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The effectiveness of “Zakat” as a charity based supportive system for poverty reduction among Muslims in Sri Lanka

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The prevalence of poverty among Muslims is high though the Muslims constitute only 8% of total Sri Lankan population. *Zakat* is a charity based poverty reduction strategy that can be applied to reduce poverty among Muslims. Hence this study was carried out with objectives of assessing the effectiveness of *Zakat* contribution and to investigate the possible ways of developing *Zakat* as a supporting strategy in poverty reduction. This study was carried out in Kegalle district. Being a recipient of *Zakat* was the inclusion criteria. Data was collected using case studies, informal interviews and documentary analysis. The concept of *Social Capital* was applied to discuss the findings, as *Zakat* can be recognized as a form of *Social Capital*. The study revealed that provision of *zakat* to the needy has bridged the gap between the poor and others. The productive utilization of *Zakat* on initiating business and education has been helpful to overcome poverty. Unbiased selection of recipients, well organized nature of *zakat* distribution has made it more effective. The attitudes of the recipients of *zakat* varied depending on the level of education, the amount of *zakat* that they received their religious knowledge and the strength in religious belief. Some respondents had misused the amount that they received on unwanted activities such as consuming alcohol which is believed to be a sin according to Islamic interpretation. It is a significant observation that the majority of the *Zakat* recipients strongly believed that they should be able to contribute to *Zakat* in the next annual distribution than remaining as a recipient. Believing that poverty was a punishment given by Allah and he tests the faith (*thakwa*) of the religion, some respondents had become more religious than ever before. Encouraging the contribution, proper selection of eligible recipients, fair distribution and monitoring of effective usage of the *Zakat* through a properly established *Zakat* committee is recommended. *Zakat* should be recognized and incorporated as a supportive system for poverty reduction in national policy and programming. The government can mediate to get funds from Islamic countries by expanding the international linkages.

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