

Informal Economic Activities among Rural Women: with special reference to Southern Sri Lanka

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Abstract- Informal economic activities among women is a most popular phenomenon in the developing world as well as developed world. Many economists argued that official labor statistics does not reflect all the informal activities which carried out by women. Moreover the female who are engage in economic activities which belong to the informal sector, do not have proper operating place. Sri Lanka is a small Island in the world. Women of the Sri Lanka constitute more than half of the population. But official statistics reflects, contribution of the women to the economy is relatively low. Majority of women's work are not often measured in quantitative terms and it is not valued in national accounts. By this paper it is try to identify informal sector economic contribution of females who are living in Southern Province, Matara District in Sri Lanka. Among the whole DSD Divisions of Matara District three were selected to the sample. All the study respondents were selected by using the stratified random sampling technique. Hundred and twenty study respondents were chosen to the sample and both primary and secondary data were used to analyze the data. Data were collected through structured questionnaire and quantitatively analyzed them. According to this study most of the respondents were engage in trading sector informal activities. Less contribution was identified in service sector informal activities. Social recognition for their employment was not in a satisfactory level. Further 58% of the respondents have secondary level education. Fifty six percent of them have obtained primary level education. And also the results showed that there is a positive relationship between education level and the monthly income of the women.

Index Terms- Rural Economy, Rural Woman, Rural Development, Informal Activities,

I. INTRODUCTION

Lack of systematic information on women's economic participation is a much debatable subject among economists and researches. Women can contribute to raise economy in many ways. Because they are contributed to great deal of unremunerated work in the society. Focus of this paper is to identify rural woman contribution to build up the families or society without any/much recognition of the society/economy or country. She participates in the production of goods and services for the market and house hold consumption, in agriculture, food production or engaging in some other economic activity while building up her family.

Women in Sri Lanka often have to play different tasks like mother, wife in the house hold as well as income earner to the

family. They have to manage both family commitments and economic activities of the family. Women should be the major focus of the society in Sri Lanka because the majority of the people are women .But national income statistics showed that 68% of males have been participated in the workforce while the women participation is limited to 36% (Central Bank Annual Report, 2012).

Almost all the countries in the world have some kind of national income accounts measure the economic activities. It is an important entity to understand how a county's macro economy works. The national income accounts are based on the idea that the economic activities occurs during the considering period of time, by taking the amount of output produced, the income received by the producers of the output and the amount of spending by the ultimate purchases of output. Women greater majority of unremunerated domestic and community work is not often measured in quantitative terms and it is not valued in national accounts. This study gives special attention on Southern Sri Lanka. Southern Sri Lanka comprise with three districts. Namely Galle, Matara and Hambantota. Various steps have been taken by the successive governments to develop this province. But rural poverty is still exists in this area. Especially the women in rural areas are needed to develop and to sustain the economy of the country. However different approaches like product, income and expenditure gives different ideas on economy. Problems such as incomplete or misreported data must show reasonable measure about economic activities among the people who live in an economy. So this study will fill the gap of such studies among the women in rural economy and informal activities in Sri Lanka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Khan and Khan(2006) informal employment include wage employment as well as the self-employment. They expressed that these employments are not legally protected.

More over scholars have stated that when an enterprise is established and controlled by women, it is not only boosts economic growth, but also has many desirable outcomes. Several recent studies on rural women's contribution to the rural development indicate that the contribution of rural women to the family budget and how it affects the rural economic development (Longman,(2011),Bano et al(2012). The most important feature is that when there is poverty, major vulnerable groups among the poor are women. A person who is landless, who has no assets, except their unskilled labour can be considered as a poor(Annual Report DCS,2011). Rural people largely depend on agriculture, fishing , small scale industries and services. Links to the

economy of rural poor is mainly determined by how they use their assets and participate in production. (Khan, 2006), Claros and Zahib (2005). According to the past researchers most of the rural people engage in both tradable, non tradable goods and services. Aikaeli (2010) has said that the quality of human capital is an important factor in explaining rural poverty. Further it says that education adds to the effectiveness of labour through, technical progress and also in general education allows people to adapt more easily to both social and technical changes in the economy and to change in the demand for labour. In a study on the determinants of Soviet household income had found that human capital and demographic factors were the main determinants of the income. Scholars have identified that major factors of women empowerment is defined their decision making capacity, control over resources and their own welfare practices (Sultana et al (1994), Lingman (2011), Riber and Nisha, (2012). Some of the researchers emphasized that empowering the women is a one of the key to human development.

Several other researchers have done researches on the determination of the labour force participation of married women. In their research labour force participation was taken as the dependent variable. Women's age, education, marital status, wage rate, number of children, type of the family, family size, employment status of husband, income and education level of the husband and monthly expenditure were taken as the independent variables of that researches. Descriptive statistics was used to determine the labour force participation of married women. Several researchers have found that contribution of women were a function of several socio-economic variables. They are related to socio cultural factors, environmental factors, competencies and to political factors.

Though some researchers used descriptive analysis method to analyse the data (Bibi and Afza, 2012) some others have used Probit Model, Ordinary Least Square Method (OLS) etc.. Naqvi and Shahnaz (2002) have applied legit and probit model in their study.

Thirty five years before, Chambers has done a research on economic activities. In Sri Lanka the age distribution of women in the labour force indicates that the highest number of women are in the economically active category between ages 30 and 60 years (Chambers, (1978) . Most of the past studies, those who have done their research on this title revealed that many rural women work on their home or any other place, are not covered by labour legislation. These women are not entitled to the holiday pay, or sick leave etc... And wages are low and link to the targets of productions rather than computation of number of hours worked. Argument here is, with the changes of technology, politics, policies, situation must change. And also with

globalization, situation must change. But still there exists unvalued worked amongst the women.

Problem Identification

As in the case of many developing countries, in Sri Lanka the contribution of rural women to the economy is ignored. But in Sri Lanka women in the rural areas occupy themselves in considerable amount of economic activities in order to enhance the family budget. According to the past literature in this regard clearly show a vacuum. Therefore filling the gap will be a good advantage for these ignoring people as well as to the country's economy.

Objective of this study

Development of rural areas becomes a major factor in many countries. Because they constitute the larger section of a country's land and they accommodate the larger percentage of a country's population. When consider the rural sector female population cannot be ignored. Hence the objective of this study is: to investigate informal activities among rural women in Sri Lanka.

Hypothesis

Ho :- There is a positive relationship between living standard of the household and the contribution of the rural women.

Vs

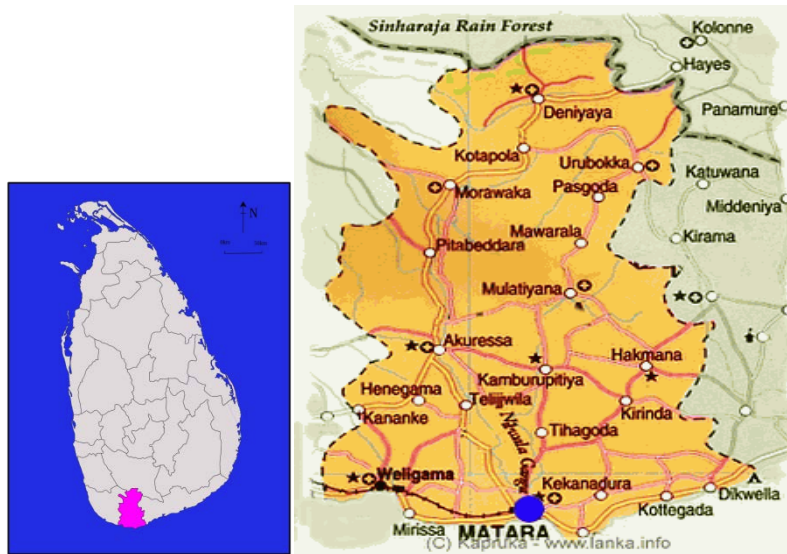
H1 :- There is no positive relationship between living standard of the household and the contribution of the rural women.

Methodology

Study Area

Matara district is located on the Southern Coast of Sri Lanka. Out of total Sri Lankan land 1.96% land is belong to Matara District. To the North it is covered by two Divisional Secretariats Divisions (DSD); Kolonna, Kalawana DSD Divisions of Rathnapura District. To the western Habaraduwa, Imaduwa, Yakkalamulla, Thawalama, Neluwa DSD Divisions of Galle District. To the Eastern DSD Divisions of Okewella, Beliatta, Katuwana of Hambanthota District. From Matara District DSD Divisions three were selected to the field survey. They were Devinuwara, Dickwella and Weligama. Matara District contributes a significant amount of national revenue in Sri Lanka by agriculture, agriculture based industries, fisheries industries and other industries. Paddy, Tea, Rubber, Cinnamon are main crops grown in Matara District.

Administrative Map of Matara District



Data and Data Collecting Instruments

Both primary and secondary data were used to analyze the data. Primary data collected through 120 women those who are engage in the identified informal activities in the areas. Self-administered structured questionnaire was used to collect the data

Sampling Technique

Women were selected through stratified random sampling techniques. Because population falls into natural groups and I can be divided into non-overlapping groups, stratified random sampling technique used as the most suitable sampling technique for collecting primary data in this study. Within the strata simple random sample technique was used to select the respondents (R.O. Thattil,1999).

Data Analysis and Discussion

Quantitative approach was used to analyze the data. Questionnaire were distributed among women who were engage in domestic industries such as coir, beeralu, lace making, weaving, fishery and tailoring etc.. Four main activities were identified as the major income activities of the area. They are Agriculture, Trading, Services and Manufacturing. Scholars have been identified following variables for their research to identify the contribution of business/jobs. Therefore, researcher used following variables as the dependent variable and independent variables.

Dependent variable: - Women participation in informal economic activities in Matara District in Sri Lanka

Independent Variables :- Family and cultural background, Educational Level, Risk taking and commitment, Environmental factors, Financial barriers, Self Confidence, Recognition by the society.

Sampling elements were selected as follows.

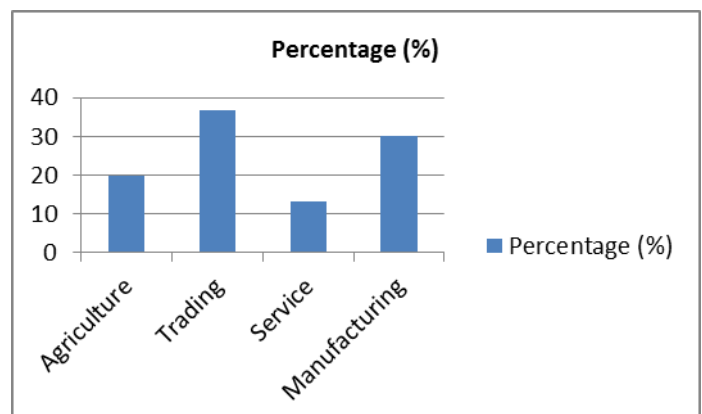
Table 1- Sample

AGA Division	Number of Women selected
Dickwella	45
Weligama	45
Devinuwara	30
Total	120

In the questionnaire six age groups were presented as , 20-30,31-40,41-50,51-60,61-70,70<.. From them 39% of despondence belonged to 41-50 age group.1% of despondence were belonged to 20-30 age group and over 70 age group. Others belonged to 41-50 age group.

According to the results of the sample survey , at young age labour force participation was low because of family responsibilities or any other reason. But they do child caring or any other house hold work at home without getting any income. But with age, when women get older they are able to spend more time on their income generating activities. In this age women tend to earn more money , in order to facilitate the children education and enhance the house hold welfare.

Figure1 - Participation of women in the economic activities



The above table revealed that most of the women engage in trading sector economic activities like selling food items, joysticks, bags, envelopes ,coir products ,garments etc.. Less contribution is indicated in service type activities like house maids, caring children, caring sick peoples and look after elders etc..

Table 3 - Recognition of the employment

Recognition by the society	Percentage (%)
Excellent	00
Good	13.33
Somewhat good	25.83
Poor	60.83

Source :- Sample survey

The above table shows the ideas of the participants on the recognition of their job activities performed in the society. Majority of them were not happy about how other people think about their economic contribution to the family as well as to the country. On the other hand, women still also perform a larger majority of unremunerated domestic work and community work, such as caring for children and older persons, preparing food for the family, cleaning the environment, and providing voluntary assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals and groups. This work is often not measured in quantitative terms and is not valued in national accounts. Women’s contribution to the development is seriously underestimated, and thus its social recognition is limited.

The table below shows the educational level of women in the sample survey. From the sample 56% of them attained primary level education and 58% of them have obtained secondary level education. No professional qualifications obtained by any of them.

Table 4 - Education Level of women

Educational Level	Percentage (%)
Primary	56
Secondary	58
Graduate	6
Professional	0

Source :- Sample survey

According to the information which was found out through the questionnaire from the investigated sample, some considerable factors are significant. The women who were engaged in nformal activities said that they had earned a very little amount of money from their informal jobs.

Though some women wanted to go for permanent job still they haven’t got that chance because of several reasons. And though some women wanted to expand their business, they haven’t get the chance to developed it because their job haven’t been registered anywhere. Other thing is they can’t spend much time to continue the business and find avenues to expand it. Among the barriers they face the less support from the family is significant. Very less support is given by the husband, children and other relatives. Instead of supporting they encourage them to

find some money anyhow for their day today survival. Most of them had no idea about expanding their business. Other special thing was they mentioned was that the people of the society did not care their activities and family members and other relatives also considered that they are unemployed.

Findings and

Present study is based on the field survey of informal activities where a majority of women are employed in the three DSD Divisions in the Matara District,namely Dickwella,Devinura and Weligama.Main objective of this study was to how rural women contribute to build up her family and related society around her. This study revealed that rural women are isolated and economically depressed. Poverty is the major issue of the rural areas. Specially poverty among the rural women is higher than the men. But women contribution is significant in many ways with regard to their house- hold economy and to the rural and national economy. This has resulted to for the wellbeing of the children and to the living standards of their lives. The main conclusion arrived from the analysis was that women’s contribution towards the family income has a positive effect on the living standard of the family. The relationship between women’s income and the house holds facilities too was a positive one. The results supported to prove the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between living standards of the house hold and the contribution of the women. Further women’s individual characteristics affect their contribution to the family.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through this study it is revealed that multi task and work-life balance are significant features in women’s day today life. Women greater majority of unremunerated domestic and community work is not often measured in quantitative terms and is not valued in national accounts. However different approaches like product, income and expenditure gives different ideas on economy. Further the problems such as incomplete or misreported data , must show reasonable measure about economic activities among the people live in an economy.

To enhance the productivity of women they should be trained in the industry. New technology, financial support and other supports should be introduced to improve the quality of the informal activities. Awareness programmes and the availability of marketing facilities is essential, especially for those engaged in home based employment. Providing loan facilities to buy machinery and other equipment ,will help to increase the contribution to the house hold budget and will ultimately affect the contribution to the rural economy and to the national economy too. Also the relevant authorities should take necessary steps to recognize for them and should take the necessary actions to facilitate them.

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