

# **A Study of Issues related to Empowerment of Female-Headed Households in Rural Areas in Sri Lanka**

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## **Introduction**

Women empowerment enables women to identify their latent potentials and skills in decision making, active participation and implementation of policies and programmes. According to that, main feature of empowerment process is having power to control materials, wealth, intellectual initiatives and ideologies and this process has related to welfare, upliftment, community participation and poverty alleviation (Batiwala, 1995). Female-Headed Households (FHHs) is a new structural form of household and this type of households have become significant phenomenon in the last half of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century (Baros, Fox & Mendonca, 1994). “Female Headed Households are households where either no adult males are present, owing to divorce, separation, migration, non-marriage or widowhood, or where men, although present, do not contribute to the household income, because of illness or disability, old age, alcoholism or similar incapacity” (ABC of women workers’ rights and gender equality, 2007:81). Recently, it can be identified a marked increase of Female-Headed Households (*FHHs*) in Sri Lanka. According to the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey (*HIES*) 2016, out of 5.4 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.4 million households or 25.8 percent of the households were female headed (Household Income and Expenditure Survey Final Report, 2016). Although *FHHs* have occupied a prominent place in development discourse globally, very limited researches have been conducted regarding women empowerment related to *FHHs* in Sri Lanka. As a result, there are some knowledge gaps in policymaking and development discourse regarding *FHHs*.

## **Methodology**

Accordingly, the main objective of this study was to identify the social issues related to empowerment of women heads in rural areas. This empirical research was conducted in five *Grama Niladari* divisions of *Galgamuwa* divisional secretariat division which conveyed a marked increase of *FHHs* in Sri Lanka. Data were collected from a hundred *FHHs* through purposive sampling method. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used as primary data collection techniques. The research was conducted based on the survey method.

## **Results and Discussions**

Generally, head of household has power and authority to apply control for family affairs and it has originated from moral conditions or legal obligations. According to Mencher,

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