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HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN SYSTEM C OF THE MAHAWELI SETTLEMENT SCHEME, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

`HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN SYSTEM C OF THE MAHAWELI SETTLEMENT SCHEME, SRI LANKA'

Like other developing countries, Sri Lanka, which is traditionally an agriculture-based country, is at present striving for greater social and economic development. As a planned settlement scheme, the Mahaweli Development Programme is, by far, in terms of the magnitude and resources involved, the most ambitious development programme undertaken in the country. In the Mahaweli Settlements in Sri Lanka, farmer settlers form the major work force and play a strategically important key role in the process of agricultural development, despite the multitude of problems they encounter. In spite of several hardships and the low level of their socio-economic status such as lack of proper housing units and the lack of domestic amenities and facilities, their contribution is significant. A micro-level investigation shows that the socio-economic status based on housing and related amenities is not satisfactory as the majority of the Mahaweli settlers still have temporary houses although they have been living there for more than 12 years now.

The study was undertaken for: identifying the housing problem of Mahaweli settlers, examining the factors affecting settlers' housing development, and identifying obstacles for affordable housing, finding out settlers aspirations, expectations and implications for the strategy formulation, and finally examining the different roles of settlers' in housing development related to the construction process itself, such as making building materials by themselves, and using indigenous construction skills.

This study is an exploratory one, which uses descriptive and analytical methods. Both primary and secondary research categories are employed here. Detailed field investigations of

the study were conducted on 400 households selected from 14 villages in system C of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Settlement Area in Sri Lanka in 1994-95. Villages were selected by the Simple Random Sampling Method and the sample was also selected by the Stratified Simple Random Sampling Method which covered the whole of system C.

The purpose of the field survey in the 14 sample areas was to test the following hypotheses. Mahaweli settlers live in inadequate housing conditions and the ability of the settlers to improve their housing depends on their socio-economic background (such as family income, educational background, age distribution, size of the family, health conditions, quality of building materials used, construction skills, amenities, and the year of settlement).

Three approaches have been employed in data analysis. Firstly, the frequency of distributions showed the proportion of each group and cross tabulations compared the respondents' socio-economic background and housing characteristics. Secondly, using the Bivariate Correlation Analysis and Multiple Regression Model test, housing relationship variables which have influenced housing development, were identified and analyzed. Thirdly, similarities and differences between the three settler groups were compared.

Out of 14 variables examined in the bivariate correlation analysis only 10 emerged as statistically significant (95 % Confidence Level). They were family income, family health, cost of building materials, construction skills, domestic amenities, and educational levels. The year of settlement, age and the size of the family, rest were not statistically significant.

When all the variables were examined in the multivariate analysis, family income appeared to be overwhelming. There was also a statistically significant association between housing with health status and the cost of building materials. An important observation was the loss of statistical

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significance: age, year of settlement, level of education, size of the family associated with multivariate analysis etc. The cost of building materials and construction skills did show a significant relationship at the bivariate level, but not at the multivariate analysis.

Based on the analysis it was found that the main hypotheses have been proved and that the Mahaweli settlers are living in inadequate housing conditions and the ability of the settlers to improve their housing depends on their socio economic back-ground. The low income and family health which were the most effective reasons in regards to housing development. Besides this, the cost of building materials as well as the lack of construction skills, together with the high cost, the low level of education, and the absence of community participation in housing development have worsened the situation.

Hence the introduction of income generating activities, the use of local and traditional building materials and the use of their own construction skills and traditional technology have to be thought of. Yet, their contribution to the production of a substantial portion of the country's goods and services is also overlooked, ignored, and unrecognized. The full participation of settlers is essential, if attempts to improve the current human settlement conditions are to be successful.   Due to their great potential and the decisive role in the development of their resources, their integration into the process of development should be given strong emphasis. It is suggested that a multifactorial strategy should be devised in improving housing development in the Mahaweli Settlements.