 9% female ($n=5$).
- **Age & Experience:** Ages ranged from 31 to 84 years; farming experience spanned from 3 months to 50 years.
- **Device Ownership:** 63% ($n=36$) owned smartphones, 30% ($n=17$) owned feature phones, and 7% ($n=4$) owned no phone.

Digital Usage in Farm Operations

Following chart shows how those farmers use digital technology for agriculture.

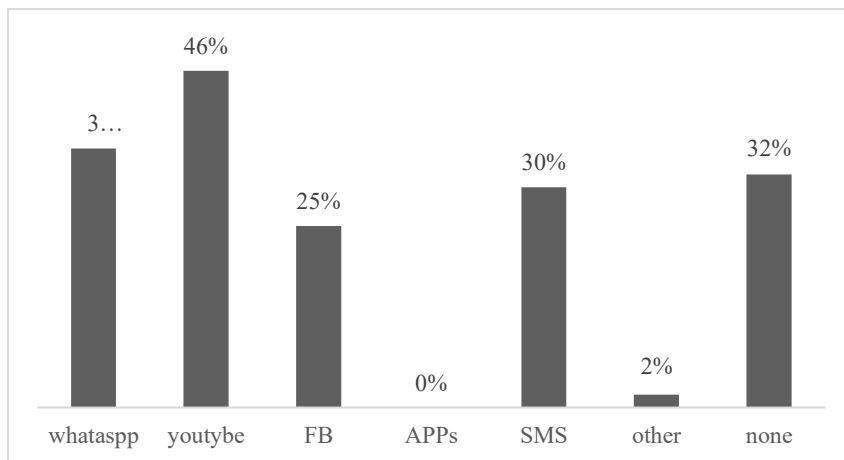


Chart 1- Usage of digital technology for agriculture

Agricultural Activity	Digital Adoption / Usage Details	Traditional / Non-Digital Methods
Disease Diagnosis	35% send leaf images to experts via mobile apps/messaging; 35% use the internet for self-research.	22% rely solely on personal experience, physical officer visits, or peer advice.
Fertilizer Guidance	47% use digital technology for obtaining advice	48% follow unverified peer advice.
Water & Seasonal Updates	19% use digital platforms exclusively; 12% use a hybrid approach.	68% rely strictly on traditional physical notices.
Subsidies & Registration	77% have successfully registered in government digital fertilizer databases.	23% remain unregistered or utilize manual paperwork.

Economic Impact & Market Connectivity

Despite high smartphone penetration, direct economic conversion remains limited:

- **Production Costs:** Only 2% reported significant cost reductions from using digital tools. 47% experienced moderate reductions, while 49% saw zero financial savings.

- **Market Access & Direct Sales:** The vast majority of farmers do not use digital platforms to secure higher crop yield prices or connect directly with buyers, remaining dependent on local middle agents.
- **Perceived Potential:** Despite low current utilization, 60% of farmers believe that digital technology could actively increase their monthly income if properly integrated.

Key Barriers to Adoption

The following chart shows about barriers for using digital technology.

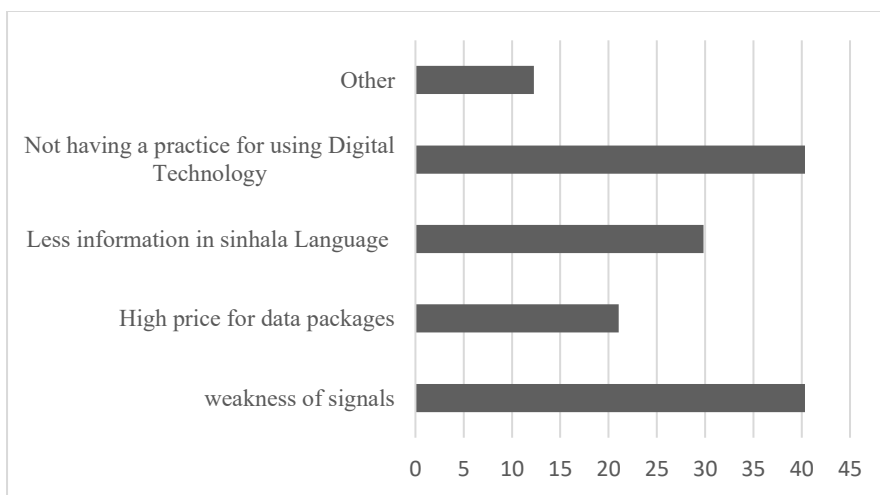


Chart 2- Barriers for using digital technology

Farmers suggestions

- Conduct IT training to gather information
- Provide technological equipment at a reasonable price
- Hold awareness program on importance of technology, weather forecasting and protect farming land from wild animals.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that smartphone ownership does not automatically translate into agricultural technology adoption. Even though most of them accept that they can increase their income by using digital technology. It is identified that weakness of signals, lack of practice and awareness for using digital technology and less information in Sinhala language as drawbacks. Therefore, it is better to hold awareness programs, promoting simple and native language mobile applications and development of infrastructure. The study contributes empirical evidence on the current level of digital technology adoption and perceived economic benefits among rural paddy farmers in Giribawa, while identifying infrastructure, language, and skills-related barriers that should be addressed to improve adoption.

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Post-Evaluation of a Government Subsidized Scheme for Dairy Cattle Acquisition and its Impact on Smallholder Dairy Livelihoods in Uva Province, Sri Lanka

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Key words: *Dairy farmers; Subsidized scheme; Dairy development; Smallholder farmers*

Introduction

Dairy farming is an important component of rural livelihoods in Sri Lanka, contributing to household income, food security, and the resilience of mixed-farming systems, while national statistics continue to show a substantial base of milk-producing farmers and annual domestic milk production exceeding 500 million liters in recent years (Wijethilaka, 2025). However, productivity in smallholder systems remains constrained by limitations in feed resources, breeding efficiency, animal management, and technical support services, especially under low-input farming conditions (Premaratne

et al., 2005). In Uva Province, where dairy farming is practiced largely by smallholder farmers, subsidy-based livestock development programs have been used to improve access to dairy cattle and enhance farm-level production and livelihoods. The study aimed to conduct a post-evaluation of a collaborative government-subsidized scheme for dairy cattle acquisition implemented in 2024, which provided up to 50% capital subsidies for livestock acquisition under the Collaborative Dairy Development Project in Uva Province, with special emphasis on assessing the effectiveness of the dairy cattle subsidy scheme on smallholder farming systems. The Collaborative Dairy Development Project was conducted under the purview of the Office of the Deputy Chief Secretary (Planning), Uva Provincial Council & Department of Animal Production and Health (DAPH), Uva Province. The specific objectives of the post-evaluation were to assess the impact of the subsidy scheme on milk production and animal productivity; evaluate changes in herd composition and reproductive performance; examine effects on household income and milk consumption; assess farmer satisfaction and perceptions, identify key constraints faced by beneficiaries; and provide recommendations for improving future dairy development interventions.

Methodology

The study was conducted as a one-time post-evaluation survey in the Badulla and Monaragala Districts of Uva Province using a structured assessment approach. Although 88 dairy farmers had benefited from the project in 2024, only 70 eligible farmers who had received subsidized dairy cattle were included in the analytical sample. Data were collected using a pre-tested, structured questionnaire designed to capture comprehensive information across six key areas: : (i) baseline farm conditions prior to receipt of project assistance, including existing herd size, production level, housing, feeding, and management practices; (ii) demographic and socio-economic

characteristics of beneficiaries and their farm enterprises; (iii) animal-related characteristics, including breed, age, physiological and health status, and source of the subsidized cattle; (iv) productive and reproductive performance indicators, such as milk yield, lactation status, calving history, conception and service information, calf growth, and herd development; (v) farmer perceptions, satisfaction, and perceived benefits and constraints associated with the subsidy programme; and (vi) changes in household-level socio-economic outcomes, including income generation, employment, milk sales, and asset development. Development Officers attached to the Uva Provincial Council administered the surveys after completing an awareness programme conducted by the investigators. Face-to-face interviews were supplemented with on-farm observations to verify selected farmer responses and document animal condition, housing facilities, feeding resources, hygiene, health-care practices, and general farm management. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and consistency before data entry. The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures in MS Excel, including frequencies, percentages, means, and ranges, where applicable. The results were interpreted to identify trends in animal productivity, reproductive performance, herd development, farmer satisfaction, and socio-economic benefits, thereby providing an evidence base for assessing project effectiveness and formulating recommendations for future dairy development interventions.

Results and Discussion

The beneficiary sample was geographically dispersed across Uva Province and represented 70 farmers who had received subsidized animals through the programme. Of the respondents, 65 were male, and 35 were female according to the recorded survey profile, indicating male dominance in dairy-related farm activities. The age distribution showed a modal class of

35– 40 years with 21 farmers, while only 18 farmers were below 35 years of age and 44 were above 45 years, suggesting weak youth participation and an ageing farmer population. Educational attainment was concentrated at the secondary level in 69% of respondents, whereas only 6% had tertiary education, and the reported Spearman rank correlation between age and education was negative and significant (Table 01), indicating lower educational attainment among older farmers. Dairy farming was the primary occupation for 78.6% of respondents, while 21.4% identified crop farming as their main occupation, and 47.1% maintained a secondary income source, indicating livelihood diversification.

Table 01: Spearman rank correlation between farmer age and educational attainment

Variables	Spearman's rho (r_s)	P-value	n
Age and educational attainment	-0.306	0.014	64

Farm resource conditions revealed important structural limitations. In terms of landholding, 51% of farmers owned 0.5–1 acre of land and 27% owned more than 1.5 acres, yet 90% allocated less than 1 acre to dairy farming and 50% used less than 0.5 acre for dairy operations. Housing systems were dominated by free grazing at 48%, while semi-intensive and intensive systems accounted for 26% each. Water access was based mainly on well water at 44% and pipe water at 21%, but 17% depended solely on river or stream water, 9% used a combination of well and river water, 3% used river and pipe water, and 6% relied on other sources. Feeding patterns were also suboptimal: 37% of

farmers collected roughage from outside the farm, 26% cultivated their own fodder, 17% combined fodder cultivation with outside collection, 14% relied entirely on free grazing, and only 6% purchased roughage. Furthermore, 63% of respondents provided concentrate feed, whereas 37% did not. These findings are consistent with evidence from Badulla district showing that forage type, concentrate supplementation, watering frequency, shed condition, and farmer management practices significantly influence milk production in Sri Lankan dairy farms.

The breed composition of the distributed animals was heavily skewed towards Jersey cattle at 69%, followed by crossbreds at 20%, Friesians at 8%, and Sahiwal at 3%. At the time of subsidy distribution, 35% of animals were heifers and 13% were calves, meaning that 48% of

the distributed stock was pre-productive, while only 24% were milking cows, 18% were pregnant cows, 7% were non-pregnant cows, and 3% were dry cows. Mortality was low, with only 3 deaths recorded in the subsidized animal sample. After receiving the animals, 70% of farmers made some infrastructure investment, including new shed construction by 37%, shed extension by 19%, and feeding equipment acquisition by 14%, whereas 30% made no post-distribution infrastructure improvement.

At the time of evaluation, 53.1% of animals were lactating, 23.4% were pregnant, 6.3% were dry, and 17.2% were open, indicating that most animals had entered productive or near-productive stages. Average daily milk yield per cow was reported as 6–10 L by 46.3% of respondents, 0–5 L by 40.7%, 11–15 L by 11.1%, and 16–20 L by 1.85%, showing that high-yielding cows were relatively rare in the sample. Peak daily milk yield showed a similar pattern, with 54.7% of cows in the 6–10 L category, 28.3% in the 0–5 L category,

11.3% in the 11–15 L category, and 5.7% in the 16–20 L category. Lactation length was reported between 8 and 10 months in 86% of cows, while 8% had shorter lactations and 6% had lactations exceeding 10 months. Reproductive performance remained a major limitation, because 84% of cows had calving intervals above 16 months and only 16% fell within the 14–16-month category, with no cows recorded in the optimal 12–14-month range. Age at first calving was also delayed, with only 21% calving within 24–30 months, whereas 52% calved at 31–37 months and 27% at 38–44 months. Most farmers reported only one calf born since receiving the project animals, while some reported two calves and others reported zero calving, stillbirths, or postnatal calf losses. These trends suggest that the biological response to the subsidy programme was positive but constrained by suboptimal reproduction and management, which aligns with Sri Lankan dairy-sector evidence showing that low milk output is often associated with feeding limitations, poor breeding efficiency, and inadequate service support.

Despite these constraints, several positive outcomes were recorded. Body condition improved in 61% of animals and was maintained in a further 37%, while only 2% of respondents reported a decline in body condition. Farmer satisfaction with the subsidy programme was high, with 43.8% reporting they were highly satisfied, 45.2% satisfied, and 9.6% neutral. The project also contributed to improved household income, increased milk consumption, and stronger livelihood resilience according to beneficiary responses, and many respondents had received training on cattle management, forage, feeding, and animal health. These findings support the view that dairy development interventions can contribute meaningfully to rural household livelihoods, but that gains in productivity depend on how well improved animals are matched with feed, housing, breeding support, and follow-up

extension services. The findings of this survey align with an independent study done by Kumari et al. (2019) in Badulla District.

Conclusions

The government subsidized scheme for dairy cattle acquisition contributed positively to smallholder dairy development in Uva Province by improving herd establishment, stimulating some farm-level infrastructure investment, enhancing body condition, and generating favorable farmer perceptions and livelihood benefits. However, the concentration of milk yield in the low-to-moderate range, the high proportion of cows with calving intervals above 16 months, delayed age at first calving, limited dairy land allocation, and continued dependence on low-input feeding and grazing systems show that subsidized scheme for dairy cattle acquisition alone is insufficient to maximize production gains. It is recommended that future dairy development programmes integrate livestock subsidies with strengthened beneficiary targeting, fodder development, concentrate feed access, reproductive management, housing improvement, water provisioning, and sustained extension support to ensure more sustainable enhancements in smallholder productivity and livelihoods.

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Micro-credentials as a Capacity-Building Tool for Rural Entrepreneurship Development

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Keywords: *micro-credentials, rural entrepreneurship, SME development, TVET, capacity building, recognition of prior learning, Sri Lanka, lifelong learning.*

Introduction/Background

Rural entrepreneurship is central to inclusive economic development in Sri Lanka, particularly in communities where livelihoods depend on agriculture, food processing, craft production, tourism, retail trade and informal micro-enterprises. Yet many rural entrepreneurs have limited access to structured training and recognized qualifications. Their skills are often gained through experience, family enterprise, apprenticeship and community practice, but such learning is rarely documented in a form accepted by training institutions, employers, customers or lenders. Micro-credentials provide a flexible response to this gap. They are short, focused records of assessed learning that certify specific knowledge, skills or competencies (Oliver, 2022). The Council of the European Union (2022) similarly identifies micro-credentials as a means of documenting learning outcomes gained through small volumes of learning. For rural entrepreneurs, this model is valuable because training can

be delivered in short, practical units while learners continue their businesses. When aligned with technical and vocational education and training (TVET), competency standards and quality assurance, micro-credentials can support lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and progression into formal qualifications. Accordingly, this study examines how competency-based, quality-assured and stackable micro-credentials could strengthen rural entrepreneurship capacity within Sri Lanka's skills development system.

Methodology

This extended abstract employs a desk-based synthesis because its purpose is to develop a policy-oriented framework rather than report primary empirical findings. This approach was appropriate for integrating international evidence, Sri Lankan policy documents and TVET frameworks to identify transferable principles and implementation requirements for rural entrepreneurship. Relevant documents were examined thematically under definitions, TVET alignment, curriculum and assessment, blended delivery, quality assurance, stack ability, employer engagement and policy requirements. The analysis was strengthened using accessible international sources from UNESCO, the Council of the European Union, the OECD, ILO and UNICEF, and Sri Lanka's National Vocational Qualifications Framework, was compared to identify areas of convergence, policy gaps and feasible implementation options. Although the study does not present primary data, it provides an evidence-informed foundation for subsequent pilot testing and empirical evaluation in rural settings.

Results/Findings

The synthesis indicates that micro-credentials can support rural entrepreneurship in four main ways. First, they can provide targeted upskilling in areas directly linked to enterprise survival and growth, such as bookkeeping, product costing, digital marketing, online selling, customer management,

packaging, occupational safety and sustainable production. This reflects wider evidence that micro-credentials can support labor-market participation and flexible skills development, although their impact depends on recognition and trust (OECD, 2023). Second, micro-credentials can validate experiential learning. Many rural entrepreneurs already demonstrate competence through everyday business practice but lack recognized evidence. A recognition of prior learning approach using portfolios, demonstrations, production records, work-based projects or practical assessment would allow existing skills to be formally certified.

Third, micro-credentials can widen access through blended and low-technology delivery. The source document highlights how online, blended and decentralized approaches can reduce distance barriers for rural learners. This is important in Sri Lanka, where a fully campus-based approach may exclude entrepreneurs who cannot leave work, family or local responsibilities for long periods. Short face-to-face workshops supported by mobile learning, community-based mentoring and simple digital platforms would be more realistic. Fourth, micro-credentials become more valuable when they are stackable. Separate units in digital literacy, financial literacy, marketing, and business planning could accumulate towards certificates, continuing professional development (CPD) records, or higher-level TVET qualifications.

The findings also show that quality assurance is the key condition for credibility. If short courses remain unregulated, their value will be weak. Each micro-credential should state its learning outcomes, level, workload or credit value, assessment method, issuing body and relationship to occupational standards. Assessment should verify performance rather than mere attendance. Sri Lanka already has a competency-based TVET structure, and the National Vocational Qualifications Framework is implemented under TVEC as the

regulatory body for TVET, with emphasis on national standards, assessment and certification (TVEC, 2021). Therefore, micro-credentials should be linked to existing competency standards and not treated as isolated certificates. The ILO and UNICEF (2025) also emphasize that micro-credentials can improve skills signaling for youth and workers when they are relevant, trusted and connected to employment pathways.

Conclusion

Micro-credentials can serve as practical capacity-building tool for rural entrepreneurship development in Sri Lanka if they are designed as credible, competency-based and stackable learning achievements. Their main contribution lies in their ability to connect informal earning and work experience with formal recognition while providing flexible access to specific business and technical skills. However, this potential cannot be realized through short courses alone. Sri Lanka requires a clear national framework, quality-assured providers, recognized assessment mechanism, credit transfer arrangements, employer engagement and accessible blended delivery. Pilot programs in agribusiness, food processing, rural tourism, digital enterprise and small technical services would allow the model to be tested and evaluated before wider adoption. When implemented effectively, micro-credentials can strengthen rural SMEs, improve confidence, support lifelong learning and contribute to inclusive local economic development.

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Globalization and Opportunity-Driven Entrepreneurship: Implications for Sri Lanka from High- and Middle-Income Countries

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Middle-Income Countries; Entrepreneurial Development*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is a primary driver for economic growth, innovation, and employment in both developed and developing nations. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2 distinct types of entrepreneurship are identified: opportunity-driven entrepreneurship (ODE) and necessity-driven entrepreneurship (NDE). The distinction is mainly based on the motive to become an entrepreneur. Opportunity-driven entrepreneurs voluntarily establish ventures to exploit perceived business opportunities, motivated by factors such as achievement, independence, innovation, and growth prospects. In contrast, necessity-driven entrepreneurs are often pushed into entrepreneurship by limited employment opportunities or economic insecurity (Zwan et al., 2016). Previous studies indicate that ODE has important implications for sustainable economic development because it has greater potential to promote innovation, productivity, and employment (Acs et al., 2011; Block et al., 2014).

This distinction matters in the Sri Lankan context, where entrepreneurship and enterprise development can strengthen livelihoods, generate employment, diversify local economies, and improve rural communities' resilience. As Sri Lanka becomes increasingly integrated into the global economy, entrepreneurs face both new opportunities and emerging challenges. Globalization involves increasing economic, political, and social interaction and interdependence among countries (Guillén, 2001). Although it can expand entrepreneurial opportunities, its benefits may not be distributed equally across countries at different stages of economic development.

Against this background, this study examines the effect of globalization on ODE in high- and middle-income countries, with particular reference to Sri Lanka. Strengthening opportunity-driven entrepreneurship in Sri Lanka could contribute to inclusive economic development by facilitating a transition from livelihood-oriented and necessity-based entrepreneurial activities towards more innovative, sustainable, and growth-oriented enterprises.

Methodology

The study employs panel data covering 64 countries from 2004 to 2018, classified according to World Bank income categories. The initial sample comprises 38 high-income and 26 middle-income countries.

ODE is the dependent variable, drawn from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor database. The principal independent variable is a composite globalization index incorporating economic, political, and social dimensions. Gross enrolment in tertiary education and research and development (R&D) expenditure as a percentage of GDP are included as control variables.

A panel-data framework is employed to utilize both cross-country and time-series variation. Robust Least Squares (RLS) is used as the principal estimation method, while Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) estimates are used as

a robustness check. Separate models are estimated for high-income (HI) and middle-income (MI) countries to identify differences by economic development level.

Results and Findings

The results show a statistically significant negative association between globalization and ODE across both income groups. Under the principal RLS specification, the globalization coefficient is -0.0829 for high-income countries and -0.1467 for middle-income countries. The negative relationship is therefore considerably stronger in middle-income countries.

The results further indicate that R&D expenditure has a positive and statistically significant coefficient in the RLS model for middle-income countries, underscoring the importance of domestic innovation capacity in strengthening entrepreneurial development.

Conclusion

Empirical findings on globalization show a negative and significant impact in both HI and MI country groups. However, this negative impact is stronger in MI countries than in HI countries.

The findings suggest that greater integration into the global economy does not necessarily lead to higher levels of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. While globalization expands access to markets, technologies, information, and international networks, it simultaneously intensifies competition. Domestic start-ups and smaller enterprises may therefore struggle to capture emerging opportunities when competing with established global firms (Patel & Rietveld, 2021).

The stronger negative globalization coefficient observed for middle-income countries has important implications for Sri Lanka. The findings suggest that integration with global markets should be paired with deliberate domestic

measures that strengthen entrepreneurs' capacity to identify, develop, and sustain competitive opportunities.

For Sri Lanka, this is particularly relevant to rural and regional enterprise development. Globalization can create opportunities for value-added agriculture, tourism, fisheries, digital services, creative industries, and small and medium enterprises. However, access to international markets alone may be insufficient where entrepreneurs face constraints in technology, finance, business knowledge, innovation, product standards, digital capability, and market information.

Accordingly, entrepreneurship policy should move beyond simply encouraging business formation. Greater emphasis is needed on opportunity recognition, innovation, technology adoption, value addition, market intelligence, entrepreneurial education, R&D linkages, and access to domestic and international value chains. Strengthening these capabilities could enable Sri Lankan entrepreneurs to turn globalization from a competitive pressure into an opportunity for enterprise growth.

Particular attention should be given to rural entrepreneurs and SMEs to ensure that greater global integration expands economic opportunities rather than deepening existing competitive disadvantages. For Sri Lanka, the central challenge is therefore not merely to participate more extensively in the global economy, but to strengthen entrepreneurs' capabilities to compete, innovate, and capture the opportunities it creates. Promoting opportunity-driven entrepreneurship can help shift from necessity-based and subsistence-oriented activities to productive, innovative, value-adding, and growth-oriented enterprises. This transition is essential to translate globalization into more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable local economic development.

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Community-Based Tourism as a Strategic Approach in Rural Development: A Case Study of Hanguranketha, Sri Lanka

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Keywords: *Community-Based Tourism, Agro-Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Rural Livelihoods, Rural Development.*

Introduction

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has gained growing recognition as a sustainable approach to rural development by creating opportunities for livelihood diversification, local entrepreneurship, and community empowerment. Unlike conventional tourism models that are often controlled by external investors, CBT emphasizes local participation and equitable distribution of tourism benefits. As a result, tourism can contribute not only to economic growth but also to cultural preservation, environmental conservation, and social development (UNWTO, 2021).

Community-based tourism (CBT) in Sri Lanka is steadily expanding beyond niche eco-villages into regional post-conflict and rural recovery strategies. While early initiatives were isolated, modern frameworks utilize CBT to foster socio-economic stability, preserve cultural heritage, and facilitate post-war reconciliation in regional areas like Jaffna, though infrastructure limitations and inconsistent governance remain challenges (Jeyarajan, 2024).

Hanguranketha Divisional Secretariat Division in the Nuwara Eliya District possesses considerable potential for community-based tourism development. The division covers approximately 231 km² and consists of 79 Grama

Niladhari Divisions. It hosts a population of about 64,797 people living in 21,411 families, including 2,451 female-headed households (Hanguranketha Divisional Secretariat, 2025). While agriculture remains the staple livelihood activity, the area contains a unique combination of cultural heritage sites, agricultural landscapes, biodiversity-rich ecosystems, waterfalls, reservoirs, mountain environments, and wellness-related attractions. Despite these resources, tourism remains underdeveloped, and its contribution to local livelihoods is relatively limited. This study therefore examines the potential of community-based tourism as a strategy for enhancing local livelihoods in Hanguranketha.

Literature Review

Community-Based Tourism is widely recognized as a mechanism for promoting inclusive rural development. Previous studies indicate that tourism can generate employment, strengthen entrepreneurship, improve infrastructure, and create alternative income opportunities for rural communities (Scheyvens, 1999). The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework further explains how tourism can strengthen financial, social, natural, physical, and human capital, thereby improving livelihood resilience and reducing dependence on a single economic activity (DFID, 1999).

Research on agro-tourism, eco-tourism, and cultural tourism demonstrates that tourism can generate economic value from existing local resources while encouraging environmental and cultural conservation (Barbieri, 2013; Richards, 2018). These perspectives provide a useful foundation for assessing tourism development opportunities within Hanguranketha.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods case study approach. Primary data were collected through a household survey involving 100 households, 6 Focus Group Discussions, and 12 Key Informant Interviews with government

officials including, Sri Lanka Tourism Development Board and Provincial Tourism Department, tourism operators, entrepreneurs, and community representatives. Secondary information was obtained from the Resource Profile and Socio-Economic Profile of the Hanguranketha Divisional Secretariat Division, tourism reports, and institutional records.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to summarize baseline demographic and behavioral distributions (Field, 2018), while qualitative information was examined using reflexive thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns of meaning within the context (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a comprehensive understanding of tourism resources, livelihood opportunities, community participation, and development challenges.

Analysis and Findings

Agriculture remains the backbone of local livelihoods and offers significant opportunities for agro-tourism development. Land-use analysis shows that 23.28% of land is utilized for paddy cultivation, while highland cultivation and garden lands account for 23.44%. Home gardens and mixed cultivation systems represent an additional 20.73% of total land use. Tea plantations occupy 8.73% of land, while vegetable cultivation and mixed farming account for 14.19% (Hanguranketha Divisional Secretariat, 2025). These figures indicate that more than two-thirds of the land area is directly associated with agricultural production. Such a landscape creates opportunities for farm visits, tea tourism, traditional food experiences, harvesting activities, and demonstrations of indigenous farming practices. Rather than replacing agriculture, tourism can add value to existing farming systems and create supplementary income opportunities for rural households.

The area also possesses strong ecological resources that support eco-tourism development. Forest lands account for approximately 3.34% of total land use, while water bodies contribute 1.52% (Forest Conservation Department, 2025). Forest ecosystems, waterfalls, reservoirs, and mountain environments provide opportunities for trekking, birdwatching, nature photography, environmental education, and conservation-based tourism activities. These resources not only attract visitors but also encourage the sustainable management of natural assets.

Cultural tourism represents another important opportunity. Historical temples, religious sites, traditional performances, folklore resources, and the annual Hanguranketha Perahera contribute significantly to the destination's cultural identity. Stakeholders identified the Perahera as one of the most important tourism events in the area because it attracts visitors and stimulates expenditure on accommodation, food services, transportation, and retail activities. However, a considerable proportion of tourism-generated income flows out of the destination through external vendors and service providers, limiting the economic benefits retained by the local community.

The study also examines the structure of local businesses and tourism entrepreneurship. The division contains approximately 1,818 licensed businesses, of which an estimated 1,100–1,200 are small enterprises. Around 150–180 businesses are directly or indirectly linked to tourism activities. However, only 60–70 tourism-related enterprises possess registered business names (Hanguranketha Divisional Secretariat, 2025). This finding suggests that tourism entrepreneurship exists but remains largely informal. As a result, many tourism enterprises face difficulties in accessing finance, training opportunities, and institutional support necessary for business growth.

Community participation in tourism remains relatively low. Survey findings revealed that only 20% of households were directly involved in tourism-related activities, while 80% had no active participation in the sector. Tourism currently contributes approximately 5% of household income among participating households. Although this contribution is modest, respondents recognized tourism as an important supplementary income source, particularly during periods of agricultural uncertainty and fluctuating market conditions.

The findings reveal that Hanguranketha possesses a diverse tourism resource base capable of supporting cultural tourism, agro-tourism, eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and wellness tourism. This diversity provides opportunities for community participation across multiple sectors of the local economy.

The findings further indicate that tourism provides meaningful opportunities for women and youth. Homestays, food processing, handicraft production, cultural performances, guiding services, and small-scale tourism enterprises were identified as potential livelihood activities. Given the presence of 2,451 female-headed households in the division, community-based tourism has the potential to contribute to women's economic empowerment and enhance household income generation.

Overall, the analysis suggests that tourism's greatest contribution lies in livelihood diversification. The integration of tourism with agriculture, culture, environmental resources, and local enterprises can strengthen economic resilience while creating multiple income streams for rural communities. However, realizing this potential requires stronger community participation, improved tourism entrepreneurship, and greater retention of tourism-generated income within the destination.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study demonstrates that Hanguranketha possesses substantial potential for community-based tourism development due to its rich combination of cultural heritage, agricultural landscapes, biodiversity resources, and natural attractions. Although tourism currently contributes only a limited share of household income, it offers significant opportunities for entrepreneurship development, employment generation, and livelihood diversification.

To maximize these benefits, greater emphasis should be placed on strengthening tourism entrepreneurship, formalizing tourism-related enterprises, and improving access to training and financial support. Special attention should be given to women and youth through targeted capacity-building programs and enterprise development initiatives. Strengthening destination branding, enhancing digital marketing, and improving infrastructure are also essential for increasing visitor numbers and enhancing the competitiveness of the destination.

In addition, stronger linkages should be developed between tourism enterprises and local agricultural producers to promote agro-tourism and increase local economic retention. Sustainable management of cultural and environmental resources must remain central to planning tourism to ensure that tourism development contributes to both community well-being and long-term destination sustainability.

Community-based tourism therefore represents a practical and sustainable strategy for enhancing local livelihoods in Hanguranketha while preserving its unique cultural identity and environmental heritage.

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Pattern of Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Expenditure among Older Adults from Low-Income Households in Vadamarachchi North, Sri Lanka

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Keywords: *Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure; Older adults; Catastrophic health expenditure; Low-income households; Non communicable diseases.*

Introduction

Sri Lanka is experiencing rapid population ageing as a consequence of sustained declines in fertility, increasing life expectancy and broader societal and structural transformations. With fertility falling below replacement level and mortality remaining relatively low, Sri Lanka has emerged as one of Asia's rapidly ageing societies. This demographic transition has important social and economic consequences, particularly for older adults who may experience intersecting physical, psychological, social and financial vulnerabilities. Healthcare needs generally increase with age, while limited income and dependence on household or family resources may constrain older adults' ability to meet healthcare-related costs. Although Sri Lanka provides extensive publicly funded healthcare, households continue to incur out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure (OOPHE) for medicines, diagnostics, private services and transportation (Gamage et al., 2024). Andersen's (1995) Behavioral Model further highlights how healthcare utilization is shaped by predisposing, enabling and need factors. However, empirical evidence concerning OOPHE among economically disadvantaged older adults in Sri Lanka remains limited. Therefore, this descriptive study examines the pattern of OOPHE among older adults from low-income households in

Vadamarachchi North, contributing to understanding healthcare-related financial vulnerability within an ageing population.

Methodology

This study adopted a critical realist ontological position and drew on positivist and interpretivist epistemological perspectives. A mixed-method approach with a cross-sectional survey design was employed in Vadamarachchi North, a predominantly rural/suburban area with low-income households. Following a sequential approach, quantitative data were collected using a structured questionnaire from 45 older adults aged 60 years and above, followed by semi-structured interviews to explore their experiences of healthcare utilization, out-of-pocket expenditure, financial constraints, and household support.

Results and Discussion

The findings indicate that out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure (OOPHE) among older adults in low-income households is influenced by multiple factors, including health needs, economic resources, family support, and accessibility to healthcare services. Among the 45 respondents, 66.7% were female and 33.3% were male, highlighting the relevance of gender, economic dependency, and caregiving arrangements in understanding healthcare experiences and expenditure patterns in later life.

The average monthly OOPHE was Rs. 2,737.78, while the median was Rs. 1,500 and the mode was only Rs. 200. Expenditure ranged from Rs. 200 to Rs. 10,000, with a standard deviation of Rs. 2,741.54. The substantial difference between the mean and mode suggests a positively skewed distribution in which most older adults experience relatively low routine expenditure, while a smaller group incurs substantially higher costs. Importantly, 40% of households experienced catastrophic OOPHE, suggesting that healthcare-related financial vulnerability is concentrated among a significant minority

rather than being uniformly distributed across households. These findings indicate that financial burden may be generated particularly by episodic or unexpected healthcare needs rather than by routine expenditure alone.

Despite Sri Lanka's extensive publicly funded healthcare system, healthcare-seeking behaviour was not exclusively confined to public facilities.

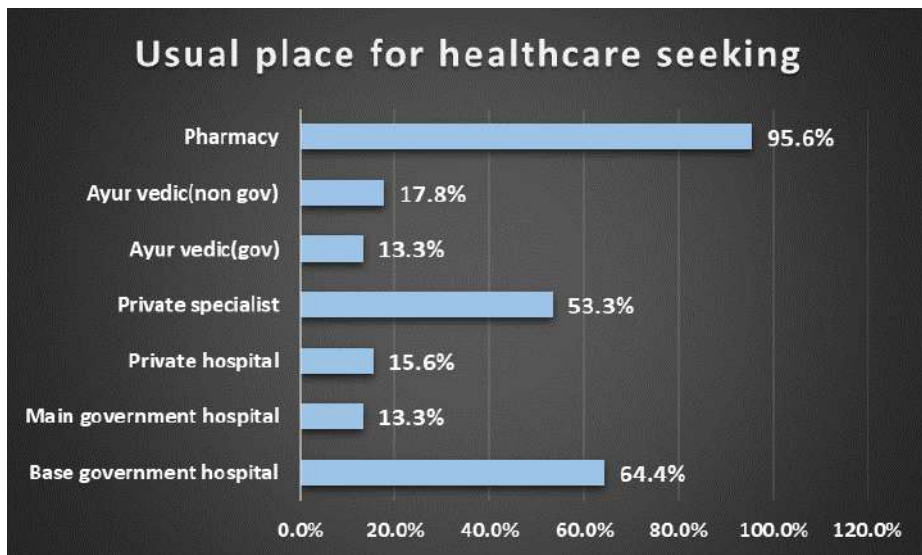


Chart 1: Health seeking behavior

(Source: Field data, 2026).

Chart 1 shows that pharmacies or small medicine stalls were the most commonly used healthcare source (95.6%), followed by base government hospitals (64.4%) and private specialists (53.3%). Qualitative findings showed that public hospitals remained the main providers, while private services were mainly used during emergencies due to mobility limitations, perceived quality, provider rapport, and specialist care. Transportation was also an important indirect component of OOPHE.

Family support was significant, with 71.1% receiving financial support from children and 40.0% relying on social welfare. Only one participant had health

insurance. While 53.3% did not perceive family support as a burden, 46.7% experienced some level of burden, with qualitative findings highlighting dependency, shame, and concerns about burdening children.

Overall, the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate that OOPHE among low-income older adults is shaped by the interaction of healthcare need, limited household resources, family-based informal support and structural accessibility of services. The findings are consistent with Andersen's (1995) model, particularly the importance of enabling resources and healthcare needs in shaping healthcare utilization. The findings also suggest that Sri Lanka's publicly funded healthcare system substantially supports routine healthcare access but does not completely protect economically vulnerable older households from financial shocks, particularly those associated with emergencies, specialist care, medicines and transportation.

Conclusion

This study finds that low-income families in rural settings rely on public healthcare; however, this does not eliminate the use of private healthcare, and OOPHE is mainly driven by unpredictable health shocks and indirect transportation costs rather than routine care, while social welfare is perceived as inadequate and health insurance is rarely used. As a collectivist society, families provide considerable care and support to their older adults; however, for vulnerable older adults, government intervention is needed to target families in need, provide health insurance regardless of age, and increase welfare support based on vulnerability..... This study finds that low-income families in rural settings primarily rely on public healthcare services; however, this reliance does not eliminate the use of private healthcare. Out-of-pocket healthcare expenditure (OOPHE) is driven mainly by unpredictable health shocks and indirect costs, specially expenses incurred on transportation, rather than by routine healthcare needs. Social welfare support is perceived as

inadequate, while health insurance remains rarely utilized. In this collectivist social context, families play a significant role in providing care and financial support to older adults. However, vulnerable older adults require greater government intervention, including targeted support for families in need, age-inclusive health insurance coverage, and welfare assistance based on levels of vulnerability.

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**Financial Literacy and Fraud Victimization Among Older Adults: A
Study of Warakapola Divisional Secretariat Division, Sri Lanka.**

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Keywords: *Financial literacy, digital financial literacy, elderly people, financial fraud, fraud victimization, financial vulnerability.*

Introduction

Population ageing is a significant demographic transformation worldwide. The United Nations projects that the global population aged 60 years and above will reach approximately 1.4 billion by 2030. Sri Lanka is experiencing an equally significant demographic transition, with the proportion of older adults increasing from 6.6% in 1981 to approximately 18% in 2024 (Department of Census and Statistics [DCS], 2024). This rapid ageing occurs alongside an increasingly digitalized financial environment, creating new challenges for older adults. Financial literacy, encompassing financial knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours that support appropriate financial decision-making, is increasingly important for maintaining financial security and independence (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). Evidence from Sri Lanka indicates comparatively lower levels of financial and digital literacy among older populations (Central Bank of Sri Lanka [CBSL], 2021). The rapid digitalization of banking and financial services may therefore expose older adults to new forms of financial vulnerability. Limited digital financial literacy, low technological confidence, social isolation, declining cognitive abilities and high interpersonal trust may increase susceptibility to financial fraud. International evidence has also demonstrated associations between financial literacy, risk preferences and fraud victimization among middle-aged and

older adults (Yu et al., 2023). However, empirical research examining the relationship between financial literacy and fraud victimization among older adults, particularly in rural and semi-urban Sri Lankan settings, remains limited. This study therefore examines financial literacy practices, digital financial capabilities and vulnerability to financial fraud among older adults in the Warakapola Divisional Secretariat Division.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method research approach. A combination of purposive and random sampling techniques was used to select 65 older adults from Dadigama (n=35) and Nangalla (n=30) GN divisions. Quantitative data were collected through an interviewer-administered survey questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel. The questionnaire examined financial knowledge, saving and spending practices, money management, digital financial literacy, technology use, financial transactions and experiences of fraud victimization. To complement the quantitative findings, five semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences of financial literacy, digital technology use, fraud exposure, responses to fraud, coping strategies and sources of support. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation, were maintained throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

The 60+ population in the study area is predominantly female (15,077 females; 11,444 males). Similarly, 50 of the 65 participants were female. Most participants had secondary-level education, while 45% relied on government assistance. These characteristics are presented in Graphs 1 and 2.

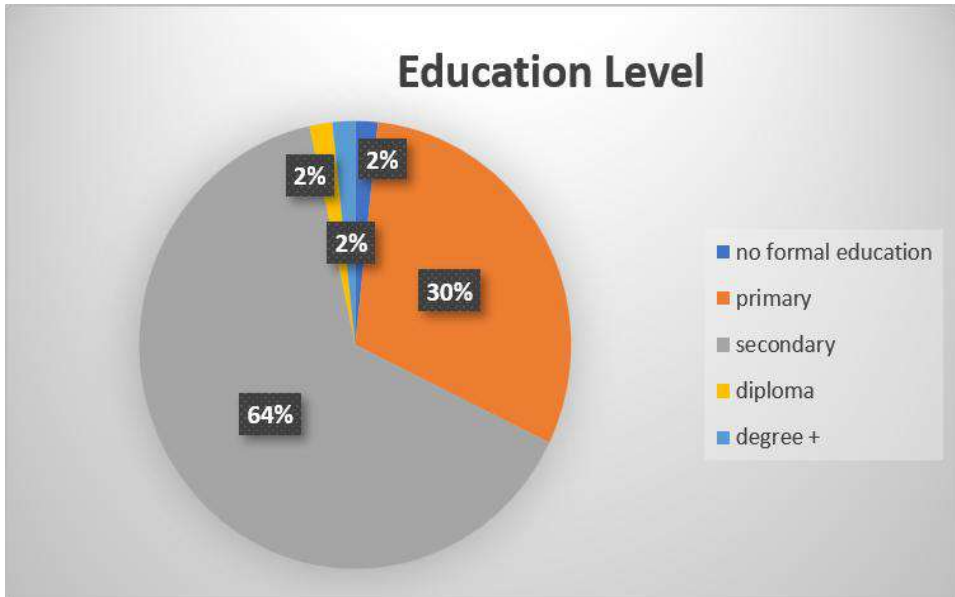


Chart 1: Educational Level of the Study Sample
(Source: Survey data, 2026).

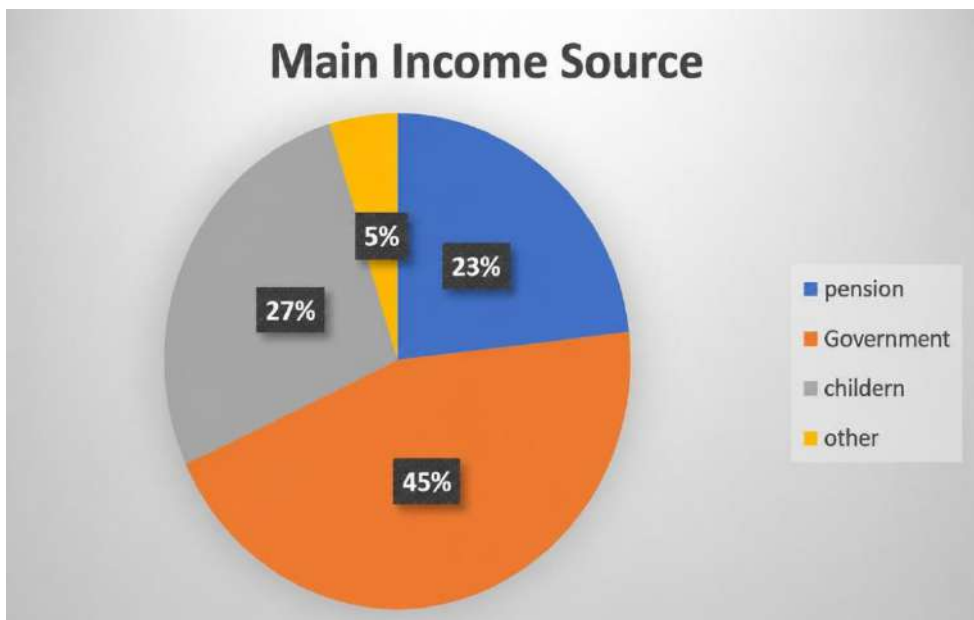


Chart 2: Main Source of Income of the Study Sample
(Source: Survey data, 2026).

Participants demonstrated moderate traditional financial literacy, with 87% identifying banks as the safest place to save. However, digital financial literacy was very low: only 3% could use internet banking independently, while about one-quarter could use ATMs independently. Risky practices were also evident, with approximately 20% rarely or never verifying information before financial transactions.

Importantly, 21.7% of participants had experienced financial fraud, mainly investment fraud (11.7%) and telephone fraud (6.7%), with strangers being the most common perpetrators. These findings suggest that increasing financial digitalization may create new vulnerabilities for older adults with limited digital skills. They also align with Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) and Yu et al. (2023), highlighting the role of financial literacy in informed financial decision-making and reducing fraud vulnerability.

The qualitative data analysis generated five key themes: technology confidence, vulnerability to fraud, impacts of fraud, prevention and coping, and financial literacy. Table 1 presents the themes identified through the qualitative data analysis. Participants generally reported limited confidence in using digital technologies and often relied on family members for financial and technological tasks. Fraud victimization had impacts beyond financial loss, including anxiety, guilt, depression, sleep disturbances and reduced trust. Family members served as an important informal protective mechanism, although excessive dependence could undermine older adults' autonomy and financial independence.

Table 1: Qualitative Themes

Technology Adaptation and Confidence Deficits	“But when it comes to technology, online banking, or mobile apps, I'm not very confident. I usually ask my children for help...” (Interview 1, 68 yrs old male)
Vulnerabilities to Financial Fraud	“Sometimes I become frightened because these people seem very clever.” (Interview 4, 65 yrs old female)
Impact of Fraud and Coping Mechanisms	“She was devastated because it was part of her retirement savings. Everyone became much more careful after that.” (Interview 2, 72 yrs old female – describing neighbor's experience)
Support and Prevention Strategies	“My son works in Colombo, and whenever I receive strange messages or phone calls, I ask him before doing anything.” (Interview 1, 68 yrs old male)
Conceptualization of Financial Literacy	“I keep a monthly budget using a notebook. Every expense is written down because I like knowing exactly where my money goes.” (Interview 3, 76 yrs old male)

(Source: Survey data, 2026).

Overall, financial vulnerability should be understood not simply as an individual deficit in financial knowledge, but as a socially embedded issue shaped by technological change, family relationships, institutional protection and unequal access to digital skills.

Conclusion

The study highlights a significant gap in digital financial literacy among older adults, increasing their vulnerability to financial fraud. Although family support plays an important role, excessive dependence on family members may compromise older adults' autonomy and dignity. Addressing this vulnerability requires coordinated efforts among families, financial institutions, government agencies, and community organizations. Practical digital financial literacy programs should focus on safe banking practices, fraud recognition and prevention, and the protection of personal and financial information. Strengthening these skills can contribute to greater financial security, independence, and overall well-being among Sri Lanka's ageing population.

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**Development of a Mobile Learning Platform for Rural Community
Development and Vocational Training through Public
Participation“New colors in the world of toddlers”.**

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Keywords : *Community Participation, Early Childhood Development, Learning Environment, Toddler World, New Colors.*

Introduction

One of the major challenges faced by early childhood development centers in rural areas of Sri Lanka is the lack of a good, safe and stimulating physical learning environment for children's development. Literature confirms that color, spatial arrangement and community connection directly affect children's psychological and social development. However, Sadares Early Childhood Development Center located in 35 c Thatilla Grama Niladhari Division has 13 children and two teachers, and creativity and socialization are limited due to lack of infrastructure and resources. In this context, the need for a sustainable intervention using community resources and labor has emerged. Therefore, the main objective of this project is to “create a good learning environment in the early childhood development center”. The community work project titled New Colors - A World of Pictures was carried out with community participation.

Methodology

Qualitative and quantitative data were used to identify the problems of the community. Data collection tools included community meetings, semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, field observations, a questionnaire, home visits and pre-project documentation of the Sahapa Sutta.

The New Colors for the World Community Work project was funded by the labor contribution of parents, financial support from community-based organizations, financial support from Mr. Garukusal Gunasekara of the Foundation of Goodness, and labor contribution from volunteer groups to paint the external and internal walls of the center. In addition, educational walls were created, handmade toys were created, and learning environments were created, as well as improving health and safety facilities.

Results

After implementing the project for nearly six months, many significant changes occurred. Firstly, the internal environment changed completely. Secondly, there were changes in the external environment of the community. Community participation stands out as a key factor. The labor of the villagers was very important for the project and mutual cooperation developed among them. Unity and very active work in carrying out activities were observed in the community. A change was seen in the attendance of children compared to before. The interest of the preschool administrators also increased compared to before.

Conclusion

This community work project confirms that a community-based intervention such as the New Colourful World can significantly improve the quality of learning and children's participation in early childhood development centers. The sustainability of community participation, even with a small group of 13 children, is the main success of this project. In principle, in rural development programs, in addition to physical infrastructure, priority should be given to creating an environment that meets the needs of community relations and the psychological needs of the children. The long-term impact of this intervention for future projects will help to improve the cognitive and social skills of

children, as well as to increase the interest of students who are interested in pursuing further studies.

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**Strengthening the Livelihoods of Handloom Weaving Community
Through Prajashakthi Project: A Research Centered on Handloom
Weaving Production Communities in Batticaloa District, Eastern
Province**

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Keywords: *Handloom industry, rural livelihoods, small and medium enterprise (SME) development, Prajashakthi project, Batticaloa district, social empowerment, rural institutional development, market access, sustainable livelihoods, Eastern Province, inclusive rural development, local economic development.*

Introduction / Background

In the Batticaloa District of Sri Lanka's Eastern Province, the handloom weaving industry continues to play an important role in sustaining rural livelihoods and preserving the cultural heritage and traditional knowledge of local communities. Handloom weaving provides an important source of household income, particularly for families and small-scale producers who depend on traditional production activities. Beyond its economic contribution, the sector represents an important part of the cultural identity of communities in the district and has potential to contribute to rural entrepreneurship, employment generation, women's economic participation, and local economic development.

However, despite its social, cultural, and economic importance, the handloom sector faces several structural and operational challenges. Limited access to working capital, irregular availability and increasing costs of raw materials, dependence on traditional production techniques, inadequate modern

equipment, limited technical skills, weak market integration, and insufficient institutional support constrain producers' ability to increase production, improve income, and sustain their businesses. These constraints also affect the competitiveness and long-term sustainability of small-scale handloom enterprises.

The Prajashakthi National Development Project, implemented under the Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, provides an opportunity to strengthen rural production structures through integrated community-based interventions, livelihood development, social empowerment, institutional strengthening, and local economic development strategies. Understanding the socio-economic conditions, production capacity, constraints, support requirements, and level of awareness among handloom-producing communities is therefore essential for designing interventions that respond to local realities and contribute to sustainable outcomes.

This research focuses on handloom production communities in the Batticaloa District, with particular attention to their socio-economic conditions, production-related challenges, awareness of Prajashakthi interventions, access to available support, and benefits derived from such interventions. The study aims to generate evidence to support targeted and practical interventions for strengthening the handloom sector and improving the sustainability of rural livelihoods.

Methodology

The research was conducted to assess the socio-economic conditions of handloom production communities in the Batticaloa District and identify the major constraints affecting production, income generation, market participation, and sustainability. Particular attention was given to producers' awareness of Prajashakthi interventions, their access to available services and

support mechanisms, and the extent to which existing interventions correspond to the needs of rural producers and small-scale enterprises.

Primary data were collected through a structured survey among handloom-producing families and small enterprises in selected Grama Niladhari divisions of Batticaloa District. The survey covered demographic characteristics, household income, production capacity, availability and cost of production inputs, access to finance, market participation, skills and training, business constraints, awareness of government programmes, and utilization of project-related services. Descriptive and comparative analysis methods were used to identify common patterns, major constraints, gaps in existing support mechanisms, and priority areas requiring intervention.

Results / Findings

Preliminary findings indicate that many handloom producers continue to operate below their production capacity, mainly because of financial constraints and limited access to essential production resources. Limited availability and high prices of raw materials, together with insufficient investment in modern equipment and technology, were identified as key barriers to increasing production capacity and improving product quality.

Market access emerged as another significant challenge. Many producers depend heavily on middlemen and have limited opportunities to engage directly with broader domestic and value-added markets. Limited branding, product promotion, digital marketing, and collective marketing mechanisms further restrict market expansion and producers' bargaining power.

Survey responses also showed uneven awareness and participation in available government support initiatives, including those under the Prajashakthi project. Administrative procedures, information gaps, and access deficiencies were identified as factors limiting the utilization of available support. The findings

highlight the importance of strengthening communication, awareness creation, institutional coordination, and community-level access mechanisms.

Conclusion

This research underscores the necessity of targeted, sector-specific interventions to strengthen the contribution of the handloom industry to rural livelihoods and local economic growth in Batticaloa District. Improving the sector requires a coordinated combination of financial support, reliable access to raw materials, skills development, technological upgrading, institutional assistance, and improved market opportunities. The following recommendations are proposed: expanding access to financial assistance and microcredit facilities; improving supply-chain support for raw materials; encouraging skills development and technological upgrading while preserving traditional knowledge; facilitating market access through collective branding, exhibitions and digital platforms; and strengthening local awareness and institutional access mechanisms to improve participation in development programmes. Integrating the handloom sector within broader rural small and medium enterprise development strategies under the Prajashakthi framework can increase economic resilience, create employment opportunities, preserve traditional knowledge, and support long-term social empowerment in the Eastern Province.

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**Assessing the Effectiveness of the Prajashakthi Programme as a
Grassroots Community Development Strategy: A Case Study of the
Sainthamaruthu-08, Ampara District**

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Introduction/Background

Community development programmes are important mechanisms for promoting bottom-up participation and addressing local development challenges in developing contexts (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006). Participatory development literature further emphasises the importance of meaningful community involvement in identifying needs, influencing decisions and shaping local development processes (Arnstein, 1969; Chambers, 1994; Pretty, 1995). In Sri Lanka, the Prajashakthi Programme represents a state-sponsored grassroots initiative designed to strengthen community participation, social mobilization and local development through decentralized governance structures. The programme aims to empower communities at the village level by creating platforms for collective decision-making and coordinated engagement with local authorities. However, Although the programme's reach empirical evidence on whether these mechanisms adapt into effective community-level development outcomes remains limited particularly in post-conflict and rural contexts such as the Eastern Province. Sainthamaruthu-08 Grama Niladhari Division in Ampara District presents a relevant setting for

examining this issue because of its socioeconomic vulnerabilities and active programme implementation. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the Prajashakthi Programme as a grassroots community development strategy by examining community participation, awareness, perceived development outcomes and implementation challenges in the study area.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-method case study design to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Prajashakthi Programme within Sainthamaruthu-08. The case study approach was selected because of its suitability for in-depth examination of a bounded practical phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2018). A total of 100 households were selected using simple random sampling and a structured questionnaire was administered to collect quantitative data on participation levels, awareness and perceived development outcomes. Qualitative data were collected through 8 key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders, including community leaders, community empowerment officer, Grama Niladhari and other officials, as well as 2 focus group discussions with community members using purposive sampling. Participant observation was also undertaken to supplement primary data. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). Ethical considerations including informed consent and confidentiality were maintained throughout the data collection process.

Results/Findings

The findings indicate that the Prajashakthi Programme has positively contributed to grassroots community development in the study area. 73% of respondents reported increased awareness regarding local development initiatives and opportunities for community participation. The programme has

created platforms through which community members can discuss local issues, identify priorities and contribute to development planning. The study further revealed that the programme has strengthened collective decision-making processes. Participants highlighted that community meetings and discussions facilitated greater involvement of residents in identifying local needs and proposing solutions. As a result, social interaction and cooperation among community members have improved contributing to stronger community cohesion.

Qualitative findings showed that the programme has enhanced communication between community members and local institutions, leading to improved coordination of development activities. Participants also reported increased awareness of available resources and government-supported development opportunities. However, several challenges were identified. Limited participation among certain segments of the community reduced the inclusiveness of programme activities. Respondents noted that some community members remained hesitant to engage actively due to personal, social or economic constraints. Furthermore, inadequate coordination among stakeholders occasionally hindered programme implementation. Political influence at the local level emerged as another significant challenge. Participants reported that political affiliations sometimes affected community participation and decision-making processes potentially limiting the programme's effectiveness. Furthermore, implementation constraints such as resource limitations, insufficient monitoring mechanisms and varying levels of community commitment were identified as barriers to achieving programme objectives fully.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Prajashakthi Programme has contributed to grassroots community development in Sainthamaruthu-08 by increasing awareness, strengthening participation and supporting participatory decision-making. However, limited participation, stakeholder coordination difficulties, political influence and implementation constraints continue to affect programme effectiveness. Strengthening community mobilization, stakeholder collaboration, transparent decision-making and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms could improve programme outcomes. The study contributes empirical evidence from a post-conflict rural setting and offers practical insights for policymakers, development practitioners and community organizations seeking to strengthen participatory community development programmes in Sri Lanka.

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Participatory Governance and Community-Led Development: Lessons from the Grama Prabodha Programme in the Western Province of Sri Lanka

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Keywords: *Participatory Governance, Community-Led Development, Grama Prabodha Programme, Community Participation, Rural Development, Resource Mobilization*

Introduction

Participatory governance emphasizes citizens' involvement in identifying priorities, decision-making, resource mobilization, implementation and monitoring. Community-led development similarly emphasizes local ownership, collective action and accountability. Arnstein (1969) argues that meaningful participation requires opportunities for citizens to influence decisions, while Mansuri and Rao (2013) emphasize the importance of institutional and social conditions for successful participation.

In Sri Lanka, Rural Development Societies (RDSs) provide an established community-level mechanism for collective development activities. The Grama Prabodha Programme of the Department of Rural Development, Western Province, combines government financial assistance with community participation and resource mobilization. Communities may contribute finance, voluntary labour, materials, technical skills, facilities and other in-kind resources.

The programme therefore provides an opportunity to examine whether modest public investment can generate substantially greater development value

through community participation. During 2023–2025, 235 projects throughout the Grama Prabodha Programme were implemented with government assistance of LKR 15.70 million, while total reported project value reached LKR 60.97 million.

Research Problems and Objectives

The study addresses the limited empirical understanding of how small-scale government financial assistance, implemented through RDSs, contributes to participatory governance and community-led development at grassroots level. The main objective was to examine the contribution of the Grama Prabodha Programme to participatory governance and community-led development in Western Province. Specific objectives were to assess community participation, additional resource mobilization, project implementation, grassroots leadership, women's participation, institutional collaboration and accountability.

Methodology

A descriptive case study design was used. The study covered Colombo, Gampaha and Kalutara Districts and examined programme implementation during 2023–2025. Data were obtained from departmental administrative records, project proposals, financial records, monitoring and completion reports, and field observations. Quantitative analysis focused on project numbers, government financial assistance and total reported project value, while qualitative interpretation examined participation, leadership, institutional collaboration and implementation factors.

Year	Projects	Government Funding (LKR mn)	Total Project Value (LKR mn)
2023	75	3.70	16.97
2024	40	2.00	11.00
2025	120	10.00	33.00

Results and Findings

Financial Leverage

The programme implemented 235 projects with LKR 15.70 million in government assistance. Total reported project value was LKR 60.97 million, indicating approximately LKR 45.27 million in additional community and locally mobilized resources. Thus, every LKR 1 of government investment generated approximately LKR 3.88 in total reported project value.

In 2023, LKR 3.70 million in government funding generated a project value of LKR 16.97 million. In 2024, LKR 2.00 million generated LKR 11.00 million, representing the highest proportional leverage. In 2025, implementation expanded to 120 projects, with LKR 10.00 million government assistance generating LKR 33.00 million in total project value.

Community Participation and Resource Mobilization

Projects addressed locally identified needs including roads, culverts, schools, temples, community buildings, water facilities and entrepreneur development. RDSs supported priority identification, organization of members, mobilization of resources and implementation.

Community contributions included voluntary labour, financial resources, construction materials, technical expertise, equipment and use of facilities. The substantial difference between government assistance and total project value demonstrates the catalytic role of community participation.

Governance, Leadership and Women's Participation

The programme provided opportunities for RDS leaders and members to develop skills in planning, financial management, coordination, record keeping, resource mobilization and monitoring. Women's participation occurred through community mobilization, livelihood activities, welfare initiatives and RDS activities. However, the depth of participation varied among communities.

The programme also strengthened government–community interaction through proposal preparation, approvals, financial processes, implementation, monitoring and completion. These processes created mechanisms for shared accountability between government institutions and communities.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the Grama Prabodha Programme provides a practical example of participatory and community-led development within a provincial government framework. Its strongest feature is the resource-leveraging effect: LKR 15.70 million of government investment was associated with LKR 60.97 million in total reported project value.

The programme reflects four important principles: locally identified priorities, community contribution, institutional support through RDSs, and government–community partnership. However, participation should not automatically be interpreted as complete community control. The effectiveness of participation depended on leadership, organizational capacity, community cohesion and resource availability, consistent with Arnstein (1969), Cornwall (2008) and Mansuri and Rao (2013).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The Grama Prabodha Programme demonstrates that relatively modest government financial assistance can stimulate substantially greater community development resources when supported by established community organizations. During 2023–2025, 235 projects generated LKR 60.97 million in reported project value from LKR 15.70 million of direct government assistance.

The experience indicates that public investment becomes more effective when combined with community ownership, voluntary contributions, grassroots leadership and government–community partnerships. Nevertheless, variations

in leadership, organizational capacity, community engagement, women's participation and monitoring affected programme performance.

Future implementation should therefore strengthen RDS capacity, introduce systematic measurement of financial and in-kind community contributions, improve monitoring and documentation, promote women's meaningful participation, and assess long-term sustainability and outcomes. Government grants should increasingly be viewed as catalytic investments capable of mobilizing wider community resources rather than simply as expenditure.

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**A Study on the Implementation Effectiveness of the “Praja Shakthi”
Programme in the RDS Sambunagar Area Based on Social
Empowerment and Livelihood Development**

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Keywords : *Praja Shakthi; Rural Development; Social Empowerment; Social Mobilization; Livelihood Development; Monitoring and Evaluation*

Introduction

Rural development is an integrated process that encompasses not only economic growth but also social justice, participatory governance, and sustainable livelihoods. Research indicates that when social participation and local decision-making processes are weak, the long-term impact of development programmes are reduced (Chambers, 1997). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also emphasize poverty eradication, social equality, and inclusive development (United Nations, 2015).

The “Praja Shakthi” programme introduced in Sri Lanka has been designed to promote livelihood development and social empowerment through community-based structures at the village level (Ministry of Rural Development, 2023). The programme aims to ensure people’s participation through Community Development Councils and to improve the economic conditions of vulnerable families.

The study area, RDS Sambunagar, is a rural community whose livelihoods are largely based on agriculture. Although paddy cultivation is a major source of income, farmers’ net income is reduced due to the lack of adequate processing

and value-addition facilities. In addition, low awareness of the “Praja Shakthi” programme and weaknesses in the functioning of the Community Development Council have emerged as practical challenges to social empowerment.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted using a Mixed Methods Research Design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For quantitative data, a structured questionnaire survey was conducted with 80 paddy-producing families. Information was collected on household income levels, production costs, awareness of the programme, and social participation.

For qualitative data, three focus group discussions were conducted with women, youth, and farmers, together with five key-informant interviews involving Community Development Council members, a village officer, and development officers.

In addition, project documents, Community Development Council activity records, and expenditure data were analyzed. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative information was examined through thematic analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Findings and Conclusions

The findings indicate low levels of programme awareness and social mobilization. Among the families who participated in the study, 68% reported that they did not have sufficient knowledge about the “Praja Shakthi” programme. This is contrary to the programme’s fundamental objective of being designed around community participation.

Although a Community Development Council had been established, its meetings were not conducted regularly. Since adequate representation of village residents was not ensured, local participation in decision-making

remained low. As a result, community trust and accountability have weakened.

Because there is no local rice-processing facility for paddy value addition, families spend approximately Rs. 8,000–15,000 on transportation. This reduces their net income by around 20–30%. Women-headed households and low-income families are particularly exposed to greater economic pressure.

Furthermore, weaknesses in project monitoring and data-recording systems create challenges for evidence-based policy decisions. The need to strengthen community-based data collection and monitoring systems is therefore clearly demonstrated.

Conclusion

The experience of Sambunagar confirms that the success of the “Praja Shakthi” programme depends on strong community participation, transparent administration, and effective data-based monitoring systems. As emphasized by Chambers (1997), the voices of communities must remain central to development.

Therefore, the following measures are essential to improve programme effectiveness: (1) strengthening village-level awareness and social mobilization; (2) ensuring local representation in Community Development Councils; (3) implementing data-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and (4) promoting small-scale value-addition enterprises, including initiatives related to paddy processing.

This study contributes to understanding the practical challenges of rural development programmes and provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and development practitioners.

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**Unveiling Institutional Gaps in Community-Based Livelihood
Programmes: A Practical Experience Study from a Field Placement
under the Prajashakthi Programme**

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Introduction

The Prajashakthi Programme, implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, promotes rural livelihood improvement through community mobilization. A notable initiative within a coastal fishing community involved converting fish waste into Fish Amino Acid (FAA), a sustainable income generating activity. Despite its promising design, effective implementation depends heavily on the strength of institutional structures, particularly Community Development Councils (CDCs). This study aims to examine the institutional and relational gaps that impede the effective implementation of the Prajashakthi Programme at the grassroots level, drawing from a field placement.

Methodology

A qualitative approach grounded in an interpretivist paradigm was adopted. Data were collected through six months of participant observation, informal interviews with community members, CDC officers, and Divisional Secretariat officials, reflective field notes, and document review. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework was applied to identify recurring institutional patterns and gaps.

Results and Discussion

Three interrelated themes emerged as most prevalent across the data. First, communication breakdown between the CDC Chairperson and Secretary was the most frequently recurring pattern, leading to fragmented decision making and reduced community trust. Second, interpersonal prejudices among CDC members resulted in a nominal team structure rather than a functioning collective, a pattern observed consistently across nearly all CDC meetings attended. Third, the CDC's limited capacity to present strong, evidence-based proposals to the Divisional Secretariat recurred as a structural barrier that constrained resource access. Collectively, these themes reflect a structural disconnect between policy intent and field reality, weakening programme implementation at the grassroots level.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings underscore that innovative livelihood models cannot achieve their intended impact in the absence of strong, cohesive, and capable institutional structures. The study recommends that CDC Secretaries and Chairpersons receive targeted training in programme management, communication, and proposal development. CDC membership should be determined through transparent and inclusive community representation processes, free from personal affiliations or group loyalty, to foster genuine collective ownership. Furthermore, the integration of at least one or two

qualified Social Workers within CDC structures is recommended to facilitate community engagement, mediate interpersonal tensions, and strengthen the institutional-community interface. Addressing these structural deficiencies is essential to bridging the persistent gap between policy design and grassroots reality in rural development programming.

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Intertwined Dynamics of Self Governance and Community Participation: The Case of Labour Bank

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Introduction

Sustainable development seeks to harmonize economic advancement, social equity, and environmental stewardship across generations, operationalized through three interdependent pillars—economic viability, social inclusion, and ecological integrity—that must be pursued simultaneously rather than in isolation. Community participation plays a crucial role in realizing these pillars, as suitably arranged public participation contributes to self-governance and helps achieve sustainable development within communities. Self-governance in this context refers to the capacity of communities to collectively organize, make decisions, and manage resources through civic initiative and cooperative action (by Abraham Marshall Nunbogu, 2018). Research demonstrates that community self-governance embodies power and politics, developed through intersecting nodes of people, organizations, institutions, resources, and spaces (by Patricia Basile, 2023).

In rural India, the village economy relies on mutual dependency between landlords who need labour for harvesting and workers who need wages. However, this system often fails the most vulnerable - landlords may deny

work or offer unfair wages due to personal conflicts or ideological differences. Furthermore, despite legislative protections such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA, 2005), which legally entitles households to 100 days of work, many villagers remain unaware of their rights due to limited education and restricted access to technology. Self-help groups and community institutions have emerged as vital mechanisms for financial inclusion and livelihood improvement in such contexts (by Disha Bhanot, 2020). Large-scale livelihoods programmes can transition vulnerable populations into the labour force through self-employment and by creating livelihood opportunities that shift households away from casual farm labour.

This paper examines how the Labour Bank in Haveri district, Karnataka, demonstrates the intertwined dynamics of self-governance and community participation, addressing systemic gaps in rural employment through an institutional innovation that operationalizes all three pillars of sustainable development. The objective is to analyse the Labour Bank's governance structure, operational mechanisms, and impact on livelihood transformation, social empowerment, and institutional growth.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study approach, focusing on Haveri district as a microcosm of the challenges and innovations in Sustainable Community Development. The research site was purposively selected due to the presence of the Labour Bank, established by the Vanasiri Rural Development Society (VRDS), a non-governmental organization. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with Labour Bank administrators, registered labourers, and landlords, supplemented by document analysis of operational records, registration databases, and programme reports. The analytical framework draws upon the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and

theories of community self-governance capacity, examining how self-steering capacity develops within community initiatives aiming to improve local liveability. The case analysis examines three interrelated dimensions: livelihood transformation, social empowerment, and institutional growth.

Results / Findings

The Labour Bank functions as a skill-mobilization hub and formal intermediary that bridges the gap between job seekers and employers. Its operational process follows a structured flow: wage workers register in the Labour Bank database; landlords submit labour requests; matching and allocation occur; work is assigned; and payment is ensured. The Bank guarantees a minimum wage of ₹300 per day and negotiates higher rates for contract-based work, while sustaining operations through a 2.5% service fee. The findings reveal significant impact across three dimensions. First, regarding livelihood transformation, the Bank has assisted over 4,000 labourers in securing regular employment and accessing government benefits, professionalizing the rural labour market. Second, in terms of social empowerment, the initiative has successfully reduced rural-to-urban migration, enabling families to remain together while earning dignified livelihoods in home villages. Third, concerning institutional growth, the Bank demonstrates how community-driven institutions can overcome structural barriers through transparent processes and collective self-governance. These findings align with research showing that community involvement contributes most significantly to community attachment and sustainable outcomes (by Xiuying Cheng, 2021), and that self-help mechanisms promote democratic practices and participatory governance 8.

Conclusion

The Labour Bank case demonstrates that self-governance and community participation are not separate phenomena but intertwined dynamics that

mutually reinforce sustainable development outcomes. By institutionalizing labour intermediation through a community-governed structure, the initiative addresses economic vulnerability, social exclusion, and awareness gaps simultaneously. The findings suggest that community institutions which combine transparent governance, participatory decision-making, and formal intermediation can transform exploitative labour relations into equitable systems. Policy implications include supporting similar community-driven institutional innovations as complementary mechanisms to statutory entitlements like MGNREGA. Future research should examine scalability across different socio-economic contexts and long-term sustainability of such community institutions.

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**Barriers to Community Participation in Community Development
Initiatives: A Case Study of Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari Division,
Doluwa, Kandy, Sri Lanka**

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Keywords: *Community Development, Community Participation, Participatory Rural Appraisal, Structural Barriers, Stakeholder Engagement*

Introduction

Community development is a participatory process through which community members engage in identifying problems, planning, implementing, and evaluating activities aimed at long-term development (Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2009). Meaningful participation strengthens ownership, collaboration, and community well-being (Lachapelle, 2008; Sebunya & Gichuki, 2024; Kumar, 2026). However, limited participation remains a major challenge to the implementation and continuity of community development initiatives. Although community development has been widely discussed, there is limited and inadequately understood empirical evidence on the factors affecting participation in the local context of *Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari* Division. Therefore, this study explored the factors contributing to limited community participation in community development initiatives in *Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari* Division, *Doluwa* Divisional Secretariat Division (DS), Kandy, Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach and used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools. The study was conducted in *Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari* Division, where the researcher engaged in participatory observation for nearly six months while serving as a trainee social worker under the Productivity Model Village establishment of the Clean Sri Lanka programme. Participants were purposely selected based on their active involvement in community development initiatives. The sample included five key informants: the Grama Niladhari Officer, Economic Development Officer, Samurdhi Development Officer, Agriculture Officer, and Productivity Development Officer and six community members who participated in informal discussions. Three Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted with the Village Development Committee, Elderly Society, and *Dayaka Sabha of Inguruwatta Temple*. Data collection continued until data saturation was reached.

The participants were both male and female, aged between 35 to 72 years and were all Sinhala Buddhists. Data were collected through participatory observation, community and resource mapping, FGDs, semi-structured interviews, informal discussions, and field notes. The interviews and discussions were transcribed and translated into English. Thematic analysis was used: transcripts and field notes were repeatedly reviewed, meaningful units were coded, similar codes were grouped into categories, and themes and sub-themes were developed in line with the study objective. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and relevant permissions were obtained from the *Doluwa DS* and other relevant officers. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and methods, prolonged field engagement, and careful transcription and translation.

Findings

The findings identified two interconnected thematic categories: structural and stakeholder-related factors, comprising three sub-themes, and community-member-level factors, comprising six sub-themes.

Theme 01: Structural and stakeholder-related factors

Sub-theme 1.1: Limited responsiveness to community priorities and needs and the continuation of top-down approaches: The first theme showed that limited participation was associated with insufficient responsiveness to community priorities and the continuation of top-down approaches. Community members were not always adequately involved in identifying problems, planning activities, or making decisions. Consequently, some initiatives did not reflect local needs, reducing community ownership and responsibility.

Sub-theme 1.2: Insufficient cultural sensitivity, weak relationships and ineffective communication between community and stakeholders: Insufficient cultural sensitivity, weak rapport, and ineffective communication between stakeholders and community members also reduced participation. Participants indicated that community members did not always feel understood or receive adequate information and opportunities to raise concerns.

Sub-theme 1.3: Limited inclusiveness: Limited inclusiveness was another concern, as vulnerable groups and individual voices were not always adequately considered during planning and implementation.

Theme 02: Community-member level factors

Sub-theme 2.1: Participation shaped by individual preferences and personal constraints: The second theme showed that participation was shaped by individual preferences, personal needs, and sociocultural, political, economic,

practical, psychological, and capacity-related constraints. Financial difficulties, daily work responsibilities, time limitations, limited motivation and experience, and lack of confidence or awareness affected the ability and willingness of community members to participate.

Sub-theme 2.2: Preference for immediate and material benefits: Participants often prioritized immediate and material benefits over long-term collective outcomes. Consequently, initiatives without direct personal benefits attracted less regular participation.

Sub-theme 2.3: Perceptions, previous experiences and mistrust: Previous experiences of unsuccessful initiatives and dissatisfaction with existing leadership contributed to mistrust of new activities.

Sub-theme 2.4: Weak leadership, selective participation, and political influence: Poor leadership, misleading behavior, and selective participation were also identified as barriers of community members active participation. Party-based political perspectives and personal interests further affected participation, leading to reduced collaboration and representation.

Sub-theme 2.5: Declining youth and male involvement: Participation was uneven across age and gender groups: youth, middle-aged men and women participated less frequently, whereas elderly women were more often involved. Some retired Grama Niladhari Officers and other retired government employees were particularly active, possibly due to their previous experience and familiarity with community activities.

Sub-theme 2.6: Dependence on external assistance, limited community empowerment and motivation for collective actions: Finally, high dependence

on government institutions and external actors for resources, solutions, and leadership weakened local initiative, empowerment, and collective responsibility. Prioritizing individual needs and limited awareness of collective action reduced sustained participation in shared community goals. Field observations further showed that several need-based training workshops and awareness programmes did not achieve participation from at least 50% of the target community.

Discussion

The findings are consistent with previous research showing that top-down planning, insufficient attention to community priorities, poor communication, exclusion, political influence, mistrust, and weak ownership can constrain participation (Gram et al., 2018; Russell, 2000 & Canada, 2022). Evidence from Sri Lanka indicates that poverty, institutional rigidity, centralization, and political interference can weaken government-community partnerships and hinder sustained community participation (Karunaratne & Praveena, 2026; Ocampo, 1991). The study adds locally specific evidence concerning low youth and middle-aged participation, the comparatively greater involvement of elderly women and retired public officers, and the practical influence of daily income loss and expectations of immediate material benefits.

Conclusion

Limited participation in *Inguruwatta Grama Niladhari* Division resulted from the interaction of structural, stakeholder-related, and community-member-level factors. A hybrid approach, combining institutional support and coordination with community involvement in need of identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation, is therefore recommended. Since economic, practical, and personal constraints may limit full voluntary participation, community development in this context should involve both working with the community and working for the community.

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Green Innovation Practices and Sustainability Performance of Rural SMEs: Evidence from an Emerging Economy

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Keywords: *Green Innovation; Sustainability Performance; Rural SMEs; Green Process Innovation; Emerging Economy*

Introduction

Although green innovation comprising product, process, and organizational dimensions is widely recognized as a driver of sustainable competitiveness, existing empirical evidence remains fragmented and largely derived from urban or developed economy contexts, limiting its relevance to rural SME settings (Ministry of Industries Sri Lanka, 2025). Moreover, prior research commonly treats green innovation as a unidimensional construct, offering limited understanding of how its distinct components differentially influence economic, environmental, and social sustainability outcomes. In addition, the role of internal firm capabilities in enabling effective green innovation adoption remains underexplored, particularly in resource-constrained rural environments where capability gaps significantly shape innovation outcomes. Addressing these gaps, this study examines the impact of green product, process, and organizational innovation on sustainability performance in rural SMEs, assessing their differential effects across sustainability dimensions and the enabling role of internal capabilities, thereby contributing context-specific empirical evidence on sustainability transitions in emerging economies such as Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka, 2025).

Literature Review

Green innovation, grounded in the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capability Theory, refers to a firm's ability to reconfigure resources to address environmental challenges while sustaining competitive advantage. Recent evidence shows that green innovation improves firm performance through enhanced resource efficiency, reduced emissions, and cost optimization (UNEP, 2025; World Bank, 2026). However, this relationship is context-dependent, with notable variations across economies due to differences in institutional quality, technological readiness, and innovation ecosystems (OECD, 2025; Global Innovation Index, 2026). In emerging economies, institutional voids, financial constraints, and weak support systems constrain SMEs' green technology adoption, while rural SMEs face additional barriers in skills, knowledge, and infrastructure (Asian Development Bank, 2025). This highlights the need for more disaggregated and context-specific analysis of the green innovation–sustainability nexus in rural SME contexts

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design targeting rural SMEs in an emerging economy, with data collected from owner-managers via a structured questionnaire. A sample of 250–350 firms is selected to meet Structural Equation Modeling requirements using Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS), chosen for its robustness in analyzing complex latent constructs and predictive relationships. Stratified random sampling ensures sectoral and regional representation. Validated scales measure green product, process, and organizational innovation, along with sustainability performance across economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Reliability and validity are assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). SEM-PLS is used to test the measurement and structural models simultaneously and evaluate the proposed hypotheses.

Results and Findings

The analysis reveals a statistically significant and positive relationship between green innovation practices and sustainability performance, with notable variations across dimensions. Green process innovation demonstrates the strongest effect, primarily due to its direct impact on resource efficiency and cost minimization, indicating its critical role in operational sustainability. Green product innovation shows a moderate but significant influence, particularly enhancing market competitiveness and customer-driven sustainability outcomes. Organizational innovation, while less directly impactful, plays a pivotal enabling role by strengthening internal alignment and facilitating the adoption of other green practices. Importantly, the findings indicate that internal capabilities such as managerial commitment and knowledge intensity act as key drivers of green innovation implementation. The model further suggests a partial mediating effect of green innovation between firm capabilities and sustainability performance, highlighting the mechanism through which internal resources translate into tangible outcomes.

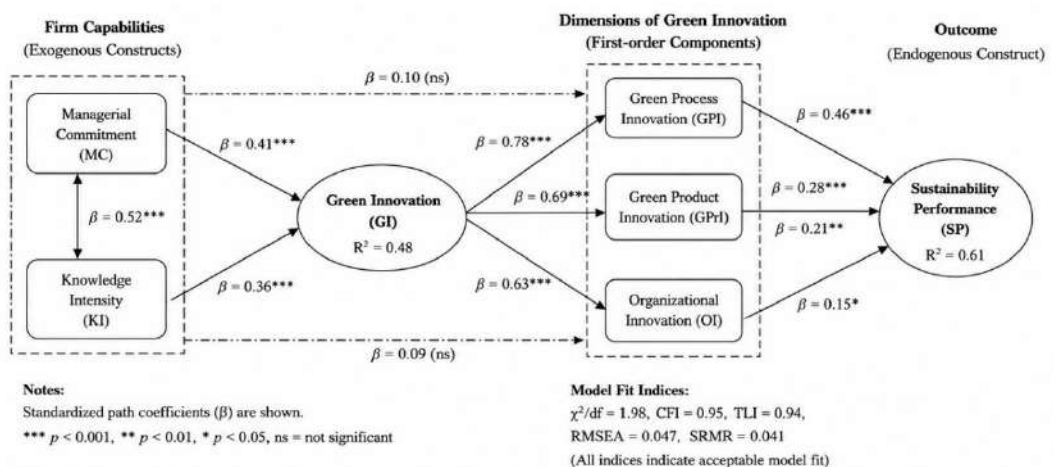


Figure 1: Structural Model and path analysis results

These results are consistent with prior empirical evidence emphasizing capability-driven sustainability transitions in SMEs (Chen et al., 2014; Xie et al., 2019). Furthermore, the differentiated effects across innovation types underscore the importance of decomposing green innovation into its functional dimensions rather than treating it as a singular construct, thereby offering more precise theoretical and managerial implications for resource-constrained rural SME contexts.

Conclusion

This study confirms that green innovation enhances sustainability performance in rural SMEs, with process innovation being the most influential. Internal capabilities are key to effective adoption. Policy should focus on financing, capacity building, and technology access, while SMEs should integrate all innovation dimensions for sustainability.

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Smart Village Project: A Community-Centered Approach for Sustainable Rural Development in Sri Lanka

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Keywords: *Smart Village; Sustainable Development; Community Empowerment; Participatory Rural Development; Psychosocial Well-being; Social Work; Rural Transformation*

Introduction

The Smart Village concept constitutes an innovative strategy designed to address the diverse challenges encountered by rural areas. This is achieved through the integration of information and communication technology (ICT) and social innovation, with the aim of fostering sustainable rural development. In contrast to the Smart City model, which predominantly targets urban settings, Smart Villages focus on enhancing rural strength by employing digital solutions specifically adapted to rural contexts and requirements. A systematic conceptual framework for Smart Villages delineates four fundamental components: objectives, strategies, dimensions, and foundations. These components collectively form a comprehensive model for understanding and implementing Smart Village initiatives. The dimensions include seven critical focus areas essential for holistic development: economy, ICT, service delivery to people, governance, environment, living conditions, and energy. This multidimensional framework not only enriches theoretical foundations but also guides practical interventions by emphasizing the

interconnected elements necessary for successful smart rural development (Pasupuleti, 2025).

The Smart Village Project, implemented by the National Institute of Social Development (NISD), is a rural development initiative aimed at enhancing the socioeconomic, environmental, and psychosocial well-being of rural communities in Sri Lanka. The project integrates social work principles with rural development strategies, digital data systems, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to promote sustainable and inclusive village transformation. The concept of smart villages emphasizes the use of appropriate technologies, local resources, community participation, and innovative approaches to improve the quality of life and economic opportunities of rural populations (Ayodyani et al., 2023). The project was implemented across selected villages in six Ampara, Anuradhapura, Badulla, Gampaha, Kilinochchi, and Monaragala districts (NISD, 2026). Therefore, this study aims to assess the socioeconomic, environmental, and psychosocial conditions of selected rural communities in Sri Lanka and identify key intervention areas for sustainable rural development through the Smart Village approach.

Methodology

A mixed-methods research design was utilized to gain a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic and psychosocial conditions in the selected rural communities. A total enumeration of households was conducted; however, those who were not present during the field survey were excluded, resulting in a total of 1,720 households of 6 villages. Quantitative data were gathered through 1,334 household surveys, encompassing 4,388 individuals across six villages. These villages were selected based on economic, social, and NISD center criteria, with prioritization by the respective divisional secretariat. The survey collected data on family profiles, including

demographic characteristics, education, livelihoods, health, and access to social protection services (NISD, 2026) within the village context.

Qualitative data were gathered through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs 30), Focus Group Discussions (18 FGDs), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), community mapping, and institutional assessments. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled triangulation of socioeconomic, demographic, environmental, and psychosocial information and provided a comprehensive understanding of community conditions, vulnerabilities, assets, and development needs (NISD, 2026).

Findings

The findings indicate that agriculture remains the primary livelihood source in most of the studied villages, including paddy cultivation, seasonal crop production, livestock farming, and other small-scale agricultural activities. Tourism and related activities also provide livelihood opportunities in selected communities. However, rural livelihoods are increasingly constrained by climate change, market instability, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to modern agricultural technologies, and weak market linkages. These challenges are consistent with broader evidence highlighting the need to strengthen climate resilience, agricultural productivity, rural employment, and market access among smallholder communities in Sri Lanka (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2017; World Bank, 2021).

Human–elephant conflict (HEC) emerged as a major environmental, socioeconomic, and psychosocial challenge, particularly in Lathugala and Nabadawewa. Human–elephant conflict can negatively affect agricultural production, household income, food security, physical safety, and community well-being. Previous research in Sri Lanka has similarly identified HEC as a significant challenge for rural communities living in and around elephant

habitats (LaDue et al., 2021; Perera, 2016). The Smart Village findings indicate that the consequences extend beyond economic losses and have important psychosocial implications for affected households and communities (NISD, 2026).

The study identified significant educational disparities within the surveyed communities. Approximately 75% of the surveyed population reported the ability to read and understand basic content, while 16.9% had never attended school and only 4.1% had attained higher education (NISD, 2026). These findings demonstrate the continuing importance of improving educational opportunities, digital literacy, vocational education, and lifelong learning within rural communities. National-level evidence also highlights the importance of strengthening digital and educational competencies to support participation in an increasingly technology-oriented economy (Department of Census and Statistics, 2025).

Several vulnerable population groups, including women, youth, older persons, and low-income households, face multiple barriers to sustainable livelihoods, vocational training, healthcare services, and social protection. These vulnerabilities demonstrate the importance of integrated rural development interventions that address economic, social, educational, and welfare needs simultaneously (NISD, 2026).

Despite these challenges, the study identified strong social capital within the communities. Community-based organizations, including Farmer Societies, Women's Associations, Samurdhi groups, youth clubs, and Rural Development Committees, play an important role in strengthening local governance, collective action, mutual support, and community participation. Such community-based structures provide an important foundation for participatory rural development because they enable communities to mobilize

existing resources, identify local priorities, and participate in decision-making processes (NISD, 2026).

Based on the assessment, the Smart Village framework identified five key intervention areas: Smart Agriculture, Smart Economy, Smart Education, Smart Youth Development, and Smart Social Protection. Smart Agriculture focuses on climate-resilient agricultural practices, improved irrigation systems, appropriate agricultural technologies, and livelihood diversification. Climate-smart agricultural approaches are particularly relevant to Sri Lanka because smallholder farmers are increasingly exposed to climate-related risks and variability (FAO, 2017; World Bank, 2021).

Smart Economy promotes entrepreneurship, digital marketing, local enterprise development, tourism-related opportunities, and cottage industries. Strengthening digital connectivity and market access can enable rural producers and entrepreneurs to reach wider markets and diversify household income sources (World Bank, 2021).

Smart Education emphasizes digital literacy, access to learning resources, vocational education, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Improving digital competencies is particularly important for reducing the rural–urban digital divide and enabling rural populations to benefit from emerging educational and economic opportunities (DCS, 2025)

Smart Youth Development supports vocational training, entrepreneurship, employment pathways, and youth participation in community development. Investment in rural youth skills and entrepreneurship can contribute to employment creation, livelihood diversification, and the long-term sustainability of rural communities (NISD, 2026).

Smart Social Protection addresses the needs of vulnerable households through improved access to welfare services, community-based support mechanisms, and stronger linkages between communities and relevant government and non-governmental institutions. This approach recognizes that sustainable rural development requires not only economic interventions but also mechanisms that protect vulnerable populations from social and economic shocks (NISD, 2026).

Conclusion

The Smart Village Project demonstrates that sustainable rural development requires an integrated, community-centered approach that combines livelihood enhancement, psychosocial well-being, environmental sustainability, digital inclusion, and participatory governance. The findings indicate that rural communities possess significant local knowledge, social capital, institutional networks, and community assets that can be mobilized to support sustainable development (NISD, 2026).

Strengthening local capacities, promoting inclusive participation, improving access to technology and education, diversifying livelihoods, and effectively utilizing community-based organizations are essential for long-term rural transformation. In particular, addressing climate-related vulnerabilities and human–elephant conflict requires coordinated interventions involving communities, government institutions, development organizations, and other relevant stakeholders (World Bank, 2021).

The study concludes that Smart Village interventions aligned with social work principles, participatory development, community empowerment, and multi-stakeholder collaboration have considerable potential to enhance quality of life, social inclusion, resilience, and sustainable development outcomes in rural Sri Lanka. The Smart Village approach therefore provides a practical

framework through which social work can contribute beyond individual and family-level interventions to broader community development, social planning, advocacy, and sustainable rural transformation.

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Community Mobilization for Sustainable Waste Management: From Needs Assessment to Collective Action in 759- Wellawa Grama Niladhari Division

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Keywords: *Community Mobilization, Community Empowerment, Sustainable Waste Management, Environmental Sustainability, Recycling, Collective Action.*

Introduction

Sustainable waste management is fundamental to environmental sustainability, public health and community well-being. However, many semi-urban communities in Sri Lanka continue to experience problems related to improper waste disposal, open burning of household waste, inadequate recycling opportunities and limited waste collection services. Similar challenges were identified in the 759-Wellawa Grama Niladhari Division of the Kurunegala District, which comprises a population of 1,688 across 460 households within an area of 259.9871 hectares, including the villages of Wellawa, Panagamuwa and Ihalagama (Kurunegala Divisional Secretariat, 2025).

From January to June 2026, a participatory community development process was conducted to identify priority community needs. Community observation, transect walks, community meetings, interviews with community members and government officers, focus group discussions, participatory rural appraisal (PRA) community mapping and secondary data reviews were used for need identification. Household surveys, questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussions and SWOT analysis supported the needs assessment,

while community meetings and a ballot box ranking exercise prioritized waste management as the most critical community issue.

The intervention was guided by the Participatory Development Approach, Community Empowerment Approach and Rothman's Locality Development Model, which emphasize community participation, collective decision-making and local ownership (Pretty, 1995; Rothman, 2008). The initiative also contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) (United Nations, 2015). The objective of this practice-based community development was to demonstrate how community mobilization and multi-stakeholder collaboration improved sustainable waste management in the 759-Wellawa Grama Niladhari Division.

Methodology

This practice based community development project documented the implementation of a community intervention carried out between January and June 2026. The project was implemented through the Community Development Council (CDC) in collaboration with the Divisional Secretariat, Grama Niladhari, Community Development Officer, Samurdhi Development Officer, Agriculture Research and Production Assistant, Public Health Inspector, schools, youth and women's organizations, community volunteers, Eco Spindles (Pvt) Ltd., the Samagi Recycling Centre and other stakeholders. The intervention followed the stages of need identification, community assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Community members actively participated in planning and decision-making. Information was gathered through household surveys, community meetings, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, participant observation, PRA community mapping, secondary records and problem-ranking exercises.

Project progress was monitored using participation records, observation, activity reports, photographic documentation and stakeholder feedback.

Findings

The intervention demonstrated the effectiveness of participatory community mobilization in addressing local environmental challenges. More than 1,000 community members participated in environmental awareness programmes, planning meetings, clean-up campaigns and recycling activities, reflecting strong community ownership and collective action.

School-based environmental programmes engaged approximately 3,500 students in PET bottle collection activities, resulting in the collection of 356 kilograms of recyclable plastic for the first round. Partnerships with Eco Spindles (Pvt) Ltd. and the Samagi Recycling Centre established sustainable PET bottle and used pen recycling mechanisms that encouraged responsible environmental practices among schools and the wider community.

Stakeholder collaboration facilitated the acquisition of an electric bicycle with a trailer to support community based PET bottle collection while creating a part-time income-generating opportunity. Additional activities included compost awareness programmes, shramadhana campaigns, removal of invasive weeds from Panagamuwa Lake, promotion of eco-friendly alternatives and installation of environmental model boards and mesh cages along the Wellawa main road.

The intervention also generated important behavioral and social outcomes. Community observations indicated a reduction in open burning of household waste, increased household waste segregation, improved recycling behavior and greater environmental awareness. Furthermore, the project strengthened the capacity of the Community Development Council, enhanced collaboration among government institutions, schools, private-sector organizations and

community based organizations, and increased the participation of women, youth and local volunteers in environmental management.

Conclusion

This practice-based community development initiative demonstrates that participatory planning, community empowerment and multi-stakeholder collaboration can effectively address local environmental challenges while strengthening community ownership. The intervention enhanced environmental awareness, promoted recycling practices and established sustainable community-based waste management mechanisms through active community participation.

The experience highlights the importance of integrating local government institutions, community organizations, schools and private-sector partners in environmental development programmes. Strengthening local authority support, maintaining partnerships with Eco Spindles (Pvt) Ltd. and the Samagi Recycling Centre, expanding environmental education in schools, enhancing the capacity of Community Development Councils and replicating similar initiatives in other Grama Niladhari Divisions would contribute to long-term environmental sustainability and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Human-Elephant Conflict and Poverty: A Study of Socioeconomic Vulnerability and Wellbeing among Rural Households in Aralaganwila

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Introduction

In the Sri Lankan context, human-elephant conflict (HEC) has emerged as a significant issue within socio-economic and environmental discourse (Fernando et al., 2005; Thakshila Gunawansa et al., 2023). Habitat destruction resulting from illegal human encroachment and settlement expansion, large-scale deforestation, the disruption of elephant corridors, and the scarcity of food and water within national parks are among the key factors contributing to the increasing incidence of HEC across wildlife regions in Sri Lanka (Janssen et al., 2013; Köpke et al., 2021; Ram et al., 2025). HEC directly affects the agricultural livelihoods and economic security of communities living in Sri Lanka's dry zone (Bandara & Tisdell, 2010; Mahees & Rajapaksha, 2020; United Nations, 2025). This study explored the impact of HEC on rural poverty, agricultural livelihoods, and the socio-economic well-being of communities in the Rathmalthenna Grama Niladhari (GN) Division, Aralaganwila.

Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm with a phenomenological orientation and a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of rural communities affected by HEC. The study was conducted in Rathmalthena GN Division, Aralaganwila, Polonnaruwa District. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to select 15 participants with direct experiences of HEC. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and thematically organized and analyzed using Microsoft Excel 2019. Key themes focused on rural poverty, agricultural livelihoods, socioeconomic vulnerability, coping strategies, and household well-being. Verbal informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were ensured. The study was limited to one GN Division, restricting the generalizability of findings to other HEC-affected communities in Sri Lanka.

Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that human–elephant conflict (HEC) is experienced not merely as an environmental problem but as a social and livelihood crisis that reinforces multidimensional poverty among rural households in Rathmalthena. Participants’ accounts indicated interconnected effects on livelihoods, food security, household security, physical safety, psychological well-being, and social vulnerability. The participants had a mean age of 42 years and were primarily dependent on paddy cultivation, ornamental fish farming, chena cultivation, and small-scale crop production (Field Data, 2026).

Livelihood Insecurity and Agricultural Vulnerability

A dominant theme emerging from the narratives was livelihood insecurity resulting from recurrent agricultural losses. For households dependent on agriculture, elephants threatened not only income but also subsistence and the productive resources accumulated through years of labour. Paddy cultivation

was particularly vulnerable to night-time elephant incursions, transforming farming from a livelihood strategy into a persistent source of uncertainty. One female farmer described an incident following the harvest:

“It was around 12.30 at night. A lone elephant came. My husband was not at home. We had harvested the paddy and stored everything here. I used an elephant cracker, but it returned, hit the wall, and took away a sack of paddy.”

(Female farmer, 32 years, Rathmalthena, 2026)

This account illustrates how HEC extends beyond crop destruction to penetrate the household economy and everyday social life. The loss of harvested produce represents both an immediate economic loss and a reduction in household food security. The absence of alternative livelihood opportunities further intensifies this vulnerability, particularly among households whose economic survival is closely tied to agricultural production.

Everyday Insecurity, Fear and Coping

A second theme concerned the normalization of fear and insecurity in everyday life. Participants described night-time elephant movements as a persistent threat to personal and household safety. Rather than being occasional encounters, these experiences shaped household routines and required continuous vigilance. Families employed a range of coping mechanisms, including firecrackers, elephant crackers, private electric fences, and, in extreme circumstances, firearms. As one male participant explained:

“We already use many firecrackers. The Grama Niladhari provides too few elephant crackers. We have also installed a private electric fence around the house. Sometimes, if the elephant does not leave, we have no choice but to shoot. It is very sad, but there is nothing else we can do.”

(Male participant, 54 years, Rathmalthena, 2026)

This narrative demonstrates how households are compelled to individualise the responsibility for managing a structurally produced environmental risk. Limited institutional protection shifts the burden of risk management onto households, requiring them to invest their own resources in protective measures. Consequently, coping itself becomes an additional economic burden.

HEC and the Reproduction of Multidimensional Poverty

Across the narratives, a broader pattern emerged in which repeated losses and limited capacity to recover reproduce household vulnerability over time. From a social vulnerability perspective (Cutter, 2024; Ram et al., 2025), exposure to HEC is shaped not simply by physical proximity to elephants but by households' socioeconomic position, dependence on agriculture, limited livelihood diversification, and unequal access to protective resources. One participant captured this cumulative vulnerability:

“We cultivate paddy by mortgaging whatever equipment and materials [and jewellery]. The houses were only recently constructed, but they were completely flattened to the ground.

How are we supposed to live...? Where are we supposed to go?”

(Male participant, 45 years, Bamunakotuwa, 2026)

This narrative reveals the cumulative and recursive nature of vulnerability. Agricultural and property losses deplete household assets, while indebtedness and reduced productive capacity constrain recovery. Repeated exposure can therefore generate a cycle in which loss reduces resources, reduced resources increase vulnerability, and increased vulnerability limits the capacity to withstand subsequent incidents.

Taken together, the inductive findings suggest that HEC should be understood sociologically as a process of livelihood erosion and social vulnerability, rather than simply as a conflict between humans and wildlife. Its consequences

are produced through the interaction of environmental exposure with poverty, livelihood dependence, household resources, institutional protection, and unequal capacities to cope and recover.

Conclusion

HEC in Rathmalthenna contributes to multidimensional poverty by undermining livelihoods, food security, safety, and psychological well-being. Reducing this vulnerability requires improved mitigation infrastructure, livelihood diversification, active mitigation measures, and community-based conflict management to strengthen household resilience.

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