

An Investigation of poverty reduction strategies for coconut-based rural communities

Coconut provides raw materials for a number of industrial uses and it is one of the major sources of income for many rural poor people in Sri Lanka. However, the coconut-based income generation activities make marginal profits to the producer due to various reasons. The objective of this study is to reveal the existing socioeconomic status; current constraints for production and to examine the possible intervention strategies to enhance the productivity of these coconut-based rural communities. A base line survey was carried out during March to May 2001 in 5 selected locations, i.e., "*Hettipola*" and "*Metiyagane*" in the Kurunegala District, "*Wilpotha*" and "*Walahapitiya*" in the Puttalam District and "*Dodanduwa*" in the Galle District, which are specialized in coconut-based livestock farming, ekel handicrafts, stipule/bracts handicrafts, treacle and jaggery, and white fibre producing activities respectively. Information was collected using a structured questionnaire with a random sample of 50 respondents from each of the category.

The majority of the respondents in the total sample can be categorized as poor, who receives an income of less than one US \$ per day. The respondents had the education up to GCE advanced level on average and hence identified as educated. Women have become the leading labor force for these coconut-based income-generating activities. Toddy tapping is the only single activity, which is gender specific and carried out by men. Lack of access to credit facilities for investments, absence of opportunities to get training in the production process and on value added products; problems in marketing were the major highlighted restrictions for production and income generation by all the communities. The elimination of these constraints may improve their product outputs both in quantity and quality, which eventually enhance their living standards. Provision of borrowing capital for new investments, supplying of training on production, contributing in new equipment and tools and assistance in marketing are few of the major strategies, would help in reducing the existing poverty level of these rural coconut based communities. However, the institutional and organizational support is essential to overcome the existing limits, where these rural poor communities are yet to achieve it on their own costs.