

3. POVERTY PROFILES OF THE FOUR DISTRICTS

The poverty situation in Sri Lanka varies according to the criteria and indicators used. According to the *National Human Development Report* (UNDP 1998), 27 percent of the population of Sri Lanka is poor, based on the Human Poverty Index. According to the Department of Census and Statistics (1995/96), 22.9 percent of the population is poor using a lower consumption poverty line (SLRs791 per person per month), while 25.9 percent is poor using a higher consumption poverty line (SLRs950 per person per month).

Neither the UNDP Report nor the Department of Census and Statistics data includes the districts of the North and the East where poverty levels are estimated to have reached critical proportions in comparison to the rest of the country, due to the armed conflict that has prevailed since 1983. Thus, the inclusion of the North and East would substantially increase the national poverty level in the country and erode the gains in poverty reduction claimed since 1985/86 with the available statistics.¹

In addition, there are striking regional disparities in poverty, even in the districts, which are not within the conflict zone. There is some correlation between human and consumption poverty at provincial level. Thus, Uva Province has both the highest human (27 percent) and consumption poverty (55 percent for the higher poverty line) levels, while Western province has both the lowest human (14 percent) and consumption poverty (23 percent for the higher poverty line) levels in the island. However, the correlation between human and consumption poverty at district level is not as clear, except for Moneragala and Ratnapura at the higher end, and Colombo and Gampaha at the lower end.

Of the four selected districts, we are unable to provide a quantitative analysis of Trincomalee due to the lack of data since 1986/87. However, according to consumption poverty lines and the Human Poverty Index, all three of the other districts are low-performing districts, with

¹ The Department of Census and Statistics *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1995/96*, the UNDP *Human Development Report 1998*, and the recent World Bank *Country Report* have failed to indicate that the national poverty levels and poverty indices computed for Sri Lanka as a whole do not include the Northern and Eastern provinces. As these lowest-performing provinces are excluded from the national statistics, it is reasonable to assume that the poverty situation in the country is far worse than currently projected.

12 Perceptions of the Poor

Hambantota closest to the national average, yet far from high-performing districts such as Colombo and Gampaha (Table 1).

Table 1: Incidence of Consumption and Human Poverty in Moneragala, Badulla, and Hambantota Districts (percent)

District	Households under Lower Consumption Poverty Line, 1995/96	Households under Higher Consumption Poverty Line, 1995/96	Households under Human Poverty Index, 1994
Moneragala	49	66	29
Badulla	30	48	27
Hambantota	27	43	23
Sri Lanka	23	26	18

Sources: *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1995/96*, Department of Census and Statistics; *National Human Development Report 1998*.

Although district-level longitudinal statistics are not available, it can be extrapolated from provincial level statistics that consumption poverty levels declined in all three districts between 1985/86 and 1990/91 and increased between 1990/91 and 1995/96. However, relative incomes have increased for the lowest 40 percent of households in Moneragala and Hambantota districts over the 1985/1986-1995/1996 period while decreasing for Badulla district (Table 2).

Table 2: Percentage of Income Received by the Lowest 40 Percent of Households in Four Districts

District	1985/86	1990/91	1995/96
Moneragala	15.8	18.9	18.9
Badulla	16.9	16.5	15.9
Hambantota	14.9	14.8	15.2
Trincomalee	18.0	n.a.	n.a.
Sri Lanka	14.6	14.8	15.2

n.a. = not applicable.

Source: *Household Income and Expenditure Survey 1995/96*, Department of Census and Statistics.

The proportion of income received by the lowest 40 percent households in the four districts remains very low, pointing both to the unequal distribution of wealth in the country and the persistence of poverty.

Trincomalee District

Trincomalee district is part of the Eastern Province. It is in the Dry Zone and the land is generally arid, while groundwater in many coastal communities is saline or brackish. The land is rain-fed from October to January during the northeast monsoon season. Many low-lying coastal communities experience floods and food scarcity due to transport difficulties during this time of the year. Between June and September most areas that are not accessible to tanks experience water scarcity. Cultivation is usually in the Maha season and since the war many fields have been abandoned, with only those close to the homestead being cultivated. Agriculture and fisheries are the most important income sources. The security situation and military ban on fishing between 6 pm and 6 am restricts fishing activities and limits access to fields.

Trincomalee district is located in one of three core conflict affected provinces in the island. It is a district with a history of contested land settlements in the postcolonial period. Gerrymandering has been an issue. Trincomalee harbor is a key natural port. The Kantalai tank is a major irrigation settlement and rice bowl. The district is also the linking district between the minority Tamil-dominated Northern and Eastern provinces, which the Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelam (LTTE) wants merged and the Sri Lankan Government resists. Its strategic importance has been a cause for competitive land colonization/settlement during various development projects in the postcolonial years, ensuing dramatic shifts in the ethnic demographics—one of the reasons for the high levels of violence and displacement visible in the district. In recent time settler communities have been targeted and experienced bloody massacres. Among older ethnically mixed border communities there is growing mistrust between former neighbors—Tamils, Sinhalese, and Muslims. Complex multiethnic trading networks and the local division of labor have been destroyed due to the conflict, with serious consequences for the local economy.

Case Study 1

I have lost everything including my limb

Ramalingam is a 25-year-old disabled fisherman and father of two children in “uncleared” Nallur in the Trincomalee district. The people of his village were displaced several times during the armed conflict. They have suffered serious shelling attacks in the past and continue to be under threat of bombing. He lives with his 18-year-old wife, his 5-year-old son and 8-month-old daughter in a wattle-and-daub hut with a cadjan roof and the sand for a floor.

He was displaced in 1990 at the age of 15 when he fled into the jungle with his parents, brother, and sister and suffered acute hunger. They then lived in Veeramanagar and Paattalipuram, and returned only two years later to Nallur. “I have been running from place to place.” When they came back half of their livestock had disappeared and they sold the rest for a very low price. He got married and had two children but disaster struck in July 2000 when he lost his limb due to a land mine explosion when he was herding cows near the Malaimuntham camp. Since then the household lives mainly by gathering *kananthi* (a type of green) and selling it in the market. Ramalingam is dependent on his father to make ends meet. He cannot go fishing and they have no access to the family land of 3 acres due to the fighting. “I have lost everything including my limb.”

The household barely eats two meals per day. Usually they have plain tea in the morning and eat rice with spinach for lunch, consuming any leftovers at night. From October to January during the rainy season until the harvest in Thoppur, which is difficult to reach because the road is closed, his family faces food scarcity, as there is no work available. He does not receive Samurdhi stamps as he and his wife became a separate household only in 1995 and they live in an “uncleared” area.

He hopes that his village will have access to transport and education, and people would be able to travel and fish without restrictions. He believes that he can overcome their poverty by regaining access to their paddy fields, receiving barbed wire and capital for cultivation, and by livestock rearing. He hopes that there would be a healthy learning environment for his children and their school would have sufficient teachers. He wishes for peace and harmony everywhere in the country, that everybody should be able to go anywhere and that there would be plenty of work opportunities for all.

Parts of the district are controlled by the LTTE while a skeletal state administration is functioning in these areas, which are termed “uncleared”. In the last Census in 1981, its population was estimated to be 255,948 with a male-female ratio of 100:86. Its ethnic composition comprised 36.4 percent Tamils, 33.4 percent Sinhalese, 29.3 percent Moors, 0.5 percent Burghers, and 0.3 percent Malays. The most recent *Statistical Handbook of Trincomalee District* (District Planning Secretariat 2000) estimates that in 2000 the population was 355,706 and the ethnic composition of the district was 39 percent Muslim, 32 percent Tamil, 29 percent Sinhala, and 0.5 percent others. The male-female ratio is 100:103. The changed ethnic demographics over the last 20 years are clearly worthy of analysis. What is also striking is the change in the gender pattern of the population with women becoming a majority, a trend to be anticipated with an ongoing war, but marked in the case of Trincomalee district, which had an extremely unbalanced gender ratio in the past.

The *Statistical Handbook of Trincomalee 2000* estimates that out of a total of 83,829 families that comprise the population of the district, 40,437 families were displaced during the armed conflict in the 1990s, while 30,960 houses or over a third of homes in the district were damaged or destroyed.² These displacement figures do not include very short term displacement due to conflict. The Trincomalee Town and Gravets Divisional Secretary estimated that over 80 percent of the district had been briefly displaced when the second Eelam war commenced in 1990.

The Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Program as at August 2000 estimated that there were 13 welfare centers for displaced persons with 3,025 families, or 11,713 individuals living in camps. Another 2,576 families or 11,631 individuals were displaced and living outside camps. Over 5 percent of the population of the district is currently internally displaced. A total of 1,948 families whether in camps, outside, or resettled receive dry ration stamps. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are 10 welfare centers as of April 2000 with a total of 3,581 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Trincomalee district (*UNHCR Trincomalee Welfare Centre Profile*). This document also notes the lack of birth certificates among women which restricts access to schooling, and the high level of school dropouts. In Alas Graden Camp school dropouts were 85 percent and in the Paddy Marketing Board Welfare Centre, 32.35 percent.

The team visited villages/urban units and refugee camps in five DS areas—Trincomalee Town and Gravets, Kuchchveli, Muthur,

² The Integrated Food Security Programme (IFSP) report puts this number at over 50,000.

16 *Perceptions of the Poor*

Eechchilampattai, and Padavisiripura, including one camp for displaced persons in Nilaveli, 8 kilometers (km) from Trincomalee town. A planned visit to the Gomarankadawela division was cancelled due to denial of security clearance after an LTTE attack and return fire by the military overnight. While this team was in the field in Muthur, a fleet of civilian fishing vessels were mistakenly bombed, four boats and fishing equipment were destroyed, and the injured were taken to Trincomalee hospital.

The residents of Paranamadawachiya in the Padavisiripura division, which is inland and tank-fed, and predominantly Sinhala, had repeatedly experienced LTTE attacks. Over 70 percent had been displaced to Jayanpathipura school and were resettled or relocated in the same year, 1994. Some still slept in the forests at night for fear of attack, others said that they could not cultivate their fields due to the security situation. Out of 211 families (945 individuals), there were 12 government employ-

Case Study 2

How long can we live like this?

Swarnamali is a 46-year-old widow and refugee, who lives with her six children in the Nilaveli camp in Trincomalee district. They live in a *cadjan* (palm thatch) hut in the camp with 108 other refugee families. Swarnamali came to Kanniya near Trincomalee from Kandy in 1974 with her parents. Subsequently she married a tinker from Gampola who had also settled in Kanniya. He was killed in February 1997 in Killinochchi.

Her eldest daughter married a man she had met in the camp one year ago, when she was only 16 years old and has a child. Her 16-year-old son does wage labor when he can get it. Her 15-year-old second daughter dropped out of fifth grade and is a preschool aide, earning a monthly allowance of SLRs1,000. Swarnamali herself has passed the "O" level but lost her certificate when her house was burned, and laments that she is unable to get work that is appropriate to her education level.

They are poor because they were displaced, left their homes, her husband was killed, and they have no jobs, she says. In the refugee camp, almost everybody is poor, there are many widows with big families and they eat sufficiently only when they can find work, she explains. People get married very young because of the troubles and the fear of recruitment by armed groups.

ees (teachers, GN, Samurdhi, and other services including agriculture). There were 6 carpenters, 22 in the armed forces (mostly in the police), and 44 home guards who earned SLRs4,600 a month. Three women were currently in the Middle East. Approximately 15 families had electricity, and 35 had latrines. Sarvodaya worked here and one small group had saved SLRs5,000 through cultivation projects. There were 30 Samurdhi groups and 20 Sarvodaya small groups.

About 20 percent of the village had cement and tiled houses. The bus terminal was at the village center and ran three times a day. Several people said that they could not access their fields due to the security situation, the village had been much wealthier before the conflict and displacement. There was a greater range of poor-wealthy in the village than in uncleared areas. Malaria was a recurrent concern. The poorest families in the village manage on three meals a day.

Their lives have not seen any great change. The security situation is slightly better than before. "Earlier we were very frightened and were frightened of the army. Now there is not so much trouble and uncertainty." Food is difficult and it is rarely that they eat more than two meals per day—mostly roti and bread, sometimes rice or *pittu* (noodles) with a vegetable. They receive food rations from the World Food Programme but sometimes they do not receive these on time in which case they only have tea. "How long can we live like this?"

Swarnamali is indebted to many people because the family's earnings are low. She was in a *sittu* (revolving credit) group and bought some jewellery but all that has been pawned. Life in the camp is insecure. There is drunkenness among young boys and young girls get pregnant, she says. She could go to the Middle East but she does not want to because she is scared about what would happen to her daughters.

Her 14-year-old son is in the eighth grade and her two younger daughters are in primary school. She hopes that they can continue their education, that all her children will have work and they would look after her when she is old. "If not the girls, at least, the boys. Otherwise, I'll have to go to a home for the elders." Swarnamali who comes from a mixed Sinhalese/Tamil family background wishes that there would be peace in the country and that people would live with each other in harmony, "because we lived as friends and relatives in the past."

18 Perceptions of the Poor

In Jaya Naga in the Kuchchveli division, which is a Muslim coastal village that had experienced bombing from the sea in 1990, 8 people had gone missing, and 63 families remained displaced. All the families had been displaced for four years in a camp in Horowapothana, and slowly as the security situation improved the people trickled back. All the families were eligible for Samurdhi and resettlement loans from the Government. Most families had not taken loans because once they took them, their relief/rations (SLRs336 worth of food stamps) would stop. Ten men had gone to the Middle East. The village once had electricity but the infrastructure had been destroyed. From the ruins and the big church that has been taken over as an army camp it was clear that this had been a relatively wealthy area and even a little town in the past before the conflict. Over 50 percent of cultivable village land was in uncleared areas and they had no access due to military restrictions. Likewise those dependent on fishing were restricted by the official ban and a 3-mile radius. Still the shops had a few weeks dry food stocks. Oxfam had given assistance for micro projects.

The team also spent four days in the LTTE-held or “uncleared” areas in Eachchilampattai and Muthur. The depth and magnitude of poverty in the uncleared areas appeared far greater than in the government-held areas of the district. In the uncleared areas many children were visibly malnourished and a majority of the women and some men interviewed complained of fainting and lack of energy and inability to work, also indicating malnutrition.³ Fifty percent said they did not have

³ This observation is broadly corroborated by the IFSP report, which included the uncleared areas of this study. As the authors note, if **stunting** (height-for-age) is applied as an overall indicator of the long-term health and nutrition situation of a population, 27 percent of the children under five were stunted, 42 percent in uncleared areas and 34 percent among the Tamil children in cleared areas. The comparison of *findings in the survey area with national prevalence of malnutrition* (children 3–59 months) shows very unfavorable results for all three nutritional indicators. Prevalence of stunting is 28 percent compared to 16 percent, prevalence of wasting 27 percent compared to 13 percent, prevalence of underweight 51 percent compared to 31 percent. Data on national level (*Demographic Health Survey 1995/96*) did not include the North-Eastern Province. The highest prevalence of low birth weight was found among the children in uncleared areas (38 percent), whereas in the other communities 16–20 percent of the children weighed less than 2,500 grams. Prevalence of wasting (low weight-for-height, indicator for acute malnutrition) is extremely high among all three ethnic groups (26 percent, children 0–59 months). This compares very unfavorably to national data from 1995/96 (13 percent wasting), which exclude the North-Eastern Province. **The nutritional status of women** in the survey area is also very serious; 48 percent of the women are malnourished (BMI <18.5), half of them severely malnourished (BMI <17). Similar to the findings concerning children’s nutritional status, malnutrition among Tamil mothers is worst (50 percent, in uncleared areas 77 percent). About 48 percent of the women in uncleared areas are even severely malnourished, which is extremely high. Among the Muslim and Sinhalese communities malnutrition of women is lower, but still 29–40 percent are affected.

three meals a day. Rice, fish, and green leaves were consumed. All had been displaced between 1990 and 1997. Houses, livestock, and tools had been destroyed. There was no electricity and no motor vehicles. Traders used bicycles or bullock carts while many people trekked miles for provisions or to the cooperative in the cleared areas. Over 75 percent of people in Nalloor, Navaladi, and Rahlkuli lived in refugee-like makeshift *cadjan* huts. Over 90 percent were eligible for Samurdhi. In Nalloor out of 107 families, 15 were women-headed and there were 7 orphans. School was irregular. Most women over 20 had no education or had studied up to grade four. Shops were usually located in one-room makeshift *cadjan* huts or shells of houses that doubled as a home for the owner, with barely any dry food stocks. The roads were practically impassable due to years of lack of maintenance, potholes, and erosion during floods also caused by breakage of small tanks, mines, and shelling. Lack of drinking water due to brackishness/saltiness was also a problem in the coastal areas.

The depth of poverty and vulnerability in the uncleared areas is arguably due to the ban on the transport of basic construction items such as cement, brick, and other construction materials to maintain infrastructure as well as the ban on fertilizer, fuel, petrol, kerosene, gas, and diesel, and restrictions on essential food items as well as soap and other household items imposed by the Sri Lankan military. On the other hand the LTTE taxes people who go to collect firewood, honey, and other products from the forests and conscripts youthful labor and children who have completed grade eight. Nearly half of the households in uncleared areas did not have adequate drinking water throughout the year whereas a third in the cleared areas also mentioned water shortages during the months of June to September. In uncleared areas less than 5 percent of families had latrines.

Aside from the displaced, farmers and fishing communities have been most affected by the disruption and/or destruction of their livelihoods in the conflict and the ongoing security situation. Landless people who depend on wage labor have been affected by the poor security and mobility situation. The pass system and restriction of movement along the border, as well as in and out of the major towns, severely inhibit access to markets and produce often goes bad due to poor storage and transportation facilities.

One hundred percent of the people interviewed for the Trincomalee District poverty consultations in five divisions, Eechilampattai, Kuchachveli, Muthur, Padavisiripura, Trincomalee town and Gravets, had had to flee

20 *Perceptions of the Poor*

their homes at some point in the last 10 years.⁴ Homes, home gardens, crops, tools, equipment, and seeds were all destroyed when the people were displaced. In Nalloor there were just three houses that had cement floors, and these too were still badly damaged from the shelling in the early nineties. We saw several bombed out cement structures. The larger houses and most permanent structures had all been destroyed during the shelling and bombing. All the others lived in shacks with *cadjan* roofs, with sand floors and coconut thatch walls. Most families have just one tiny room to sleep, cook, and live in. The conditions were that of some of the worst refugee camps, shelter being made of coconut leaves that had been knitted together—the roof as well as the walls. During the rainy season (October-December) when there were floods and everything went under water, people gathered at the school buildings. The only school-teacher at Nalloor travelled to the village daily. School attendance was poor since the children had nothing to do.

The disruption to education and mobility that displacement and restriction to camps entail results in the frustration of the best and brightest youth. The pass system and restrictions on mobility particularly affects young women who fear being body searched. The Government, working with NGOs, attempts when possible to accommodate displaced children in government schools in their host communities, but many children in camps simply do not have access to schooling.

In Trincomalee district, given the long-term nature of the conflict and displacement, poverty alleviation has been based on a relief approach. Income generation is a risky business and has limited value when the military and paramilitary groups control the movement of persons and goods via a shadow economy. As poverty is closely linked to conflict and violence, there is a need to incorporate approaches to deal with psychological trauma and peace building.

⁴ The LTTE and the military have quite cynically used displaced persons as security shields or buffers during military campaigns. Some still slept in the jungles for fear of attack in the night. Others could not access their fields due to mines and or fear of shelling or due to the fact that they had become jungle and fear of elephant attack. Most had been displaced during 1990 when the second Eelam war started with others being displaced in 1995. Many had been cyclically displaced. Some were still in refugee or relief centers. The Trincomalee Divisional Secretary estimated that over 80 percent of the entire district have been displaced in the course of conflict, with many being repeatedly displaced during operations.

Moneragala District

Moneragala district, located in the south-eastern part of the country, is part of the Uva Province. Its population was estimated at 403,935 in 1999, with a male-female ratio of 100:97 (Uva Provincial Council 2000). Moneragala's ethnic composition was 95.5 percent Sinhalese, 3 percent Tamils, 1.5 percent Moors, 0.03 percent Burghers, and 0.01 percent Malays in 1995. The district is predominantly rural, with 73.4 percent of its labor force in agriculture (Census and Statistics 2000b), its farmers cultivating paddy, sugarcane and *chena* crops such as maize, finger millet, cowpea, and mung bean in the Dry Zone. Part of its population inhabiting the Intermediate Zone is employed in rubber, coffee and tea cultivation, as well as gem mining. Whether it is income, consumption, or human poverty levels at stake, Moneragala district emerges as the poorest district in Sri Lanka, when the North and East are excluded.

Table 3: Average Household Income and Expenditure in Moneragala District 1995/96

	Average Monthly Income per Household (SLRs)	Average Monthly Expenditure per Household (SLRs)	Food Ratio (%)	Households Receiving Samurdhi/JTF (%)
Moneragala	4,231	4,288	65.8	64.6
Sri Lanka	6,476	6,525	54.4	39.1

Source: HIES 1995/96, Department of Census and Statistics.

Moneragala has recorded the second lowest average household income in the country, and the lowest average household expenditure (Table 3). It has the highest food ratio in the country. The food ratio is a good indicator of how much money a household has left over to spend on other needs. Moneragala ties with Hambantota district for the highest percentage of Samurdhi/JTF recipients in the country.

Moneragala is well below the national average in terms of a number of human poverty indicators, and has the highest rates in the country for population without access to electricity and safe sanitation (Table 4). The team visited five GN divisions in four DS areas—Kotagoda, Kotiyagala (Siyambalanduwa), Ritigahawatte (Madulla), Papolagama (Badalkumbura),

22 Perceptions of the Poor

Table 4: Dimensions of Human Poverty in Moneragala District, 1994 (percent)

	Adult Illiteracy	No Access to Safe Water	Births Outside Institutions	No Access to Electricity	No Access to Safe Sanitation	Landless 1997 ^a	Unemployed 1997 ^b
Moneragala	15.9	47.3	31.1	83.2	39.0	10.9	7.6
Sri Lanka	8.9	27.9	15.9	56.2	23.8	n.a.	10.5

n.a. = not applicable.

Sources: *National Human Development Report 1998*, UNDP;

^a Uva Provincial Council, 1997;

^b *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey, and Fourth Quarter 1999*, Department of Census and Statistics.

Case Study 3

We need to create unity and work as a group

Kamalasiri is a 48-year-old farmer in Ritigahawatta in the Moneragala district. Farmers in his village cultivate rainfed cereal crops and sugarcane. He is a father of five children. His wife, two sons, and one daughter live with him in a wattle-and-daub house with an *illuk* grass roof on four acres of highland. Their main crop is sugarcane but they also grow finger millet, maize, banana, and manioc.

He and his oldest son have not gone to school beyond first grade. His wife has a fourth grade education. His other children have had 6–9 years of schooling, except for a 21 year-old son who is still studying in the ninth grade. The oldest daughter is married and works in a garment factory in Bibile.

Kamalasiri says his village is mostly jungle and has not improved much. Some houses have tiled roofs and there is at least a cart track, where there was only a footpath not long ago. "The people who have, have something. The people who don't, work for the ones who have and survive. If we receive a good price for our crops, we will be rich." He sells a ton of sugarcane to the local trader for SLRs500, which is sold in turn to the Pelwatte sugar factory for SLRs1,050 per ton. They have no other option other than to sell their crops to the trader because none of the cultivators owns a tractor to transport the cane to a more lucrative market.

and Konkatiya (Buttala). The size of villages ranged from 100 to 367 households, 95—100 percent engaged in farming/agricultural labor. Two of the villages were cultivating mixed paddy and *chena* crops, two of them predominantly dependent on rainfed crops in their home gardens/*chenas* and the other comprised rubber estate workers who also provided labor for gem mines operating in the area. The latter was a mixed Sinhalese/Tamil settlement while the other four villages were Sinhalese, two of which were border villages adjacent to Amparai district.

The predominant form of housing in these villages was wattle-and-daub huts, thatched with *illuk* grass. Of the five villages, the two villages that combined paddy with *chena* cultivation, the village of the rubber estate workers, and one of the villages that relied solely on *chena* cultivation and home garden crops, had a certain measure of food security.

Several years ago, Kamalasiri went with his sons to Buththama, a town 4 miles away, to start a business to improve their life. He rented a small store for a monthly rent of SLRs6,500, making a downpayment of SLRs35,000 in advance. He invested around SLRs100,000 to start his grocery store by using his savings of SLRs35,000 as well as by pawning his wife's and daughters' jewellery. He also borrowed goods from wholesale traders on credit. Business was not as good as he had expected because he did not know how to run a store. Yet he tried his best for nearly a year and became heavily indebted. Eventually he realized he could not survive in the business and came back to the village to once again cultivate sugarcane.

The household suffers from malaria and dizzy spells periodically, as well as occasional snakebites. At least one member goes to the Buththama hospital, 4 miles on foot, once or twice a week for medical treatment.

Kamalasiri laments that there is not enough *ekamuthukama* (unity) in his village. "The rich do not like the poor to go up because then they would have nobody to work for them." He believes that the only way to overcome poverty is by creating unity among the villagers and working as a group. If cultivators get together, buy tractors, and sell the sugarcane to the Pelwatte sugar factory directly they could earn a better income. He believes the potential is there since villagers are gradually working in small groups established by NGOs and Samurdhi. Most of all, he wants to eat and drink well and "live like a human being."

24 *Perceptions of the Poor*

Poor households subsisted on rice and/or finger millet and maize. However, the village in which rainfed crops were grown in their home gardens suffered from food scarcity as the harvests were insufficient to store for later use. All four farming villages experienced crop losses due to elephant damage.

One of the villages in the Siyambalanduwa division had been attacked by the LTTE and 25 lives and around a fourth of the houses. Another border village had not been attacked but people lived in constant fear that they would be the next target. In the village that had formed around rubber estate workers in Badalkumbura division, urban Tamil traders from Moneragala town who had lost their properties in the 1983 riots had settled and were now working as wage laborers in the gem mines. While their living standard had deteriorated substantially they felt more secure in this remote, rural, mixed Sinhalese/Tamil environment. Two villages were affected by the violence surrounding the uprising of 1988/89 by the radical JVP. Its relative isolation makes its population particularly vulnerable to attacks and terror by armed groups.

In Moneragala district lack of infrastructure, lack of water, lack of employment and income, and lack of access to markets were seen as the primary causes of poverty. Access to cultivable land and titles, housing, medical care, and education were also major concerns. Although all five villages had small groups under the Samurdhi program, many of them were not functioning and mainly confined to strengthening already existing exchange labor relations. Only one village had been reached by an NGO, and the only village with a funeral assistance society was the one that had been attacked by the LTTE. More than in any of the other districts, the poor in Moneragala felt that they were neglected by the state and that most forms of assistance, whether by the state or NGOs, bypassed them.

Badulla District

Located in the drier Eastern part of the central hill-country, Badulla district belongs to the Uva Province. Its population was estimated at 779,238 in 1999 with a male-female ratio of 100:102 (Uva Provincial Council 2000). Its ethnic composition was 74.3 percent Sinhalese, 20.4 percent Tamils, 5 percent Moors, 0.1 percent Malays and 0.08 percent Burghers. The district has 74.1 percent of its labor force engaged in agriculture (Census and Statistics 2000b). Its southern mountainous part belongs to the Intermediate Zone and is predominantly covered with tea

plantations, mixed paddy and up-country vegetable cultivation, and forest plantations. Its northern lower part is in the Dry Zone, partially irrigated by the Mahaweli river system with farmers engaging in paddy and *chena* cultivation. Badulla records very high levels of human poverty and intermediate levels of consumption poverty (Table 1). However, income poverty in Badulla is the highest in the country—50 percent of households receive less than SLRs2,340 per month (HIES 1995/96).

Badulla records the lowest average monthly household income in the country and the third lowest average monthly household expenditure (Table 5). Its food ratio is only slightly lower than Moneragala's. Yet the percentage of Samurdhi/JTF recipients in Badulla is lower than the national average of 39.1 with only Polonnaruwa, Nuwara Eliya, and Colombo having lower levels.

Table 5: Average Household Income and Expenditure in Badulla District, 1995/96

	Average Monthly Income per Household (SLRs)	Average Monthly Expenditure per Household (SLRs)	Food Ratio (%)	Households Receiving Samurdhi/JTF (%)
Badulla	3,702	4,783	64.1	33.1
Sri Lanka	6,476	6,525	54.4	39.1

Source: HIES 1995/96, Department of Census and Statistics.

Badulla is well below national averages in most human poverty indicators. It has the second highest levels of adult illiteracy, non-access to safe water and births outside institutions (Table 6). The team visited four villages and two tea estates in five divisional secretariat areas—Ellanda (Migahakivula), Hangiliella (Uva-Paranagama), Amunugoda (Welimada), Dadayampola, Lower Wiharagala (Haldummulla), and Roeberry (Migahakivula/Passara).

Two of the villages were engaged in paddy and up-country vegetable cultivation, one inhabited by Sinhalese (one part of the village comprised a depressed caste group) and the other by Moslems (Moors). In the other two villages, inhabited by Sinhalese (one by a depressed caste), households cultivated paddy and rainfed crops—sugarcane and pepper in one case, and rainfed *chena* crops (maize, finger millet, manioc, banana)

Case Study 4

When the children grow up our problems will be solved

Karunawathi is a 42-year-old *jak* seller who lives in Ellanda in Badulla district. To reach her village one walks up a steep footpath, past boulders and waterfalls, 4 miles from the motorable road. The village has some paddyfields but most of its land is under rainfed crops maize, tobacco, banana, and vegetables. She lives in a wattle-and-daub hut, the roof covered with disintegrating old tiles. She complains that the only reason she was not given any new tiles by the Government, unlike some of her neighbors, was that she is a supporter of the opposition United National Party.

She is a mother of seven children. Her older son who is 19 years old is a laborer in the gem mines and her 22-year-old second daughter stays at her older daughter's house. Three other children, all boys, aged between 8 and 15 attend the village school while her youngest son who is just three years old stays at home with her husband, Nimal. He used to be a carpenter earning an income between SLRs3,000–3,500 per month, which they considered adequate six years back. Now he has got arthritis, cannot use his hands, and is unable to practise his trade. Therefore, the family burden has fallen on Karunawathi's shoulders.

She and her son gather young and mature *jak* from the village gardens and forests and sell them in Meegahakivula town thrice a week, walking from house to house. As she cannot carry them alone she makes the children take turns to stay back from school for the day to accompany her. She and one of the children walk 5 miles each way as they earn only around SLRs40-45 per day and thus cannot waste money on the lorry fare which is SLRs13 one way for each of them. With these meager daily earnings she has to feed

in the other. Of the tea estates, one was a large state-owned estate plantation managed by a major private company while the other one was a small privately owned and managed estate. Both had a predominantly Tamil labor force.

The number of households in the villages ranged from 30 to 285, and 80–100 percent were engaged in farming. The number of households in the estates ranged from 70 to 952, with around 80 percent engaged in estate wage labor. Three of the four villages and one estate had 3–17 persons employed in the armed forces. Three of the villages and one estate had 1–25 persons who were or had been employed in the Middle

the family, buy exercise books for the children, and medicine for her husband.

The staple food of their household is *jak*. They have a number of *jak* trees in their garden and that is their only marketable crop as well. During the rainy seasons the trees are slippery and no one can climb them, so Karunawathi's family encounters both food and money shortages. Once on a heavy rainy day in January this year the whole family starved because the boys could not climb the trees.

Karunawathi has attended school until the fifth grade but her husband and two daughters are illiterate as they have never gone to school. The oldest son has studied up to grade 4. Her other three sons are in the village school where the teaching is considered by her to be not of a good standard. Usually in Sri Lankan state schools there should be eight periods of study with a 15-minute interval during the school day. In the Ellanda primary school, she points out, the interval is 1-1½ hours and teachers come to class at any time they please and teach as long as they want. There are only three handling five grades, which means that at any given time two classes of children are not doing anything.

Karunawathi considers 90 percent of the households in her village to be poor. She sees some improvement in her village. Earlier they had a jungle path to walk on whereas now the path is wider and easier and buses come nearer to them than they did 20 years ago. There are also several village stores close by and some of the villagers have managed to build houses. Karunawathi's biggest hope for her village is that a road will come there so that she could transport her crops more easily to Migahakivula. She also is waiting for her children to grow up and be able to sharecrop a paddy field and cultivate their one-acre piece of highland as a *chena*, and thus ease her family burden.

East. Three of the villages and both estates had 2–15 persons working in industrial jobs and 1–22 skilled crafts people. Both estates had members of the household working as domestics and shop assistants in the city. The distance to the nearest health center ranged from 3 to 11 miles, and to the nearest bus stand from 1/4 mile to 2 miles.

Three of the villages and one estate had no access to electricity. In the other village and estate 50–64 percent of houses had electricity. In the three Sinhalese villages 20–25 percent households had latrines, while in the Moor village and the estates 70–95 percent of households had latrines. The estates households had received assistance to construct self-help latrines.

**Table 6: Dimensions of Human Poverty in
Badulla District, 1994
(percent)**

	Adult Illiteracy	No Access to Safe Water	Births Outside Institutions	No Access to Electricity	No Access to Safe Sanitation	Landless (1997) ^a	Unemployed 1997 ^b
Badulla	18.3	54.3	41.1	63.7	29.2	21.1	7.9
Sri Lanka	8.9	27.9	15.9	56.2	23.8	n.a.	10.5

n.a. = not applicable.

Sources: *National Human Development Report 1998*, UNDP;

^a Uva Provincial Council, 1997

^b *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey 1999*, Department of Census and Statistics.

Case Study 5

I am the only breadwinner

Zareena is a 40-year-old widow, employed on a casual basis as a tea plucker in the gardens of small teaholders in Amunugoda in Badulla district. Her village is located on the slopes alongside a small valley occupied by paddy and vegetable fields. She lives in a wattle-and-daub house with her two daughters aged 17 and 14, and her 70-year-old mother. They live on Zareena's sister's land, which is around a quarter of an acre and grow beans, pumpkins, cabbage, and chillies for subsistence.

Zareena's husband Farook, who was an agricultural laborer, died 16 years ago when her younger daughter was just 2 months old. Then Zareena joined her mother to work as a tea plucker. Ten years back her mother got sick and had to stop working. Therefore, Zareena emerged as the sole breadwinner of her household. She does not get more than 3—4 days of work per week and her wage ranges from SLRs40 to 75 per day. She has to run the household with this money and feed four people. She considers herself to be very poor, in a village where she says around 90 percent of the people are wage laborers and poor.

Although around 40 women have gone to the Middle East from her village and some have constructed good houses, she points out that things

The health situation in Badulla was better than Moneragala. In the more remote estate, the incidence of asthma, TB, and coughs was high. In one village there was a relatively high number of disabled people due to falls from *kitul* (fish-tail palm trees) and *jak* (jackfruit) trees. Two of the villages had access to a primary school between 1/2 and 2 miles, one to a junior secondary school within 2 miles and one to a senior secondary school within 1-1/2 miles. The estates had access to a primary school and junior secondary school, respectively, between 1 and 2 miles. The majority of children did not go beyond junior secondary level.

In two of the villages the predominant form of housing was wattle-and-daub with tile or *talipot* palm leaves. In two villages most houses were made of unbaked bricks and had tiled roofs. However, the poorest people had houses made of mud with *talipot* or tin roofing. Estate housing

have been bad for them since her husband's death and that they could not build a house. "See the state of our house," she comments. They receive a SLRs500 worth Samurdhi stamp, which is of help, she admits. But she complains that she has to go for meetings, sit there and come back, otherwise their Samurdhi would be cut.

Her mother has asthma so she needs frequent medical attention. They buy medicine privately in Welimada town. The closest hospital is Boralanda but they do not go there because they do not get cured from the medicine that they receive there, she says.

Neither Zareena nor her mother has been to school. Her elder daughter was asked by the principal to leave school in the fourth grade because she is retarded. Her younger daughter dropped out of school in the sixth grade, as Zareena could not bear the expenses of continuing to keep her in school.

Zareena has no idea how to overcome the problem of poverty. She would like to build a house with cement blocks, obtain electricity, construct a latrine, and buy a TV and cassette recorder. She would like her village to be reached conveniently by bus, to have a road and a public well and be "developed like Welimada town." Her mother believes that if Zareena goes to the Middle East their situation could change. However, Zareena does not want to go to the Middle East because her mother is old and nobody is there to take care of her mother and daughters.

30 *Perceptions of the Poor*

was in the form of "lines", made of stone, unbaked bricks, or mud with tin roofing. In the two villages, which combined paddy cultivation with *chena* crops, although only two meals were generally eaten, there was food security for most of the year. However, in the other two villages where the poor relied on vegetable cultivation and wage labor and in the two estates, there was food scarcity in the dry season. In three of the villages, which were located next to jungle, farmers complained of heavy crop damage due to elephants, wild boar, porcupine, and monkeys. In the fourth village, the main damage was reported to be by insect pests.

In both estates there were a number of households that had suffered violence and losses during the 1983 ethnic riots elsewhere and had moved there in search of security. In the larger estate three shops were burnt. Two of the villages were affected by the violence associated with the JVP uprising in 1988/89.

In Badulla district, poverty was associated with lack of infrastructure, water, employment, and income. Housing, crop damage by wild animals, education, and health were other concerns. In Badulla, which had been exposed to considerable social mobilization efforts through the Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), there was a higher degree of participation in community organizations. Three of the villages had funeral assistance societies, farmers' societies, and village development societies. All four had functioning Samurdhi small groups and two had IRDP/NGO small groups as well. The two estates had funeral assistance societies, and the larger estate had an NGO program to start small groups but these were not functioning yet. In Badulla district, many of the poor felt they had been excluded from state poverty alleviation programs and development efforts due to their political or ethnic affiliation. Social mobilization activities in the district have yet to seriously erode the welfare mentality and dependency syndrome in many of the poor.

Hambantota District

Hambantota district is in the southeastern corner of the Southern province. Its population was estimated at 563,000 in 1998 with a male-female ratio of 100:101 (Planning Secretariat, Southern Provincial Council 2000). Ethnically the district is predominantly Sinhalese (98.4 percent) with 0.94 percent Malays, 0.5 percent Moors, and 0.16 percent Tamils. The Hambantota district is located in the Dry Zone, with interior communities engaging in paddy and *chena* farming, coconut, cinnamon, pepper and cashew cultivation, and inland fisheries, while coastal communities

are engaged in fisheries, trade, and tourism. Around 95.8 percent of its population was estimated to be rural with 57.4 percent of the labor force engaged in agriculture (Census and Statistics 2000b). Industrialization is low with around 9.2 percent of the labor force employed in manufacturing by 1999. However, the service sector has grown and makes up the rest of the labor force. Hambantota reveals intermediate levels of human poverty and consumption poverty levels.

Hambantota records average monthly household income and expenditure levels below the national average but substantially higher than Moneragala or Badulla (Table 7). Its food ratio is close to the national average as well. Yet the percentage of Samurdhi/JTF recipients in Hambantota is substantially higher than the national average, and very much higher than Badulla district.

Table 7: Average Household Income and Expenditure in Hambantota District, 1995/96

	Average Monthly Income per Household (SLRs)	Average Monthly Expenditure per Household (SLRs)	Food Ratio (%)	Households Receiving Samurdhi/JTF (%)
Hambantota	4,397	5,563	59	64.8
Sri Lanka	6,476	6,525	54.4	39.1

Source: HIES 1995/96, Department of Census and Statistics.

Hambantota is around the national average in most human poverty indicators (Table 8). However, its illiteracy rate is substantially higher and its electrification level substantially lower than the national average. It records one of the highest unemployment rates in the country. Although district level statistics are not available, the Southern province has made considerable gains in reducing poverty since 1985/86. From poverty levels close to Uva and Sabaragamuwa Provinces in 1985/86 it had the lowest poverty incidence after Western Province by 1995/96.

The team visited four villages and one urban unit in four divisional secretariat areas—Mahaluthgammara (Lunugamwehera), Kariyamaditta (Agunakolapelessa), Uddakandara (Tissamaharama), Godavaya (Hambantota), and Murrey Road (Hambantota). One village was a minor irrigation resettlement, with paddy and *chena* (finger millet, maize, mung,

Case Study 6***We live in the wind***

Vansa is a 48-year-old widow and mother of six children from the urban low-income neighborhood of Murrey Road in Hambantota town. Her husband was a fisherman. She and her three sons live in a wattle-and-daub house with a *cadjan* (palm thatch) roof, right on the beach. "We live in the wind. The life of a fishing family is hard and uncertain. If we go fishing in the sea, one day there is fish, another day there isn't. We have work for six months and none for the next six months," she says.

Her older two sons aged 23 and 20 years are fishermen, and her 15 year-old younger son is in the eighth grade. Her three daughters are married and live elsewhere. Vansa went to the Middle East seven years ago to earn enough to build their house, but her husband contested the election and lost all the money. One year back he became sick and Vansa had to pawn her jewellery to cope with the medical expenses. He died five months ago. It was only then that her sons started going out to sea. Even though the boys inherited a small fiberglass boat, they find it difficult to obtain a good catch because they are new to the trade. The income of the fishing families, she says, depends on the weather. When the weather is fair the boys earn around SLRs5,000 per month, but when the sea is rough they cannot even cover the fuel costs. During the fishing season, the boys go out twice a day, in the night for reef fish and in the morning for small fish.

Table 8: Dimensions of Human Poverty in Hambantota District, 1994
(percent)

	Adult Illiteracy	No Access to Safe Water	Births Outside Institutions	No Access to Electricity	No Access to Safe Sanitation	Landless (1997) ^a	Unemployed (1997) ^b
Hambantota	13.1	28.3	15.9	74.4	24.5	n.a.	14.0
Sri Lanka	8.9	27.9	15.9	56.2	23.8	n.a.	10.5

Sources: *National Human Development Report 1998*, UNDP;

^a Uva Provincial Council, 1997; and

^b Southern Provincial Council, 1997; *Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey 1999*, Department of Census and Statistics.

She considers herself very poor and regards 50–60 percent of households in her community to be average. Her neighborhood has improved within the last 20 years, she says, and now has electricity, water, and roads, but not her part of the beach. Many women have gone to the Middle East and have built brick houses. Earlier they all lived in *cadjan* huts. However, fishing does not bring returns. “It is useless fishing. It is because of the women working abroad that there is an improvement here.”

Her troubles started when her daughters got married, she complains. Vansa’s family lived in a brick house on the main street in Hambantota town 10 years back. When the eldest daughter got married, as was customary among Malays, her husband demanded a house. Vansa, her husband, and the rest of the children gave up their house and moved to the beach. Now the youngest daughter’s husband also demands a house and they cannot give away their present hut as they have no other place to move. Thus, the eldest daughter has gone to the Middle East to earn enough money to build a house for her sister.

Vansa, who dropped out in the fifth grade, tries hard to educate her youngest son so that he would have a job and make her happy. She says that the life of the mother of a fisherman is hard. The sea is harsh and cruel, she cannot bear the anxiety and her heart pounds whenever her sons return late from the sea. She hopes that the country would develop, that everyone would live together without fighting, as the children of one mother. “Even if we cut up each other, everyone has the same blood, in the end.”

cowpea, sesame, peanuts, *meneri*, and *thana*) cultivation. In the second interior village, people were dependent on *chena* and home garden crops (finger millet, mung, cowpea, peanuts, coconut, cashew, mango, *jak*). A third was a mixed *chena* farming (mung, cowpea, sesame, chillies, finger millet) and inland fisheries village on the banks of the Yoda Wewa. The fourth village and the urban unit were largely fisheries-centered communities, which had expanded to include other households. In the fishing village, the poorest households were those of agricultural laborers and saltern workers. In the urban unit, households were made up of poor municipal laborers (predominantly Tamil), coconut pluckers, and informal sector workers (predominantly Sinhalese) in addition to fishermen and their families (predominantly Malay). The four villages (entirely Sinhalese) had households ranging from 107 to 426. The urban unit had

Case Study 7

We don't need anybody's help

Sumanaratne is a 28-year-old fisherman living by the banks of the Yoda Wewa tank in Uddakandara in the Hambantota district. His one-room hut built of unbaked bricks with a *cadjan* roof and a cow-dung floor is right at the water's edge and does not contain more than a kerosene lamp, a small radio, a couple of mats, and a few cooking utensils. "Two pots and a coconut grater," he shows, with a wide grin on his weather-beaten face. His small wooden outrigger boat stands alongside his hut.

His family has been fishermen for generations. His fishing partner is his 22-year old brother-in-law Sunil who lives in the hut with him since his wife 23 year-old Priyanthi left to work as a maid in Jordan. His 7-year old daughter lives with his in-laws in Pallemalala, another fishing village one hour away. He sees his daughter thrice a month. His 1-1/2-year-old son lives with his mother and he has contact with him regularly since his mother lives in the same village.

Sumanaratne says he is poor because he did not go to school beyond Grade 3, he has no job, and he does not know any other work except that of an inland fisherman. Not that it matters much, he points out, since even the university students from his village eventually end up catching fish in the tank to make money. More than 80 percent of households in his village are poor, he says. Those who farm also live with difficulty and when they cannot grow anything, which is half of the year, they fish in the tank as well. His people, on the other hand, are always in the water. The rich in his village are the traders (*mudalalila*) who make up around 2 percent of the households. "The traders are not like us," he explains, "they always earn."

He says his village has developed since his childhood. In those days everyone lived in *cadjan* huts. Now almost everybody has a house with a tiled roof—even if they had built it with a fisheries loan. But development has not happened for him and his family. "We've always lived like this. If we don't go to the tank, we have nothing." In the past there were around 45 fishing families. Now there are over 100 families. Everybody is fishing whether they are fishing households or not. So there is less fish and it is difficult for everyone. Only 35 outriggers should be allowed in the tank but now there are 90. Twenty years ago his father would cast his net and get 100–200 fishes per day but that does not happen now. There is enough demand for the fish he catches but not enough fish in the tank.

He sells a kilo of fish for SLRs20. The traders sell it for SLRs60 in the market. He points out that the traders themselves tell the fishermen that they bought their vans thanks to their catch. In the dry season between June and August food is difficult for him as the water in the tank recedes. Then he barely manages two meals. He has a piece of bread and jaggery (sweets) for breakfast, skips lunch, and has rice and fish for dinner. On days he does not catch fish, he eats rice, *dhal* (lentils), and a vegetable. If he is hungry and does not have money in his hands, he tries to catch a fish or takes credit from the village shop. As his father is dead, he needs to help his mother as well.

He is a member of the Fisheries Committee in the village. The only advantage in that he says is that one could get a loan. He took a loan for SLRs3,000 to buy a net and had to pay back SLRs6,000. It was not worth it, he points out. He managed to pay it off with the first remittance of SLRs20,000 his wife sent from Jordan. He believes that it is better to earn one's own keep. To get government assistance they have to waste time at meetings. They lose SLRs100 per day just to get SLRs200 per month. He does not go to meet any government officials. "I don't need any credit. I have to pay back 10 times more. There's more trouble with credit than without. We don't need anybody's help." His wife decided to go to Jordan to get enough money to build a house and to buy a motorbike so that he can sell the fish himself and keep the profit that now goes to the traders.

During the troubles of 1988/89 a lot of people got killed in his village—both JVPers and army people. He does not get involved in politics, except to vote for the party in opposition every time. "Last time I voted for Chandrika, this time I will vote for Sajith." The main thing is that one group does not stay in power for too long a time, he points out. "Whoever rules is the same. They earn, eat, sit around and do nothing for us. If only they would do something for our small ones."

He does not know whether they can get out of poverty that easily. "You have to win a sweep ticket. Otherwise we just have to keep on fishing. A bike would help because we can trade fish ourselves." They would be happy if their village develops. If everybody has a house, then they could live somehow. He has opened savings books for his children and deposited SLRs2,000 for each of them from the money his wife sent and hopes that they will live better than him. "What else can we hope for? We also don't like going to the tank but we have no alternative. If they follow in their father's footsteps nothing will change. But I don't know whether they will study."

36 *Perceptions of the Poor*

113 households. In two villages 80–98 percent of households were engaged in farming, while in one coastal village and in the urban unit 75–92 percent of households were engaged in fishing. In the remaining village, households comprised those that were solely engaged in farming or fishing, and those that combined the two livelihoods. The four villages had 1–5 persons and the urban unit around 50 persons who were or had been employed in the Middle East. Three villages and the urban unit had 1–6 persons employed in the Armed Forces. The four villages and the urban unit had 3–20 persons engaged in industrial employment, mostly garment factories, and 3–10 persons engaged in skilled craftwork.

One village had no access to electricity, in two villages 7–21 percent of households were electrified, and in the two coastal fishing communities 70–96 percent of households had electricity connections. The distance to the nearest health center was $\frac{1}{4}$ – $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles for three villages and the urban unit while it was 12 miles for one village. The nearest bus stand was $\frac{1}{2}$ –2 miles away for all five units. Three of the interior villages were vulnerable to malaria. However, although relatively isolated these had better access to health care than the villages in Moneragala. Inland fishermen complained of sores on their feet from accumulated reservoir water in their outriggers. Two of the villages had access to primary schools within 2 miles, two had access to junior secondary schools within 2 miles, and the urban unit had access to several senior secondary schools within a mile. In Hambantota too, the majority of the poor did not deviate from the pattern of not having more than a junior secondary level of education.

In two of the interior farming villages, the predominant form of housing was wattle-and-daub with tiles or *cadjan/talipot* leaves for roofing. In the other interior village and the two fishing communities most houses were made of unbaked bricks with tiled roofs. However, the huts of the poorest were wattle-and-daub with *cadjan* or entirely made of *cadjan/talipot* leaves, with the sand for a floor. In two of the villages that grew finger millet, this was the staple midday meal, and they had food security until the millet lasted. However, in the coastal fishing communities, especially in the urban neighborhood, food was scarce during the *warakang* (off-season) period. Seasonal food shortages were reported also in the inland fisheries-cum-farming community. In the three interior villages crop losses from wild animals including elephants were a concern; in one village stray cattle and buffaloes were also a problem, and there was tension between owners of cattle and other farmers.

In Hambantota district, except for the urban community all four rural communities had experienced violence associated with the JVP

uprising of 1988/89. Several poor households reported family members being picked up on the way to the fields or while they were having their family meal or while they were sleeping on the veranda and tortured by the security forces. Some were returned while others disappeared without a trace. Yet others reported seeing fellow villagers burnt to death on tires. Many were intimidated, forced to participate in rallies, and then disappeared into the jungle for shelter, fleeing from threats made by both sides.

Lack of income, employment, and water were the main concerns among the poor in Hambantota district. Inadequate housing and health services were also mentioned. Many government and NGO poverty alleviation programs have been implemented in

Hambantota district, mostly due to political reasons, i.e., the potential unrest of its youth. There is considerable improvement in the life of coastal fishing households. However, many benefits have been distributed according to party affiliation. In the interior villages largely dependent on rainfed crops, the poverty situation is as bad as in Moneragala district. Although many communities in the district have been socially mobilized, they are under the control of either the local elite or radical youth who consider fellow villagers to be "ignorant" and therefore do not give a chance to the poorest to voice their concerns in group settings. The poor in Hambantota district have very little faith either in the government or NGO efforts to assist them in overcoming poverty, although they do not express the same degree of exclusion voiced by the poor in Moneragala or Badulla districts.