

PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF THE SECOND GENERATION POPULATION IN THE MAHAWELI SETTLEMENT SYSTEM 'C'

M.D. NELSON

Department of Geography, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya

System C is one of the major settlement schemes of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Programme (AMDP) inaugurated in 1978. According to the settlement plan and its implementation procedure, the original settlers, such as (a) evacuees from the upstream development area, (b) landless people from the electorates, and (c) re-settlers from the old colonization schemes, have been brought to the System C in 1979 and completed the settlement development programmed in 1993. Under this programme, each farm family was given 2ha. for paddy cultivation and homestead gardens and the non-farm families were given business establishments in the main townships and the service centers. At present the total number of farm and non-farm families in System C is approximately 20,676. The estimated population is over 100 thousand.

The objective of this study is to examine the main problems and issues of the second-generation population in the settlement system C. The primary data for the analysis were obtained from field surveys conducted on the random sampling technique. Unpublished documentary sources maintained by official institutions also constituted an important source of data for this study.

It has been two decades since the settling of farm and non-farm families in the settlement area and subsequently the second-generation population has also increased during this period. Especially, the newly-married couples of the original farm families, defined as second-generation population, have made high demand for new land for their occupancy, though there is no land left for further expansion except several pockets of reservations spread in the settlement system. This situation led to create several problems such as (a) unauthorized land encroachments in the reservations and the surrounding areas, (b) land fragmentation, (c) illegal land transactions between the farmers and outsiders. Despite the demand for land, the problem of unemployment and underemployment among the youth has generated several other problems, like out-migration of those seeking new job opportunities in the main cities of the country. It is also evident that the lack of non-farm activities and the close down of the established agro-based processing industries and 'ready-made garment factories' have aggravated the unemployment problem among the youth. Not only the inefficiency of the provision of the community based service facilities, but also the present decision made by the government to dismantle the original administrative system has resulted in deep frustration among the settlers. Thus, the main consequence of these problems and issues is the enhancement of general poverty among the rural settler population and it also reflects the necessity for an appropriate new settlement development approach to solve this problem.