

**Poverty Reduction and Women Empowerment in Rural
Society of Sri Lanka: a Comparative Analysis on Public
and NGOs Intervention in Rural Development**

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is a country passing the high human development level due to the recent development efforts already implemented by the government of Sri Lanka and other stakeholders. However, poverty is an issue still influencing the peoples' livelihoods and also in the social and cultural spheres in the rural and estate sectors. Recent studies show that there is a gradual reduction in poverty, especially in the urban and rural sectors than in the estate sector. The present study is focused on a particular aspect of poverty reduction in the rural society of Sri Lanka while emphasizing women's empowerment as a strategy of poverty reduction.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to investigate into how the women's empowerment process is utilized as a strategy in poverty reduction programmes which are conducted by the public and NGOs sectors among rural society of Sri Lanka. By tracing this main objective, the study has identified the contributions made by both public and NGO sectors at macro and micro levels to reduce the poverty incidents in two selected Divisional Secretariat Divisions in the Anuradhapura District. To prove this main objective and specific objectives identified in the study, a particular methodology has been employed using both quantitative and qualitative methods, paradigms, data collection techniques, and data analysis tools.

The study revealed that there are many poverty reduction programmes and activities being implemented by the public and NGOs sectors at macro and micro levels while focusing on poor women. However, when the role of the public and NGOs involvement in the process of empowering poor women in their programmes are analyzed comparatively, the NGO sectors have played a more significant role than the public sector. Although, these programmes have played a significant role in increasing women's participation in household decision making and access and control over family resources, they have not caused any improvements on the women's social status beyond the family.

It is evident that these programmes which are conducted by the public and NGOs sectors have assisted in increasing women's decision-making abilities at the household level, but has not on a large scale changed their status at the community or regional levels such as in improving the women's status in the areas of leadership positions, community-based activities, political participation, paid employment and participation in development activities. Against this background, it can be concluded that these empowering programmes have afforded many opportunities to women to improve their family status within their families rather than their social status within society. Therefore, such programmes have helped in empowering women and reduce poverty level at household level at large; but they have not become considerable key strategies in women's empowerment and poverty reduction within rural society in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: Poverty Reduction, Women's Empowerment, Public Intervention, NGOs Intervention, Rural Development