

Labour Turnout in the Plantation Sector: A Study on Selected Large Scale Tea Estates in Sri Lanka

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One of the major Contemporary issues in the plantation sector is centred on labour. There is a mismatch between the availability of labour and their turnout. Around 30 per cent of the resident workforce does not pursue their traditional estate job. It is fact generally observed in the tea plantation sector. The sector also underwent several changes in recent past but the rate of dependency on manual labour still persists. Tea sector is highly labour intensive and it requires labour right –round the year. The nature of work demands the involvement of both the male and the female labourers. The reasons for lack of labourers for the state work are to be analysed. The studies conducted by various experts and institutes have revealed that the youth in the plantation sector are not keen to follow the foot steps of their parents in the plantation sector. The studies also highlight that the style of privatised estates management is not attractive enough for the youth in the estates. Moreover, the welfare system provided by the estate has not been adequately inspiring them to remaining in the registered labour force in the estates and contributed to the reasons for non-participation of the estate work.

However, the impact of education, gender difference and prevalence of welfare schemes on labour turnout has not been sufficiently addressed. Since, there are hardly any facts based on household survey, it was decided to conduct to do a survey in the selected tea estates. Systematic random sample was applied and selected a total of five estates, three representing the tea region of high elevation (TRHE) and two representing the tea region of low elevation (TRLE). Total household survey covered in this study was 72, comprising 42 from TRHE and 30 from TRLE. The survey found that the opportunity of receiving education has greatly contributed to the low levels of labour turnout and the same situation prevailed in both regions in this study. As far as gender variable is concerned, the low level of turnout for estate work was mostly found among the male workers and it varied greatly in the two regions under study. Existing welfare schemes are not them adequate to the health care of the workers and, therefore, not attractive enough for them to be remained in the estate jobs.

The suggestions are (a) an appropriate method of management style should be adopted for the recruitment of educated youth for the estate work; (b) replanting activity should be accelerated in the tea estates. This may prevent the male workers from seeking jobs elsewhere and it will lead to increase the productivity of tea as well. Thirdly, (c) estate management should be given a free hand to provide welfare schemes to the workers. These measures will be in the best interest of labour, industry, state and society.

Key Words: Labour turnout; Labour intensive sector; Household survey; Welfare schemes; Management

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