

Dimensions of Rural Poverty in Sri Lanka: An attempt to identify the crucial aspects of well-being of rural poor

Semasinghe, W. M.

Abstract

Though, identification of the dimensions of poverty of a specific setting is crucial for poverty analysis and designing targeted poverty reducing programs, there is no consensus among researchers, policymakers etc. on the dimensions of poverty. In fact, the criteria for selecting dimensions used in the literature remain controversial. In the Sri Lankan context, though, poverty has been greatly discussed recently as in many other developing countries, most of the analysis focused solely on the identification of incidence and trends of poverty based on uni-dimensional approach. It is hard to find the methodical attempts which made to identify the aspects of well-being and poverty. The main objective of this paper was to identify the dimensions of rural poverty. Qizilbash's 'core poor' framework was applied in this analysis. Findings revealed that food, clean drinking water, agricultural lands, clothes, education and knowledge, health care, housing, income (money), and sanitation are the crucial aspects of well-being of rural people.

Keywords: poverty, multidimensionality, capability, rural poor, perceptions of the poor

Introduction

It is widely accepted that development is nothing other than eradicating poverty. Thus, the elimination of poverty is the overriding aim of those concerned with development. Poverty persists as a central challenge for the mankind even within the enormous efforts of individual nations, global and regional organizations as well as international community. Declaration of Millennium Development Goals accelerated the efforts of the nations to combat poverty ever than before.

Traditionally poverty is perceived as an entity derived from material deprivation hence intrinsically measures were connected with material components, mainly monetary terms. With the identification of the multidimensional nature of poverty, and money or income can do little in ensuring well-being of human-being the focus was diverged to identify the other dimensions of well-being and poverty. However, it is not an easy exercise because poverty is associated with numerous demographic, socio-economic, cultural, environmental, and physiological elements. These factors affect on well-being and poverty in multitudes of ways. Some have affected largely while others marginally depending on the prevailing circumstances.

Even though poverty studies in the context of Sri Lanka is vast, almost all of them have focused on material deprivation but less on non-material aspects. The purpose of this study is to identify the ‘core dimensions’ of rural poverty in Sri Lanka. The findings of the study will help to understand the real shape of the rural lives and to assess the poverty incidence of rural sector more realistically. Also identification of real dimensions will help to policymakers for efficient policy formulation.

The Nature of Poverty

Although alleviating poverty is nearly a universal goal among nations, international agencies etc there is no precise or universally accepted definition of poverty, and the commonly accepted way of identifying poor due to the multidimensional nature and the dynamism of poverty. The definitions, which have

been emerged to describe the concept, are bias on person, location, disciplinary or individual views, and ideological values as well as available in statistics.

Due to the multidimensional nature of poverty it can mean different things to different people. A family can be considered poor because of inadequate income, unmet basic needs, or both. Should a family with an income above the poverty line but lacking access to basic education, primary health care or safe drinking water be considered as non-poor? The answer will depend on the interpretation of poverty. According to a money-based interpretation, this family would not rank among the poor, while a wider interpretation would consider this family impoverished. Conceptual and methodological differences in defining poverty can lead to the identification of different individuals and groups as poor. Likewise, the way of measuring poverty is directly linked with the definition. Thus, the way of defining poverty is crucial in any discussion of poverty reduction because definitions of poverty have essentially connected with the vector of policy instruments. According to Lister (2004), the concept of poverty is translated into policy through a more precise set of definitions and measures.

The perception on poverty has expanded and gone beyond the traditional scope of poverty i.e. 'material deprivation' and it encompasses all the aspects of human life including economic, social, political, cultural, environmental, and even psychological aspects.

The main characteristic of most of the definitions emerged initially on poverty were confined mostly to material deprivation and emphasizing inadequacy of material requirements such as food, money (or income), resources etc which necessary for human well being. This was because in that age poverty was considered as a matter of material deprivation. For an instance, Rowntree (1901) in his famous study on poverty in York has defined poverty as 'lack of food necessities to maintain the physical efficiency'. Accordingly, conceptualizing poverty in this

phase was restricted to monetary measures. This approach of poverty which is known as 'welfarist approach', concentrated mainly on economic deprivation and either income or consumption expenditure was used as measuring yardstick. Since this approach concentrate only on income or expenditure it is labeled as 'uni-dimensional approach'. Indeed, such a classification had significant advantages, notably, the convenience of numerical evaluation at both macro and micro levels. However there are several drawbacks of monetary approaches in assessing human well-being and poverty. It reveals the freedom to achieve but not real achievements of the people since income is only a mean to achieve. Possession of sufficient income does not necessarily guarantee the high level of living standard.

Klasen?

In 1980's the definition broadened encompassing non-monetary variables such as housing, literacy, life expectancy, too. This is known as Basic Needs Approach (BNA) pioneered by the World Bank's Economist Paul Streeten. With taken into consideration such variables, the key concepts behind poverty have evolved considerably in following years, particularly with the issue took centre stage in academic debates on development across disciplines. It has become widely accepted among scholars, researchers, policy makers, international agencies etc that poverty may be defined in many ways, and lack of access to basic services such as health and education may ostensibly be a greater cause of poverty and underdevelopment than income deprivation alone.

The World Development Report in 1990 defined poverty as "the inability to attain a minimal standard of living". Food and non food requirements were included in evaluating living standard. The conception of poverty has been broadened further

over time and poor people's definitions go beyond the material requirements and revealed important psychological aspects of poverty. As poor people perceived deprivation has many dimensions, including not only lack of income and wealth, but also social inferiority, physical weakness, disability and sickness, vulnerability, physical and social isolation, insecurity, powerlessness and humiliation (Beck, 1994; Chambers, 1997; United Nations, 2002). The value judgments have also been involved in defining poverty. All these facets of poverty are inextricably linked to one another. The World Bank's perception on poverty has also evolved over time. In 1980's its strategies mostly focused on economic growth and equip people with basic needs through the trickle down effect of the growth. By the 1990's the strategy broadened and had been emphasized the labor-intensive growth, social sector investment and transfer/safety nets for those excluded. The 'World Development Report' in 2001, 'Attacking Poverty' does not repudiate the earlier vision but broadened it further using the language of opportunity, empowerment and security. In explaining poverty the report has maintained that, *Poverty is hunger. Poverty is lack of shelter. Poverty is being sick and not being able to see a doctor. Poverty is not having access to school and not knowing how to read. Poverty is not having a job, is fear for the future, living one day at a time. Poverty is losing a child to illness brought about by unclean water. Poverty is powerlessness, lack of representation and freedom.* This implies that the how the dimension of poverty has broadened.

United Nations has also emphasized the aspects such as 'lack of participation in decision making', 'a violation of human dignity', 'powerlessness', and 'susceptibility to violence' in defining poverty. Narayan (2000) argues that 'the defining experiences of poor people involve highly limited choices and an inability to make themselves heard or to influence or control what happens to them.

Since the characteristics, causes and consequences of poverty vary by gender, age, culture, and other social and economic contexts, the definitions also vary according to the dimension taken into account, too. For example, people deprived of social contracts are described as being socially isolated, and hence poor in the social dimension. Similarly, people living in squalid housing are viewed as 'housing poor' and people with health deficits as 'health poor' etc. Economists prefer to identify poor in terms of 'economic position' or 'economic well-being' which can be measured one way or another. For example, according to Ravallion (1994: 3) "poverty can be said to exist in a given society when one or more persons do not attain a level of economic well-being deemed to constitute a reasonable minimum by the standards of that society". In this way thousands of books and articles on the subject have been appeared over the last two centuries.

Further, those speak about the pain brought about by their unavoidable violation of social norms, their inability to maintain cultural identity through participating in traditions, festivals, and rituals and their inability to fully participate in community life lead to a break down of social relation (http://www.brown.edu/Departments/world_Hungerprogram/hungerweb/intro/poverty.html). As pointed out by Chambers (1997) deprivation, as poor people perceived, has many dimension including not only lack of income and wealth, but also social inferiority, physical weakness, disability and sickness, vulnerability, physical and social isolation, powerlessness, and humiliation. Narayan (2000) claimed that 'when poor people speak about well-being, they speak about the material, social, physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions in addition to security and the freedom of choice of action. These facts reveal that it is very important to realize the poor peoples' perceptions for better understanding of poverty. According to Lister (2004), the definitions of poverty vary according to their narrowness or breadth i.e. whether they are confined to the material core; the nature

of that material core, and whether they embrace also relational/symbolic factors associated with poverty. The debate over the conventional approaches which emphasized lack of income or deprivation of basic needs, was gaining momentum in the late 90's.

Amartya Sen introduced a detailed and novel approach to understanding poverty. Sen described this broader conception as a lack of human capabilities that enable a person to live a life he or she values encompassing such domains as income, health, education, empowerment, and human rights (Sen, 2000: 87-90). According to Sen a person's well-being depends on what he can do and be? Happiness or desire fulfillment represents only one aspect of human existence (Sen, 1984: 512). There are many other things of intrinsic value (notably rights and positive freedoms) that are neglected by the welfare approach (Sen, 2000: 62). In line with these perspectives, at present, it is widely accepted that poverty is better seen in terms of capability failure than the lack of income or consumption, or failure to meet the 'basic needs' of specified commodities. Indeed, people can suffer acute deprivation in many aspects of life, beyond those defined as basic needs, even if they possess adequate command over commodities. As Sen argues, poverty must be seen as the deprivation of 'basic capabilities' rather than merely as lowness of incomes (2000: 87). However, Sen does not deny the decisive role of income in determining a person's well-being and poverty because lack of income can be a principle reasons for a person's ability to command over resources or commodities. According to him income is only valuable in so far as it increases the capabilities of individuals and thereby permits functioning in a society. Capability perspective concentrates on deprivations that are *intrinsically* important, unlike low income which is only *instrumentally* significant. Furthermore, there are influences on capability deprivation - and thus on real poverty - *other* than lowness of income since income is not the only instrument in generating capabilities. The relevant

functionings can vary from such elementary things as being adequately nourished, being a good health, avoiding escapable morbidity, and premature mortality, safely sheltered, free from illiteracy etc. to more complex achievements such as being happy, having self respect, taking part in the life of the community and so on (Sen, 1992; 2000; Shanmugaratnam, 2001: 267).

The Human Development Index (HDI), one of the most popular measures of development developed in 1990 by [Pakistani](#) economist [Mahbub ul Haq](#) and Sir Richard Jolly and widely used by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) includes life expectancy, literacy, educational attainment, and GDP per capita as crucial indicators of human well-being.

The Human Poverty Approach introduced by UNDP in its Human Development Report in 1997 has taken into account three basic dimensions of deprivation: a short life, lack of basic education and lack of access to public and private resources. The Human Poverty Index which formulated employing these dimensions to measure the poverty incidence concentrates on the deprivation in the three essential elements of human life already reflected in the HDI: longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Participatory Poverty Appraisal (PPA) contributed largely to broaden the scope of poverty. This approach attempted to grasp the peoples' perceptions on poverty based on their own experience. As poor people perceived deprivation has many dimensions, including not only lack of income and wealth, but also social inferiority, physical weakness, disability and sickness, vulnerability, physical and social isolation, insecurity, powerlessness and humiliation (Beck, 1994; Chambers, 1997; United Nations Organization, 2002).

Even though the scope of poverty expanded over time still monetary based approaches are more popular among researchers as well as in policymakers. This is mainly because though multidimensionality of poverty could be conceptualized straightforwardly, operationalization is not so easy. Some of the non-monetary

dimensions are qualitative, and some are unobservable, hence it is difficult to quantify or measure directly. For example knowledge, health level, quality of drinking water, freedom, dignity, voice etc are not directly observed and quantify.

In spite of these practical constrains researchers and international agencies made several attempts to identify the relevant dimensions and to formulate the appropriate index to quantify the poverty incidence.

Specifying dimensions of well-being and poverty

Whatever the definition, in any attempt to evaluate the incidence of poverty and to formulate the effective policy measures, identification of the dimension of poverty is crucial. However, there is no consensus among researchers on what elements should include into the list. Although some favor the argument on one list of dimensions for every location, for example Nussbaum (2000), others for example, Alkire (2002) disagree. Indeed it is impractical to think of such a specific list due to the heterogeneity of human being as well as the diversities of the locations. For example, the elements affect on the well-being of people in the European countries differ from the people in the Asian or African countries. Even within the same country, necessities differ from rural to urban. And also the elements included into the list depend on the broadness of the definition. For example the elements are few if poverty is perceived as lack of basic needs or basic capabilities. But if someone desire to take into account more complex functionings such as happiness, freedom, participation in politics, having a car, having self respect, taking part in the life of the community etc the list will be much bigger. Thus there is no even a little sense to think about a common list of dimensions. Meanwhile, there are no commonly accepted criteria that can be adopted to select relevant dimensions. Therefore researchers explicitly or implicitly acknowledge that formulating an identical list for each study is desirable. However the researcher must pay the attention strictly to avoid the possible risk of bias in selecting elements. Undeniably the researcher's

personal attitudes, customs, belief, social norms, his own discipline, his value preferences, data availability, available facilities etc will influence in selecting relevant dimensions. These will influence on the universality of the findings and conclusions. Robeyns (2003; 2003a) has suggested five criteria that can be used to avoid possible bias in selecting relevant dimensions. They are explicit formulation, methodological justification, sensitivity to context, different level of generality and exhaustion and non-reduction. However, as Robeyns says, these provide a general guidance to avoid or at least to reduce the possible bias that can be occurred selecting dimensions but not rules that should strictly follow. Alkire (2007) has recorded five principles that researchers generally follow either alone or as a combination. They are existing data or convention, normative assumptions, public consensus, ongoing deliberative participatory process, and empirical evidence regarding people's values.

Many researchers have endeavored to make lists of relevant dimensions using diverse methodologies. Klasen (2000) has chosen 14 components to measure the poverty and deprivation in South Africa in his study on “Measuring Poverty and Deprivation in South Africa”. The list includes education, income, wealth, housing, water, sanitation, energy, employment, transport, financial services, nutrition, health care, safety, and perceived well-being. However, he has not clearly mentioned the methodology which he followed to select these components.

Clark and Qizilbash (2005) have selected 12 components as ‘core dimensions’ in their study on ‘Core Poverty, Basic Capabilities and Vagueness: An Application to the South African Context’. The dimensions are clean water, health, access to health care, housing, jobs, education, freedom, nutrition, safety, self worth and respect, survival and religion. They applied the approach of ‘core poverty’ developed by Qizilbash (2003) on the insights in Kit Fine’s ‘supervaluationist’¹ account of vagueness. This approach allows developing a method that can be used to identify the admissible dimension of poverty and well-being.

¹ Fine, K., (1975), *Vagueness, truth and logic*, *Syntheses*, (30), pp. 265 – 3000.

Siddhisena and Jayathilaka (2004) have selected 7 dimensions as the most important factors to meet the basic needs of the poor in their effort to develop a composite indicator of multidimensional poverty to capture the non-income dimension of poverty in Sri Lanka as a part of the study on “Identification of the Poor in Sri Lanka: Development of Composite Indicator and Regional Poverty Lines”. The study is based on an analysis of data from two household surveys in Sri Lanka, viz., Sri Lanka Integrated Survey (SLIS) of 1999/2000 commissioned by the World Bank and the Consumer Finance and Socio Economic Survey (CFSES) of 1996/97. The selected indicators are: nutrition, primary education, health care, sanitation, safe water, housing facilities and income. The Weighted Principle Component (PC) based Factor Analysis was used to select and weight the factors.

In addition to that number of researchers has attempted to determine the relevant dimensions of well-being and poverty to the specific contexts. Some examples are given in table 1. Even though each list has several identical components such as education and health most are differ from each other. For example some lists include economic and social components while others in addition to those physiological components too. These differences might be due to the heterogeneity of the context which comes under study and the influence of the personal attitudes of the researchers and the perception over the well-being and poverty. The differences between contexts are acceptable but within the context could be avoid or at least reduce by concentrating on the people’s perception comes under investigation. It is no doubt that people are the most reliable source of information for themselves.

Poverty Studies of Sri Lanka

Poverty is one of the most popular fields of studies in Sri Lanka among others mainly because on the one hand poverty persists as a central socioeconomic issue for over long period of time even within the enormous effort to overcome the issue. On the other hand poverty has become a sociopolitical issue and has acquired a greater interest of party politics. Poverty emerged internationally as a key socioeconomic

issue of human being recently. International community as well as world organizations such as the World Bank and UNO has given highest priority of their development efforts to combat poverty. This is another possible reason to gain much interest of researchers, academics, development activists, NGOs, policymakers etc on this field of study recently. The studies have focused various aspects of poverty including incidence of poverty at given point of time, time trends, gender dimension of poverty, causes of poverty and the impact of various policies on poverty etc. However, mostly the findings of different studies are significantly different due to the methodological differences between studies. The most salient feature of those studies is the use of monetary based measures to identify the poor and to measure the extent of poverty. As Lakshman (1997: 199) pointed out any one of the three broad type of alternatives has been adopted as the entitlement measure: i) the value of a bundle of food commodities, ii) the value of a bundle of basic requirements, and iii) a certain amount of (monthly) expenditure on food or on basic requirements with no reference to any commodity basket. Poverty lines constructed based on the above alternatives has used to identify and to separate the poor from non-poor. Since income or expenditure are not capable to capture adequately the well being level of the people the picture painted by most of the studies are partial.

The important role of non-monetary dimensions of well-being such as nutrition, health, education has recognized even before the independence. Sri Lanka was one of the first developing countries that understood the multidimensional nature of poverty (World Bank, 2000; Kelegama, 2001), and the use of the indicators other than income or food consumption is evident even in the earliest discussions and descriptions of poverty in Sri Lanka (Gunawardana, 2004). Public sector has been playing a significant role of providing those services not only to the poor but also non-poor. However, the role of non-monetary dimensions has not been adequately taken into account in poverty assessments and until recent in poverty alleviation programs. Although emphasis in recent discourse and on policy documents has been

on the need to go beyond the monetary approach to poverty, the measurement of poverty in Sri Lanka has traditionally focused on this approach (Gunewardena, 2004). It is hardly observe the studies used composite indices that enable to capture the achievements of the crucial requirements for well-being such as education, health, housing, water and sanitation. In addition to the attempt that has made by Siddhisena and Jayathilaka (2004) to develop a composite indicator of multidimensional poverty for Sri Lanka recently, as mentioned in section 2 above, other such attempts cannot observe.

Though public sector committed to provide basic needs since before the political independence, targeted poverty alleviation programs initiated in the end of 1980s. Janasaviya is the first targeted poverty alleviation program in the country. This was succeeded by Samurdhi program in 1990s. As a whole, those programs attempted to address mainly the fulfillment of material requirements of the poor i.e. income, consumption, enhancement of income earning skills etc but paid less attention on other aspects. This is because still researchers, policymakers would like to perceive poverty as a state of material deprivation. This might be a possible reason for less effectiveness of poverty alleviation efforts. Identification of other aspects of well-being specific for the particular setting is important to design effective poverty alleviation strategies.

As mentioned earlier the objective of this study is to determine the dimensions of rural poverty. Though poverty extent is highest in the estate sector according to the recent estimates, number of poor is larger in rural sector as over 70 percent of the total population is living in this sector. Further, as experience shows that the lives of rural dwellers are intolerable though they earned relatively higher income. Thus identification of non-monetary aspects of well-being of rural people is crucial in terms of policy formulation. Such attempt is more important in the context of Sri Lanka because it is hard to observe the poverty studies focused on multidimensionality of poverty.

Conceptual framework

Determination of the relevant dimension is prior and important requirement in any attempt to assess the multidimensional poverty in a given setting. However, it is not an easy exercise because on the one hand as mentioned earlier there is not an accepted set of criteria which can be used to select the dimensions. On the other hand the necessities determine the well-being varies person to person, society to society, region to region and so on due to the heterogeneity of human being and physical conditions. Thus it is difficult to set a precise list of dimension for a particular setting. Because of this researchers have used diverse methodologies in order to select relevant dimensions for their own studies. However, it is certain that peoples' perceptions that come under study are more important in this practice.

This study is motivated from the framework developed by Qizilbash in his studies on “*A note on the measurement of poverty and vulnerability in the South African Context*” *A note on the measurement of poverty and vulnerability in the South African Context*” (2002) and “*Vague language and precise measurement: the case of poverty*” (2003). Indeed, Qizilbash inspired from Kit Fine's (1975)² ‘supervaluationist’ account of vagueness. On this account, a specification of poverty is ‘admissible’ if (roughly speaking) it makes sense as a way of articulating the notion of poverty. Furthermore, according to this framework, a vague statement is ‘super-true’ if and only if it is true on all admissible ways of making it more precise. In this sense, if anyone is poor on all admissible ways of making ‘poor’ more precise is ‘core poor’. The important characteristic of this approach is that if someone (household) is doing sufficiently badly in terms of any one dimension, he/she (it) is ‘core poor’ as long as that dimension is core. Making this judgment, it is not necessary concern how she/he or it is doing on all dimensions.

² Fine, K., (1975), Vagueness, truth and logic, *Synthese*, (30), pp. 265-300.

The next issue arisen in relating to this framework is how to define the so-called ‘core dimensions’. One can find an idea on how to address this issue from the writings of Max Black³. According to Black, various people specify the relevant terms in different ways. The degree of ambiguity about the use of the relevant terms might then be measured by the extent of assent or dissent about its use by those who use it (Clark and Qizilbash, 2005). On the basis of this notion, among various relevant dimensions of poverty ‘core dimension’ can be identified using the degree of assent or dissent on particular dimension of the relevant group of people. Virtually, a dimension can be defined as ‘core’ or ‘basic’ if there is little or no dissent about it being a dimension of poverty. At the same time, it can be judged that a dimension is admissible if even a small proportion of people identify it as a dimension of poverty. To the contrary, if no one sees a particular dimension as an element of poverty it is not admissible. If Fine’s ‘supervaluationist’ framework combined with Black’s insight, 100% endorsements of the respondents are required for a dimension count as a ‘core dimension’. That is only dimensions that every persons who interviewed in a field survey identified as critical dimensions can be counted as ‘core dimensions’. To the contrary, if any one fails to endorse a dimension it must consider as ‘non-core dimension’. This line of thought is to be employed to define the relevant dimensions in this study.

Methodology of the study

Study Area

This empirical assessment is based on the primary data collected from two different locations i.e. Viharagala and Waliwewa in Sooriyawewa Divisional Secretariat in the Hambantota District of Southern Sri Lanka. The district has an area

³ Black, M. (1937), *Vagueness: an exercise in logical analysis*, **Philosophy of Science**, (4), pp. 427 – 455.

of 2609 km² with approximately 5.5 million populations of whom 96% are considered rural residents. It is one of the highly deprived districts in many dimensions when compared with other districts in the country. The district has 592 Grama Niladhari (GN) divisions, the lowest unit in the administrative structure of the country, each with an average area of 4.4 km². Hambantota district comprises of 12 divisional Secretariats (DS), the next in the hierarchy of administration. Hambantota was ranked as the third poorest district in the country and the poorest coastal district in the country, recording 32 percent of its people as poor in 2002. However, during the past five years since 2002 the district has gained a remarkable progress in terms of poverty incidence, reducing Headcount Index to 12.7 percent. Sooriyawewa is the poorest DS division among the 12 DS divisions of the district. Viharagala and Weliwewa are relatively diverse settings in terms of location, accessibility to essential services such as education, health, drinking water etc. Weliwewa is relatively deprived village when compared to Viharagala.

Sampling Method

A total of 110 households 60 from Viharagala and 50 from Weliwewa aged 18 or over were selected for the questionnaire survey. The aim of the survey was to capture and identify the people's views on the essential dimensions that affect on their lives. The households were selected completely a randomized way and then the individuals who responded for the questionnaires were chosen purposively from the selected household. In this exercise an attempt was made as possible as to pick the individuals with sufficient education level well enough to understand questions, and also a persons who playing a key role within the household. Accordingly, it could be directed the questionnaires mostly to the heads of the selected households. However, when he/she was not in the home at the time of the survey or if he/she is not with sufficient education level so as to understand the enquiry, the filed assistances were

advised to direct the questions to the second responsible person of the household. However there were only few such occasions.

Identification of Essential Dimensions

Identification exercise of essential dimensions was done in two steps. Firstly, with the aid of pre-tested short questionnaire the respondents were asked to make a list of elements which are essential to improve their living standards. By doing so instead of giving a pre-defined list, it was intended to avoid the possible risk of omitting relevant dimensions on the one hand and including irrelevant dimensions on the other. Respondents have indicated a large number of elements in their own wards. All those elements were sorted-out into 25 dimensions as given in table 2.

Table 2: The Dimensions of well-being of Poor

Dimension	Dimension
1. Agricultural land	14. Irrigation water
2. Clean drinking water	15. Job
3. Clothes	16. Livestock
4. Credit facilities	17. Market
5. Education and Knowledge	18. Peace
6. Electricity	19. Playground
7. Fertilizer	20. Roads
8. Food	21. Safe
9. Freedom	22. Sanitation
10. Harmony	23. Telecommunication
11. Health	24. Transport
12. Housing	25. Vocational training
13. Income (money)	

Source: Field survey data base -1 (March, 2007)

Although all these dimensions affect on the quality of life, only some of them are *critically affect for a good life*. For an example, clean drinking water is an essential requirement but not telecommunication. Thus, such critical dimensions should have to separate from the above set of elements. This issue can be handled based on the conceptual framework explained previously. According to Fine's accounts, critical dimensions are necessarily being among these 'admissible' dimensions.

Hence, secondly, an attempt was made to filter the most basic elements i.e. essential dimensions, which are needed for a *good life* within the rural setting from the set of 'admissible' dimensions. In fact the *good life* means here is the life *satisfied with the essentials for a tolerable life* rather than a *life with broader and high standard*. However, it is the state higher than that of just *survives*. Hence clearly it should include the elements more than food requirements. Consequently, the respondents were asked to mark the most crucial elements among these in order to ensure a good life for their families?" Field assistances were advised to further explain the question using the alternative phrases such as, "what is a good life", and "the essential dimensions are the fundamentals without which a person cannot cope or manage at all, and without which life is unbearable. These can be aspects of life that people have, or don't have and need", but do not suggest any possible answers. Further they were asked to encourage the respondent to give at least five dimensions.

Table 3 includes the mostly stated dimensions with the number of respondents which mentioned particular dimension as an 'essential dimension' and the percentages. According to the Black's view, only one dimensions i.e. food, can be counted as an essential dimension from all the above elements because others has not received 100% endorsement. Certainly 100% endorsement is a rigorous criterion which cannot hold in practice. One cannot be expected practically *all people* do mention all the elements of a set of dimensions as essential dimensions. This is mainly because peoples are not homogeneous; their perception, experience, aspiration

etc might differ from each other. Also, it cannot be expected 100 percent perfect interviewing process without even a tiny error. If we strictly retain on the above criterion, only food would classify as an ‘essential dimension’. If so, the notion of multidimensionality of poverty would be irrational. Not only that, we are compelled to classify some dimensions (e.g. clean drinking water and housing) which is a very small number of people failed to endorse as ‘non-essential dimension’. Hence, it was decided to treat a dimension that would classify as an ‘essential dimension’ though a ‘relatively small’ number of respondents fail to endorse it.

Table 1: Various Perceptions on Human Capabilities

Grisez <i>et al</i> (1987) ⁴ Basic human values	Nussbaum (2000) Central human capabilities	Barrientos (2000a) Well-being indicators	Dayal and Goush(1993) Intermediate needs	Alkire and Black (1997) ⁵	Robeyns (2003a)
1. Bodily life- -health vigor and safety 2. Knowledge 3. Skillful performance in work and play 4. Friendship 5. Practical reasonableness 6. Self-integration 7. Harmony with ultimate source of reality	1. Life 2. Bodily health 3. Bodily integrity 4. Sense, thought, imagination 5. Emotions 6. Practical reasons 7. Affiliation 8. Other species 9. Play 10. Control over one's environment	1. Health, 2. Life Satisfaction 3. Safety 4. Social Participation 5. Political 6. Participation 7. Financial control 8. Debt service 9. Durables 10. Water	1. Nutrition/ food/water 2. Protective housing 3. Work 4. Physical environment 5. Health care 6. Security in childhood 7. Significant primary relationship 8. Physical security 9. Economic security 10. Safe birth control/ childbearing 11. Basic education	1. Life 2. Knowledge and appreciation of beauty 3. Work and play 4. Friendship 5. Self-integration 6. Coherent self- determination 7. Transcendence 8. Other species	1. Life and physical health 2. Mental well-being 3. Bodily integrity and safety 4. Social relations 5. Political empowerment 6. Education and knowledge 7. Domestic work and non-market care 8. Paid work and other projects 9. Shelter and environment 10. Mobility 11. Leisure activities 12. Time-autonomy 13. Respect 14. Religion

⁴ Grisez, Germain and John Finnis (1987), *Practical Principles, Moral Truth and Ultimate Ends*, American Journal of Jurisprudence. 32, 99-151

⁵ Alkire, Sabine and Rufus Black. 1997. *Practical Reasoning Theory of Development Ethics: Furthering the Capabilities Approach*, Journal of International Development 9(2): 263-279.

Table 3: the Dimensions got highest number of Endorsements

Dimension	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1. Agricultural lands	105	93.63
2. Clean drinking water	108	99.09
3. Clothes	108	98.18
4. Education and Knowledge	107	97.27
5. Electricity	103	93.63
6. Food	110	100.00
7. Health	105	95.45
8. Housing	109	99.09
9. Income (money)	108	98.18
10. irrigation water	103	93.63
11. Safety	98	89.09
12. Sanitation	105	95.45
13. Transport	102	92.72

Source: Field survey data base -1 (March, 2007)

Next, the term ‘relatively small’ must be clearly defined because the term vague. It might be any small percentage of responses. If it is as small as 1% of the respondents’ only two components i.e. food and clean drinking water select as ‘essential dimensions’. This cut-off is rigorous as 100% endorsement. If it increases up to 10% all the components will include into the set of ‘essential dimensions’. Hence, as Clark and Qizilbash (2005) suggest 95% criterion is salient than others. Accordingly, 95% of the endorsement is adequate for any dimension to be an ‘essential dimension’ for a good life. To the contrary, any dimension which has not endorsed over 5% of the respondents is classifies as a ‘non-basic capability’.

The 95% rule clearly separates the 8 from the 12 dimensions of table 2. They are clean drinking water, clothes, food, health, housing, income (money), Education & knowledge and sanitation. Though agricultural land, electricity, irrigation water, safety and transport has identified as valuable dimension those have not been qualified to be selected as ‘essential dimensions’.

Summary and Conclusion

The objective of this study was to identify the essential dimensions of poverty of rural inhabitant of Sri Lanka. Since poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon in nature, monetary approaches are incapable to reveal the real level of living standard of people. To understand the real circumstances of the lives of people and for the effective policy formulation towards enhancing living standard of people, identification of true factors affect their lives is very important. As researchers disclosed the dimensions determine the living standard varies person to person, country to country and region to region depending on the heterogeneity of people and diversity of the locations. Hence, the formulation of specific criteria to select the relevant dimensions or formulation of a universal list of dimensions is practically irrational. Thus, it is widely accepted that researchers have freedom to select the relevant dimensions for each of their studies.

In this exercise, an attempt was made to determine the factors affecting the living standard of rural people in Sri Lanka. This was mainly based on the framework suggested by Qizilbash with the inspiration of Kit Fine's (1975) 'supervaluationist' account of vagueness. Lastly, the relevant dimensions were selected based on the peoples' understanding on the lives they value. The list of dimensions differ from only one i.e. clothes, of the determinants of Siddhisena and Jayathilaka (2004) which used weighted Principle Component based Factor analysis to select the relevant dimensions. This proves that core dimensions not differ significantly according to the sector in Sri Lanka. Also the people's perceptions are more reliable in determination of relevant dimensions.

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