

**ELIMINATING DEAD-ENDS TO POVERTY: SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF INTER-VILLAGE CONNECTIVITY PROGRAMME**

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The objective of this paper is to assess the impact of a recent infra-structure program known as inter-village connectivity programme (IVCP) implemented initially in five DS divisions as a pilot project and then scaled up to several divisions and to argue that reducing geographical distance to service and market centres is a prerequisite of poverty reduction in rural areas in Sri Lanka.

The purpose of IVCP is to increase connectivity by building roads covering missing links with the participation of people who are to be benefitted and the political representatives of the relevant *Pradeshiya Sabhawa*. These link roads generally connect two or more places which were completely isolated before and as a result the communities have been deprived of services and access to market, thus exacerbating their poverty. This is a scenario where poverty is caught up with geography - poor people being distanced to and from everything. Some of these places, very poor villages have become socially dead ends because there are no transportation facilities to make connections with the other people or places. Existing systems of service delivery itself make this dead-end geography an easy excuse so that they do not have to provide services efficiently. This paper in essence, captures the social and economic impact of two 4 kms of concrete roads in 'Passara' and 'Kuruwita' on rural poor by systematically assessing two case studies using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The paper concludes that reducing geographical distance is very instrumental for reducing poverty and empowering rural communities.