

PERCEPTIONS OF THE POOR
Poverty Consultations in Four Districts in Sri Lanka

Final Report

September 2001

FOREWORD

This study presents the results of a series of poverty consultations that were carried out in rural Sri Lanka from July to September 2000. Four districts were chosen to represent the range of sociocultural, political, and economic differences typical of the development challenges faced by Sri Lanka. These districts are Moneragala (Southeast), Hambantota (South), Badulla (Central), and Trincomalee (Northeast).

The consultations were intended to help ADB gain a deeper and more meaningful appreciation of the scope and breadth of poverty in Sri Lanka based on the perceptions of the poor. In turn, the process also helped ADB better understand Sri Lanka's development needs and priorities as perceived by the poor. The most appropriate sectors to which ADB support can be channeled toward sustainable poverty reduction were also identified.

Five key poverty challenges in Sri Lanka were highlighted by the poor who were consulted. They are: (i) developing infrastructure; (ii) redressing regional disparities; (iii) ending the civil conflict; (iv) creating income and employment opportunities; and (v) improving education and skills training. All of these issues have been incorporated into ADB's poverty strategy for Sri Lanka.

There is much to be gained by listening to the poor. Consultations such as these help ADB to identify and understand the nonincome manifestations of poverty by giving statistics face and depth. The poor have valuable insights as to what works and what does not and their observations are extremely useful to both project and policy design. Moreover, the poor tend to perceive poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon and are likely to speak of *how* they are poor rather than *why* they are poor.

This study was managed by Mariam S. Pal, Economist (Social Development), Operations and Policy Coordination Unit, Office of the Director, Programs Department (West) of ADB with the support of Nireka Weeratunga, Anthropologist, Poverty Impact Monitoring Unit, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Valuable assistance and support was provided by Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake, Azra Jafferjee, and Shakeela Jabbar. Sultan Hafeez Rahman, Manager, Division 1, Programs West Department and John R. Cooney, Resident Representative, ADB Sri Lanka Resident Mission, provided overall guidance.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DS	divisional secretariat
BMI	body mass index
GN	grama niladhari (village officer)
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
HH	household
IDP	internally displaced person
IFSP	Integrated Food Security Programme
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programme
JTF	Janasaviya Trust Fund
JVP	People's Liberation Front
LTTE	Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelam
NGO	nongovernment organization
PIMU	Poverty Impact Monitoring Unit
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SLR	Sri Lanka rupee
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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The views and opinions expressed in this report are of the poor in the four districts but the responsibility for their interpretation in the consolidated findings and for the recommendations rests with the authors.