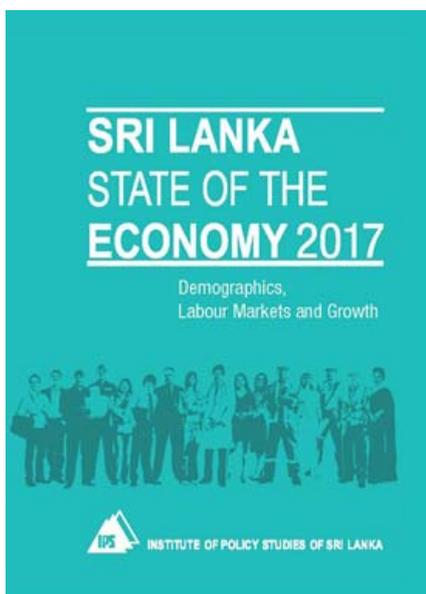


CHILD POVERTY: A LOOMING THREAT FOR SRI LANKA'S YOUNGER GENERATION

From the IPS flagship publication 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2017 Report'



labourers (25.9 per cent), followed by non-agricultural labourers and similar workers (19 per cent). Other PGs with significantly high child poverty levels are households headed by those who are unable/ too old to work (15.7 per cent) and skilled agriculture, forestry and fishery workers (12.3 per cent).

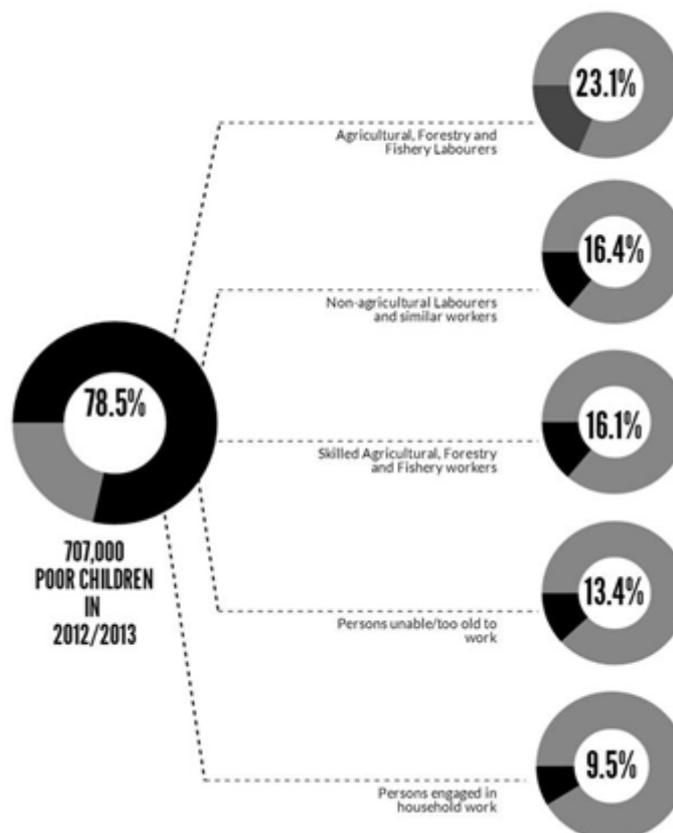
It is also important to identify the regions in which poorest and most vulnerable children are living, as it would be useful in developing suitable strategies to reduce child poverty. Out of the estimated 706,902 poor children under

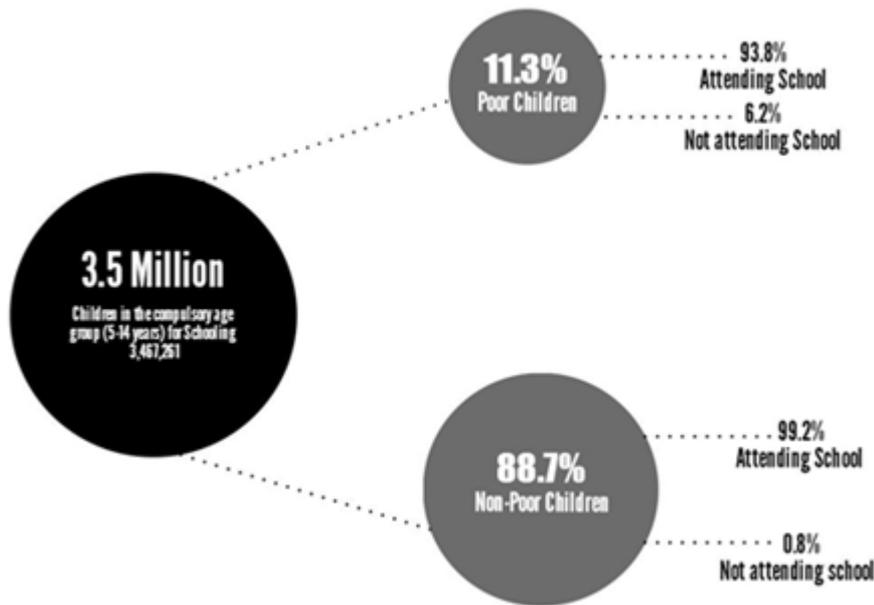
19 years in Sri Lanka, 79.2 per cent is to be found in the rural sector, while 13 per cent is in the estate sector. The balance 7.8 per cent is in the urban sector. The Batticaloa district with 63,000 out of the 706,902 poor children under 19 years in Sri Lanka has the highest share (8.9 per cent) of children affected by poverty. Apart from Batticaloa, other districts with large numbers of poor children are Ratnapura (7.7 per cent), Badulla (7.7 per cent), Galle (6.4 per cent), Nuwara Eliya (6.1 per cent), Kandy (6.1 per cent) and Monaragala (4.9 per cent).

Reducing child poverty and eradicating extreme child poverty are important and urgent tasks for any country, including developed countries. The impact of poverty during childhood can have adverse effects on children, which are irreversible and extreme child poverty can lead to an intergenerational poverty cycle. As such, it has become an urgent requirement to have a closer look at the present status of child poverty in Sri Lanka.

Who are the Poorest Children in Sri Lanka?

It is important to identify children belonging to which types of socio-economic groups (SEGs) or population groups (PGs) are most vulnerable and poorest. Child poverty is found to be highest among households headed by the agricultural, forestry and fishery





Link between Access to Education and Child Poverty

Although education is free for all children in Sri Lanka, poorer children face various difficulties in continuing their education for a full period of 13 years in school. A significant number of children leave school education after the compulsory age for schooling (5-14 years). Of a total 3.5 million children in the age group 5-14 years, 391,461 (or 11.3 per cent) are poor. Of them, 6.2 per cent are not attending school. Although the percentage is relatively low, it also shows that poor children are nearly eight times more likely to not attend school than the non-poor children in the same age group.

Many children leave formal school education after 14 years of age, as the compulsory age group for schooling in Sri Lanka ends after completing 14 years. It is observed that 23.8 per cent of poor children aged 15-16 years are not attending school, indicating that nearly one-fourth of poor children who should be in school in this age group have left school education, even without attempting O-Levels. Poor children in the 15-16 age group are almost three times more likely to leave formal school education, compared to non-poor children in the same age group. The percentage increases to as

high as 64.7 for poor children in the ages 17-18 years, showing that they are leaving school after Grade 11, either completing or without completing O-Levels. Poor children in the age group 17-18 years are twice more likely to leave formal education compared to non-poor children in the same age.

Way Forward

Poor children who need the highest priority are those found in households headed by persons engaged in agricultural and related activities, either as agricultural workers or labourers, non-agricultural labourers, persons unable to work or too old to work and persons engaged in household work, are the most vulnerable. They account for nearly 80 per cent of the total number of poor children in Sri Lanka. Therefore, sufficient attention needs to be given to improve the agricultural sector in order to improve the living conditions of the people engaged in agricultural and related activities and their families.

Income inequality in Sri Lanka is high and has remained more or less unchanged for more than three to four decades. For sustainable reduction of child poverty, as well as overall poverty levels in the country, it is necessary to reduce income inequality.

As such, developing the rural economy, creating accessible, productive and rewarding jobs in all regions, including in the rural sector, without any discrimination, is the key to minimize poverty and reduce inequality.

Education reduces poverty, boosts economic growth and increases income. Education is one of the most important investments a country can make in its people and its future. Quality education provides children with knowledge and life skills needed to realize their full potential. Equal access to quality education to all, plays a key role in eradicating poverty and it plays a central role to give the poor children a better chance of decent and fulfilling life.

Importance of precise targeting in social protection programmes: The analysis clearly identifies the socio-economic groups or population groups and the regions in which most of the poor children are located. They are the most deserving for assistance under social protection programmes. As reduction of child poverty or eradicating extreme child poverty may also depend on precise targeting of most vulnerable groups, welfare programmes like Samurdhi may need to be streamlined to include the poorest groups.

This Policy Insight is based on the comprehensive chapter on "Child Poverty in Sri Lanka" in the 'Sri Lanka: State of the Economy 2017 Report' - the flagship publication of the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS). The complete report can be purchased from the publications section of the IPS, located at 100/20, Independence Avenue, Colombo 7. For more information, contact the Publications Unit on 0112143107/ 0112143100.



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