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# ISSUES RELATED TO INFORMAL EMPLOYMENT IN CLIMATE AFFECTED RURAL AREAS IN SRI LANKA – WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

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## ABSTRACT

*Main intention of this article is to analyze the actual situation of issues related to the informal sector livelihood activities of Female-Headed Households, root causes and intensity of issues and interrelationships among those issues in sociological perspective. The empirical study is based on field data and the research was conducted in five Grama Niladari Divisions of Galgamuwa Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka. Various issues related to the informal employment among Female-Headed Households in climate affected rural areas in Sri Lanka such as hardships related to agriculture, self-employment, lack of confidence for diversification of livelihood activities, low level of income, tendency of making short-term money transactions with their kin or community members for daily needs, issues related to current programmes have been analyzed through the study. Finally, it has suggested that adaptation and mitigation methods and climate resilient actions should be introduced to sustain the livelihood of FHHs and also, to absorb full potentials of them into development discourse through empowering capacities, skills, and strengths.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Female-Headed Households, Livelihood, Climate Affected, Adaptation and Mitigation.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Employment is a major factor which influence to the living condition of an individual in the society. On the other hand, employment status or livelihood strategies of individuals directly affect the level of income and economic stability of a household. Informal employment is a concept which refer to the aspect of the ‘informalization’ of employment. 17<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) has defined informal employment as comprising the total number of informal jobs, whether carried out in formal sector enterprises, informal sector enterprises or households (Husmanns, 2003). However, informal employments are outside the legislative regulatory framework and basically refers to the regulations of informal

employment. On the other hand, household is a basic and essential unit of social organization in order to well-function of the society (Haralambos & Halborn, 1980). Although household has been considered as a universal of all social institutions, it can be identified that modern household has undergone eminent transformations in its structure in the modern society. Female-Headed Households (FHHs) is a new structural form of household and recently, it can be identified a marked increase of Female-Headed Households in Sri Lanka. According to the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016, out of 5.4 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.4 million households or 25.8 percent of the households were female-headed. Female-Headed Households who

engage in the informal sector employments have confronted negative circumstances due to economic vulnerabilities related to their livelihood activities in particularly in climate affected rural areas. Reviewing of research and studies done in the field of Female-Headed Households in Sri Lanka, shows there are inadequate sources to access towards issues related to informal employments among of Female-Headed Households in descriptive way. As a result of this, there are some knowledge and strategic gaps in policy making and development discourse regarding FHHs. Therefore, they are out of in the main development discourse. Therefore, still it has not be able to absorb the full potential of the community in sustainable and effective manner.

**2. OBJECTIVES**

According to that, the main objective of this article is to analyze the actual situation of socio-economic issues related to the informal sector livelihood activities of FHHs. Specific objectives have carefully formulated in order to achieve the main objective. They are, to investigate livelihood activities of FHHs, to identify root-causes to increase tendency for informal employment and to identify projects and programmes which have implemented to empower FHHs in climate affected rural areas in Sri Lanka.

**3. METHODOLOGY**

This research was conducted in five *Grama Niladari* divisions namely Molewa, Kallanchiya, Koonwewa, Wadugama and Medawachchiya in Galgamuwa Divisional Secretariat division which has situated in Kurunegala district, North Western province. Survey method and Case study method were used to obtain a deep understanding of complex issues through both quantitative and qualitative manner. In sampling, basically purposive sampling method under

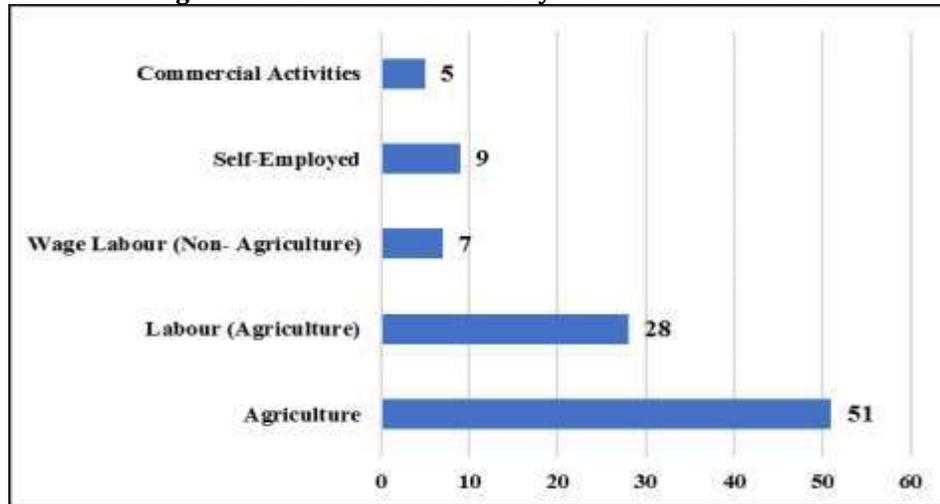
non-probably sampling was used to select FHHs with special reference to women heads who have engaged in formal employment sector from other population in the area. Then, cluster sampling under the probably sampling method was used to select women from the list of FHHs in Galgamuwa division. The researcher divided the population of FHHs in a Grama niladari division into separate groups such as widows, separated women, divorced women, women heads who live with a disabled spouse and never married women. Then a simple random sample of clusters was selected from the population, based on statistics of each Grama niladari divisions. Data were collected from 100 FHHs through questionnaires and 10 case studies among 100 FHHs through semi-structured interviews to explore and get a thorough understanding of complexity, patterns and gravity of issues of FHHs related to their living. In this research, semi - structured interviews were used for acquiring data from government officers like Grama Niladari and women development officers. In addition, observation was also used in order to obtain an acute insight into the problems.

**4. MAJOR FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

**4.1. Nature of Livelihood Activities of the Sample:**

Employment or livelihood activities are main factors which influence to decide living condition or status of an individual in the society. On the other hand, employment status or livelihood strategies of individuals directly affect the level of income and economic stability of a household. Therefore, researcher has investigated the nature of livelihood activities of responded women and data can be illustrated as follows.

**Figure 1: Distribution of FHHs by Livelihood Activities**



Source: Field Data, 2018

Remarkably, a higher number of employed FHHs (51) have engaged in agriculture. Some of them have engaged in both paddy cultivation and crop cultivation and some are doing only crop cultivation. Paddy cultivation is related to the rice cultivation and crop cultivation refers to dry farming in particular *chena* cultivation. Grains such as Sesame, Mung beans, Cowpea, Maize, Finger Millet (*Kurakkan*) are mainly cultivated in this type of cultivations as these types of crops are more suitable for dry zone area such as Galgamuwa. A considerable number of FHHs (28) work as manual labours in agriculture sector. A few numbers of women heads (7) employ in a brick-kiln and a tile mill as non-agricultural wage labours. A few proportions of female heads (9) having engaged in self-employment such as sewing dresses, Mat, boxes and purses woven from palm leaves, making cloth handbags, Making cloth door-mats etc. Fewer number of FHHs (5) have engaged in commercial activities such as groceries.

#### **4.2. Hardships Related to Livelihood Activities**

A livelihood is a combination of capacities and means of earning a living of households such as income, assets and foods (Chambers and Conway, 1991). When livelihood concept defines in rural areas, it is totally related with means of gaining of living. Livelihood is mainly related to capabilities such as skills, abilities and aptitudes, assets and resources and ability to claim and access towards them for a sustainable living (Tsfamariam, 2007). According to that, livelihood is a broader concept including monetary and non-monetary returns from activities, assets and potential capabilities. Thus, livelihood activities are related to things people do for maintaining their livings. In other words, livelihood activities are helpful in providing food or supplementing the earning opportunities for households. "Activities for living include cultivation, herding, hunting, gathering, wage labor, trading and hawking, fetching and carrying, begging, theft, selling firewood and craftwork" (Kgatshe M.M.:2005:25). Household diversify their sources of income and activities in order to secure their livelihood which can be used to supplement the income or to survive. In this process, households can confront many difficulties in particular, intensity of these hardships can be increased when women become the

head of households and women heads who are in climate affected rural areas. Hence, constraints and issues related to livelihood activities of FHHs who are in climate affected rural areas are expected to discuss in this section.

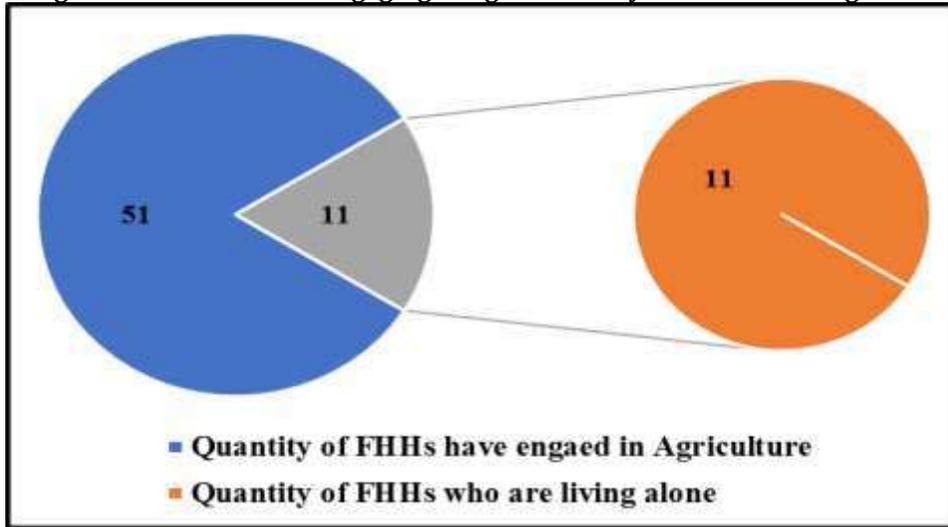
##### **4.2.1. Hardships Related to Agriculture Lack of Water:**

Natural capital is resource stocks especially common environmental resources which are very useful for livelihood activities. Water is an essential natural capital in rural paddy and crop cultivation. Farming activities in this area are based on both rain-fed cultivation and major and minor irrigation systems. Paddy cultivation in Koonwewa depends on 'Palukadawala' major irrigation system, paddy in Wadugama mainly depends on Maha Galgamuwa medium irrigation system and Pahala Koonwewa minor lake and Paddy fields in Medawachchiya, Molewa and Kallanchiya depend on minor irrigations such as Medawachchiya, Malnaidagama, Molewa, Iddamalpitiya and Kallanchiya lakes. Unfortunately, households in the studied area did not have enough water for two consecutive years due to drought continued. Thus; they had not received sufficient rain for two seasons in each of those two years. The preceding irrigation sources do not have capacity to stock sufficient water for long term droughts. Therefore, both paddy and dry farming failed in four seasons in succession that they had had worse challenges and hardships in making ends meet.

##### **Lack of Labour:**

Labour resources available to household had been one of essential assets in agricultural rural societies for both paddy and dry cultivation. It referred number of household members available for supporting in agriculture and time availability to engage in it. The type of female headship and availability of human capital played a crucial role in securing the growth and sustainability of livelihood activities for farming in particular. But considering human capital of FHHs, it was clear that majority of FHHs who had engaged in agriculture as their main income source had not had sufficient labour for their livelihood activities.

**Figure 2: FHHs who are Engaging in Agriculture by Number of Living Alone**



Source: Field Data, 2018

According to above figure, it was evident that a considerable proportion of FHHs (11) who had engaged in agriculture as their main income source were living alone due to some various reasons. It was evident that because of lack of sufficient labour, in some cases, they had tended to give them for tenant. But amount of income had been reduced in the process. Conversely, having dependents such as elder persons, infants, children and disabled persons of households, had increased many difficulties for FHHs in the matter of labour. As an alternative solution, FHHs could have had the support of kinship network or community. However, very few FHHs (8) had mentioned that they had had the support in agriculture only from their relations. It was evident that the mechanical solidarity in rural agricultural societies had been collapsed and were reaching the organic solidarity.

#### **Agriculture Extension Services and Related Issues:**

Agricultural extension services had been significant in achieving intended purposes in farming and for enhancing the sustainability of livelihood. Especially for people who had engaged in agriculture as their main income source but facing various challenges in agriculture due to both natural and man-made factors. It was significant to provide awareness and guidance on new technological agricultural methods and trainings for peasant societies basically depended on agriculture in order to uplift the living standards of people. Agricultural provisions such as fertilizers, guidance, trainings, awareness, improved seeds, new technological methods had been included to the agriculture extension services. Considering studied area, government section had played the major role of

agriculture services and more significantly, NGOs had not been functioning in any villages of sampled location. Village level farmers organizations (*Govi Samithi*) had been functioning and those peasant associations had interlinked the government agricultural provisions towards village level farmers.

Majority of FHHs engaged in agriculture as primary occupation (88%) had obtained membership of village level farmers organizations. Especially, FHHs who were doing paddy cultivations had chosen to be members of them and relatively few proportion FHHs engaged in dry farming and home gardening (12%) had not taken the membership of *Govi Samithi*. According to respondent FHHs they had received subsidy of fertilizer previously and then got money for fertilizer for paddy cultivations instead. However, due to the long drought sustained, they had not cultivated paddy fields and majority of them had tended to attend dry farming specially *chena* cultivation. They further mentioned, FHHs had not received any subsidies or supportive agricultural provisions (fertilizers or seeds) in regard with their dry farming.

It is important of having alternative mechanism to support unexpected long-term challenges in agricultural societies. If not, it might directly affect an increase of poverty and economic insecurities among people. Most of FHHs depended on agriculture had chosen the dry farming in particular *chena* cultivation as an alternative option. Since dry farming needs relatively low amount of water consumption. Due to lack of alternative supporting mechanism in providing agricultural provisions for dry farming, they had faced challenges such as lack of money for buying essential things inclusive of seeds, fertilizers etc. As a result, low

level of income of the household ultimately affected to create economic vulnerabilities and insecurities among FHHs.

On the other hand, guidance, trainings and raising awareness programmes could have been crucial for improvement of sustainability in an agricultural society in distress due to natural cause. According to FHHs, they never had opportunities to participate for such event in annals of history. Due to unawareness of contemporary climate resilient agricultural methods, they mainly depended on traditional methods and had been struggling against climate challenges. As consequences of these, economic vulnerabilities had increased among FHHs and government had to distribute drought subsidies for households. Although this was a short-term solution, long-term sustainable solutions had been required to uplift of living standards of FHHs. Providing and enhancing capacities, raising awareness, developing skills and knowledge could have been sustainable than application of welfare mechanism.

#### **4.2.2. Hardships Related to Self-Employment**

Self-employment is a great method which can use as primary occupation in order to increase the household income. Alternatively, it is a significant option to protect economic stability in challenges against agriculture and other occupations due to various factors and situations. Rather, in consideration of occupational patterns of responded FHHs, it was noticed how hard they had confronted difficulties in agriculture and obtaining manual labour. Hence, they had tended to depend on informal livelihood activities because of their familiarity with both paddy and dry farming sustained easier manual labour work. Due to lack of motivation and inspiration, they had not gained proper confidence in any new income generating sources like self-employment. In addition to internal attitudinal issues of FHHs, there might have been some external reasons behind lack of inspiration towards self-employment as an income generating source.

When investigating deeply, some important factors could be highlighted related to low tendency for self-employment among FHHs. Limited access to the market and low rate of commodity price have directly affected hardships of self-employment. Those villages situated in far away from the town had been provided with the least public transportation and infrastructure. Therefore, they had faced difficulties in accessing the market and competitive prices. On the other hand, inadequate capital to start self-employment, lack of motivational factors and lack of confidence had influenced to the decrease the tendency of self-employment among FHHs.

#### **4.2.3. Lack of Confidence for Diversification of Livelihood Activities:**

Not only external socio-economic factors but also, internal factors have influenced to decide the condition of living of people. Some external social and economic impacts can reduce through relevant and sustainable actions and mechanisms. But internal crisis which bonded with attitudes of individuals are difficult to minimize and need strong motivational process to reduce those. Although women heads are facing many difficulties and vulnerabilities in poverty due to lack of sustainable employment and livelihood activities, it is proved that they are reluctant to change their livelihood activities due to lack of confidence and motivation. Although they confront many difficulties in agriculture and manual labour they do not tend for diversification of livelihood activities because of familiarity with both paddy and dry farming and as well as manual labour works are easy to find. In one hand, they have limited in a demotivational attitudinal framework due to lack of choices, opportunities and educational and vocational qualifications. On the other hand, due to familiar daily livelihood activities, they do not much confidence about new income generating sources such as self-employment or commercial activities.

#### **4.3. Economic Hardships Related to Informal Employment:**

##### **4.3.1. Low Level of Income:**

More than half of responded women headed households (53%) are in the lowest income category (Less than Rs. 5,000). And also, it is noticeable that a few proportions of Women heads (8%) have comparatively medium income level (Rs. 10,001-20,000). But, majority of FHHs (86%) are in the low-income level (below Rs.10,000). Many reasons have influenced to generate low income in agriculture such as inadequate water resources, labour etc.

##### **4.3.2. Tendency of Making Short-term Money Transactions with Their Kin or Community Members for Daily Needs**

Reluctance to obtain loans having no stable sources of income to recover them and also insecurity of employment has influenced to reduce the tendency of obtaining loans. In addition, least support (financial or physical goods) from relations or elder children who have married and separated from household is a factor to record considerably low rate of taking loans. Formal loans sources such as Samurdhi bank and Death Donation Organizations which can reach easily in rural community, have reduced considerably the risk of obtaining loans from money lenders. When considering informal loan sources, making short term money transactions with their kin or community members for daily needs has increased due to prevalence of low level of income.

#### 4.4. Issues Related to Current Programmes

##### 4.4.1. Promoting Dependency Mentality

Monthly financial aids programmes such as “*Samurdhi*”, allowances for disabled persons, and allowances for old aged poor people called “*Piipadi*”, distribution of books for poor children, drought subsidies, fertilizer subsidies and retail goods, health clinics, self-employment trainings and low rate loan systems through women development organizations for self-employment can be identified as mainly highlighted programmes which are implemented by government particularly through Galgamuwa Divisional Sctratariat office. Most of current government programmes have related with the financial and physical allowances and has influenced to create dependency mentality and to decrease the motivational factors among FHHs. Low level of participation for self-employment training programmes can be identified among FHHs and inadequate awareness of advantages and opportunities of self-employment, lack of motivation towards new trends of income generating sources, unwillingness to change their familiar safe-zone have influenced to limited tendency of diversification of income generating sources and livelihood activities of FHHs.

##### 4.4.2. Lack of Specific Programmes with Specific Reference to FHHs

Above mentioned projects and programmes are common for all people and specific programmes with specific reference to FHHs could not be identified in the research area during the study. As identified in this study the key issues to be addressed by those projects and programmes could be listed as follows: Lack of government, private or non-governmental programmes especially relevant to female-headed households, lack of effectiveness of those programmes and strength of existing empowering methods in the community to stimulate women leadership, skills and latent potentials and to enhance involvement of decision making and improving infrastructures to enhance stability of living standards of FHHs.

#### 5. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of the study, suggestions to reduce issues related to FHHs and to enhance potential skills, capacities and strength of FHHs in order to sustain the living of FHHs can be illustrated as follows.

Creating access to the formal employment opportunities, providing opportunities for educational, vocational qualifications and skill development, and improving community supporting networks to provide care to children in their absence are essential to reduce or mitigate of issues related to employment of FHHs. And also, it is important to increase self-confidence for

diversification of livelihood activities among FHHs. In a context of most women heads have engaged in agricultural related livelihood activities it is essential to have alternative mechanism to support unexpectable but long-term challenges in agricultural societies. Hence, better adaptation and mitigation methods and climate resilient actions such as disaster resilient water systems and road systems, advanced technological agricultural methods, disaster resilient genetically improved seeds, rain-water harvesting methods should be introduced to sustain livelihood of FHHs by responsible government and non-governmental bodies. As well as enhancing capacities, awareness, skills and knowledge on sustainable livelihood activities are important than welfare mechanisms. Therefore, Agriculture extension services such as improving guidance, trainings and awareness programmes are crucial, parallel to distributing supportive physical materials in agriculture to improve the sustainability of livelihood of FHHs.

Improving access to the market, public transportation and infrastructure and low rate loan systems, updating reasonable rate of commodity price for products, increase motivational factors and empowerment are important to increase the tendency of diversified livelihood activities such as self-employment among FHHs. Introducing government, private or non-governmental programmes with especially relevant to FHHs is significant to stimulate women leadership, skills, latent potentials and to enhance involvement of decision making and to stability of living standards of female-headed households.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

Finally, this study signifies that typical rural development approaches mainly based on top-down supply had not responded adequately to the complexity of rural contexts in the past decades and suggests an approach to Participatory and Negotiated Territorial Development which offers concrete answers to the challenges of improving trust among female headed households in the research area, strengthening social cohesion and promoting a systemic territorial development.

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