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**Country Report of
Sri Lanka**

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Introduction

Sri Lanka is a small island in the Indian Ocean situated in the South East side of India close to its bottom tip. A narrow stretch of sea separates the two countries. The total area of Sri Lanka is just over 65.6 thousand sq. kms., and it is the motherland of nearly 19 million people. The country is divided into nine provinces and twenty five administrative districts, which are further divided into Divisional Secretary divisions and Grama Niladhari divisions for administrative purposes. Colombo is the commercial capital of the country.

Sri Lanka is far ahead of her South Asian neighbours in the sphere of human development, the commendable achievements attributed largely to her strong commitment to social welfare, since gaining independence in 1948. The free education system which expanded steadily to absorb the increasing student population, and the extensive government health network which provided preventive as well as curative care, with special emphasis on maternal and child health, were the major accomplishments made in the post independence era. Within the five decades, literacy rates increased from 60% to 90% and crude death rate halved to 6.5 per 1,000 population from 12.6 per 1,000 population recorded in 1950. While infant and maternal mortality rates per 1,000 live births registered a spectacular decline from 82.3 and 5.5 respectively in 1950, to 16.5 and 0.2 respectively by 1995, the average lifespan lengthened by 30 years from 42 years to 72 years. The steady increase in life expectation, dramatic rise in educational levels of the population in general, and women in particular; sharp drop in mortality levels and the control of killer diseases such as Malaria, the gradual drop in fertility levels reflect the accomplishment of human development goals in Sri Lanka.

Department of Census & Statistics

Sri Lanka has a centralized statistical system and the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) which was established in 1947 functions as the central statistical agency. The DCS is responsible for the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of the statistical data requirements of the government, as well as the provision of trained professional statistical staff to all government agencies undertaking statistical services.

The activities undertaken by the Department have been organized under 17 technical and service divisions, each technical division is in charge of a Director or a Deputy Director (see organizational chart on page 8). The technical divisions have the responsibility of undertaking censuses and surveys on subjects assigned to them. The DCS has a field organization with statisticians attached to the 25 district statistical offices and it also reaches the divisional level (sub district level) through a Statistical Officer. This arrangement provides for a smooth flow of statistical information from the divisional level through the District Office to the DCS Headquarters and vice versa.

It is also the responsibility of the DCS to provide staff trained in the required specialization having the required experience to man the statistical branch offices in other Ministries and Departments which require statistical staff. About 50 Government Ministries and Departments including Registrar General's Department, Immigration, Health, Education, Custom, Agriculture, Police, Women Bureau etc., are provided with statistical staff of the DCS. The officers posted to these agencies would meet with the background and experience necessary to design statistical documents, and collect, extract, compile, edit, process and supply information needed by these organizations.

The primary duty of the department is to collect vital information on all socio economic variables, needed for government planning and policy formulation

activities. Development of socio economic indicators are carried out on a regular basis through an integrated programme of censuses and surveys.

Main Data Sources

Statistical data are collected by several agencies in Sri Lanka, but the data collection activities carried out by most of the agencies have limited scope and coverage since they are designed to meet their own data requirements. Among these, DCS is the principal agency which collects and disseminate data systematically on a regular basis.

(i) Department of Census and Statistics

Main functions of the department could be put into the following groups, according to the nature and regularity of the activities.

- Conduct of decennial censuses of
 - (i) Population and housing
 - (ii) Agriculture
 - (iii) Industries
- Conduct of Census of Public and Semi – government Sector employment once in every four years.
- Conduct of annual surveys of Paddy, Cost of production of Tea, Rubber, Coconut, Survey of industrial establishments.
- Conduct of Demographic and Health Surveys, to obtain statistics on child mortality, child nutrition and health status of children and their mothers.
- Conduct of Household Income and Expenditure Survey to obtain statistics on household income, expenditure patterns and food consumption patterns.
- Conduct of quarterly Labour Force Survey to obtain current information on the labour force such as the labour force participation rate and the unemployment rate.
- Conduct of ad-hoc surveys and special studies at the request of users.

- Collection of farm gate and market prices of food commodities.
- Compilation of derived statistics

Statistics thus generated are released as Census / Survey reports. Comparative statistics reflecting the changing trends of socio economic variables, are presented in the annual statistical abstract in great detail, while key indicators, mainly at national level are published in the annual statistical pocket book.

In this way, the department caters to the needs of a wide circle of data users including Government Planners, Universities, Researchers in the private sector, and a number of foreign agencies.

(ii) Other producers of social statistics

Apart from being a principal user of statistical data, the Central Bank of Sri Lanka heads the other data producing agencies, with the conduct of Consumer Finances and Socio Economic survey at regular intervals since 1953, to ascertain the socio economic conditions and consumer expenditure patterns in the country. A wide range of statistical indicators are released by the Central Bank in their annual reports.

Sri Lanka has also a well organized vital registration system under the control of the Registrar General. The DCS has a Statistics Branch at the Registrar General's office and process the necessary vital statistics from their records. Although some measure of improvement has taken place with regard to the completeness of the coverage, there exist some deficiencies in respect of the quality and timeliness of the data. The identification of the cause of death in detail is one of the areas that needs the attention of all concerned authorities. However, a concerted and all round effort is necessary to bring about an overall improvement in the collection and compilation of vital statistics.

There are several other data producers such as the Ministry of Planning, Ministry of Labour, the Agricultural Research and Training Institute who conduct ad-hoc Statistical Studies, mainly to collect information to fulfill their requirements. A number of Non Governmental Organizations such as the Centre for Women's Research and the Marga Institute have made a tremendous contribution to the generation and improvement of social statistics, particularly gender statistics, with in-depth research and the conduct of micro studies on certain critical areas.

Research and Special Studies Division

The Research and Special Studies Division of the DCS comprises of one Deputy Director, two Statisticians and three Statistical Officers. It is responsible for conducting surveys and studies on selected subject areas which are important for monitoring and evaluation of projects and policies of the Government. Statistical exercises conducted in the recent past is briefly described below.

- (i) The ESCAP project on Improving gender statistics was commenced in 1994. The main objective of the project was to identify gender issues in Sri Lanka and to compile meaningful statistics to portray them. In addition, identification of deficiencies in the existing statistics on priority gender issues was also carried out. Two publications to depict the status of women in Sri Lanka at national, provincial and district level was released, while a national plan of action to improve gender statistics was also developed as outputs of the project.
- (ii) A gender disaggregated database was prepared in 1998 / 1999, on retrenched / retired employees due to structural adjustment policies of the government, at the request of the National Committee on Women - Sri Lanka. The main objective of this exercise was to provide background information, necessary to

assess the impact of structural adjustment policies and economic reforms of the government on women's employment.

- (iii) Conducted a Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) in year 2000, for the Ministry of Health. This project was funded by the World Bank. The major objectives of the DHS project was to design and implement a survey, to collect relevant data to assess the current demographic situation, and to evaluate the health program and family planning activities. These information are supposed to assist in formulating the population and health planning programs in Sri Lanka. This is the third such survey, and followed the same methodology adopted in the previous surveys carried out in 1993 and 1987.

The sample for the Demographic and Health Survey consisted of approximately 9,000 housing units and about 6,500 married women in the age group 15-49. The whole island was divided into 7 zones excluding Northern and Eastern provinces on the basis of socio-economic and ecological criteria, and they served as the primary strata. Each zone was further stratified into (upto) three strata; urban, rural and estate areas. A three stage design was adopted in selecting the housing units. Data collection was conducted by trained teams of investigators. Each team consisted of 5 female interviewers, 1 supervisor and a measurer of heights and weights of children. There were 10 teams and each team was guided by a co-ordinator.

Suggestions for Improvement of Social Statistics

(i) Training on specific aspects

The area of social statistics encompasses a wide spectrum of subjects. Different techniques are adopted in the compilation of

statistical indicators to suit specific research studies, and different approaches are used to collect information according to the nature of data requirements. For instance, the study of gender imbalances has gained much importance in recent times. But, special skills are necessary to collect information from women on certain sensitive issues, as women tend to conceal embarrassing facts to a stranger. Similarly in poverty studies, the interviewer has to be trained very carefully in order to get accurate information on household income, expenditure and consumption patterns, in a tactful manner, without making the respondent feel uneasy or annoyed.

The field staff of the DCS need a thorough training on data collecting techniques suitable for such surveys, and they should be familiarized with the concepts and methodologies used by other countries in similar situations.

(ii) Establishment of a database

The establishment of a database on social statistics is a major requirement for the promotion of its utilization for decision making purposes. This database should be designed to cater to the needs of a wide range of data users and provide data at lower administrative levels too.

Acquisition of a high capacity micro computer is essential in order to store a large amount of data and facilitate quick retrievals. It is also very important to train at least two officers on database management and maintenance procedures, so that they could acquire the necessary competence to handle the job.

(iii) Provision of literature

Reports of studies conducted in the region and other relevant reading material, would be very useful to keep the DCS staff abreast of current developments in social statistics.

