

EFFECTIVENESS OF SERVICE OF FIELD OFFICERS IN POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NON-URBAN SECTOR IN KANDY DISTRICT

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Although the services of various types of field officers are supposed to address the dimensions of poverty: economic, human, socio-cultural, political and protective aspects, their effectiveness is not very satisfactory.

This study aimed to understand the roles and assess the effectiveness of several selected Field Officers (FOs) viz. Agriculture Instructors, Extension Officers, Livestock Development Instructors, Agriculture Research and Production Assistants, Midwives, Public Health Inspectors, Estate Medical Assistants, Welfare Officers, Samurdhi Niyamakas, Grama Niladaris, Creche Attendants and FOs of Non-Governmental Organizations in poverty alleviation in the non-urban sector. Besides, research focused at identifying lapses in the services and proposing some suggestions to overcome existing drawbacks.

For this study two Divisional Secretary areas Doluwa and Deltota, were selected. Stratified random sampling technique was used and 84 households, 42 each from the rural and the estate sectors were selected to form the total sample in which a household was considered as the sampling unit. Primary and secondary data were used and the data-collecting instrument was a structured questionnaire.

Effectiveness of FOs was tested in terms of provision of education for occupational activities; literacy improvement; health, nutrition, sanitation, aspects; and empowerment at household level as well as community level. This was done by determining total household monthly income, literacy of eldest child, BMI (Body Mass Index) status of adult women (wives), level of shared responsibility at household level and level of participation at community level decision making respectively.

It was found in the rural sector that there was a strong positive relationship between provision of education related to occupational activities and total household monthly income as well as empowerment at community level and participation in community level decision making. In the estate sector, there was a positive relationship between provision of occupational related education and total family income. An association was found between provision of health related education and BMI status of adult women (wives) in the rural sector. The higher the exposure to FOs, better is the overall effectiveness of the service as perceived by the community. The Samurdhi Niyamaka was the most effective FO in the provision of several types of education in both the rural and the estate sectors with higher potential in addressing the poverty dimensions. The rural sector was better off compared to the estate sector in obtaining knowledge from FOs. Lack of provision of education, information, facilities, power and opportunities resulted from poor service of FOs.

More benefits, facilities, on-the-job training and practicable duty range for FOs with political backup, more avenues for NGOs, better organisation for identifying community needs and linkage of local service with international services at macro level are recommended as solutions to overcome the existing limitations.