

## 7. CONCLUSION

The poverty consultations conducted by PIMU on behalf of ADB reveal clearly that the poor express a range of views on the conditions and causes of poverty, on differentiating the poor, on poverty alleviation strategies, and on their needs, priorities, and aspirations. The task the team set out to accomplish was to convey the perceptions of poor people in four districts in Sri Lanka in their own words and idiom.

The views expressed here are consistent with findings from all over the world, whenever the poor have been given an opportunity to express themselves, such as in the World Bank's poverty consultations in 50 countries, represented in the "Voices of the Poor" series. The process reveals that structural dimensions of poverty are similar everywhere, and are not solely the result of activities of any particular government or organization.

The Sri Lankan state together with multilateral and bilateral agencies and NGOs expend large sums of money on poverty alleviation efforts which are of doubtful value to the poor. The macro-level statistics reveal the persistence of poverty in a quarter of the population and the vulnerability to poverty of a larger section of the population. If statistics were available for the Northern and Eastern provinces, it is reasonable to assume that the current incidence of poverty at national level would be even higher, and the claims of reducing poverty between 1985/86 and 1994/95 is at best questionable.

Thus, there is a need to rethink the strategies of poverty alleviation by government, multilateral, bilateral, and NGO programs/projects at the policy, design, and implementation levels. The poor understand poverty as a multidimensional problem and have expressed the need for investment in infrastructure, employment, peace, water resources, health, and education. Incorporating the concerns and priorities of the poor into the policy-making process and ensuring their participation in the monitoring of programs aimed at their welfare will bring much needed improvement to these programs.

The key poverty challenges for Sri Lanka are to culminate the war, redress regional disparities, develop infrastructure to reach the poor, increase employment and income opportunities, conserve the resource base, improve education and skills-training, increase health/disability/elderly service options, heal the psychological dimensions of conflict and violence, increase the effectiveness/accountability of poverty alleviation

programs, ensure the contribution of the poor in decision-making regarding poverty alleviation, and support an independent institutional framework to monitor the poverty situation and poverty impacts of all development programs and projects.

Among the key issues to be monitored in moving towards poverty reduction are differentiating the poor for effective targeting, the differential poverty impact of pro-growth and social welfare/safety net approaches, the poverty impact of the changing gender trends in demography, employment, education and wages, the contradictions between the rhetoric and practice of “empowering” the poor, and the effectiveness/accountability of poverty alleviation programs.