

Note on the Seminar

Eradication of Poverty in Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty has been observed every year since 1993, when the UN General Assembly, designated this day to promote awareness of the need to eradicate poverty and destitution in all countries.

The international theme for 2011, is “From Poverty to Sustainability – People at the Center of Inclusive Development”, a theme that resonates well with the local context and provides a useful lens through which to explore a number of key issues linked to promoting sustainable livelihoods with attention to environmental concerns, inclusive growth, equal access to services and opportunities, and participation in decision making.

2. Country setting

Sri Lanka recently emerged as a middle-income country with its growth rate averaging over 5 per cent in the past decade, and rising to 8 per cent in 2010. At the same time, Sri Lanka has been successful in translating this growth into a reduction in the poverty head count ratio from 15.2% in 2006/07 to 8.9% (HIES, 2009/10). Similarly impressive gains have been made on social indicators such as universal primary school enrolment, literacy rates and gender equality in primary and secondary school enrolment. Sri Lanka is thus well poised to meet and possibly exceed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) before 2015.

However challenges remain at the regional level, and among certain vulnerable groups. Poverty data for example, indicates a higher incidence in some of the districts in the Central regions of the country, including the plantation sector and in the Northern and, Eastern Provinces, in terms of both income and human development indicators.

3. Poverty Day Programme

Against this background, the Ministry of Economic Development, UN and Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) will use the occasion of International Poverty Day to hold a policy dialogue with several objectives:

1. To build a common understanding on the poverty dimensions in Sri Lanka;
2. Take stock of best practice policies and programmes employed in Sri Lanka to ensure gains in macro growth benefit the poor; and
3. Explore policy options to transform Sri Lanka’s lagging regions into emerging economic centres.

The Seminar also seeks to support the implementation of the Mahinda Chinthana Vision of “Balanced Regional Development with diversity” – the intention is to transform all the regions to ensure every household has the opportunity to benefit from economic development.

With a view to providing a platform for Sri Lanka to contribute to regional policy discussions, while at the same time having the opportunity to draw on experiences from countries in the region, several representatives from the region will be invited to participate.

The dialogue will take place from 9am – 4pm, in the IPS Auditorium on Monday 17 October 2011

To Mark the International Day for Eradication of Poverty