

Livelihood Diversification and Its Impact on Well-Being of Indigenous People in Sri Lanka: With Special Reference to Vadda community

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ABSTRACT

Generally indigenous people are recognized as hunter-gathers, food-collectors and shifting-cultivators since their origin. However, livelihood strategies of many indigenous communities around the world have been changed largely to agriculture, and non-agriculture based strategies since recent past. This transformation occurred in response to external and internal changes of the economies over the centuries. Sri Lankan indigenous peoples called Vaddas who own distinct socioeconomic and cultural traits, is one of the primitive communities of the world. This community with distinctive cultural values, prehistoric traditions and own survival strategies, at present, encounter to extinction due to the various influences. Even though about three centuries ago Vaddas could be found all over the island, at present they can be seen only in specific scattered places associate with semi-evergreen dry monsoon forest habitat and newly established colonies. The primary livelihood means of ancient Vaddas were hunting and gathering, harvesting non-timber forest products and sometimes shifting cultivation and fishing etc. However, at present these practises have diverted to agriculture and related activities mostly practised by non-Vaddas in rural villages due to the modern development activities, resettlements, and wildlife and cultural conservation policies and interacting with advanced communities. Meanwhile, the Vaddas resettled in newly established colonies have to adopt agricultural and related practices involuntarily. These changes of livelihood practices have significantly affected their lifestyle as well as their well-being. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of livelihood diversification on well-being of newly resettled Vaddas in Sri Lanka. The question that attempted to address is How did livelihood diversification affect on well-being of Vadda community? This study was mainly based on mixed method approach. Given the qualitative as well as quantitative nature of the study, both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were employed. In-depth interviews, group discussions, key informant interviews, focused group discussions and observation methods were supplemented by the questionnaire based survey. The study area was the Henanigala which is newly established colony under the Mahaweli Development Project in 1980s. Based on the empirical evidences the study concludes that relative position of Vaddas in terms of well-being is fairly decent. At least they have come out from the forest. However, in absolute term still they are in the misery. They have just moved from worst to bad. Lack of cultivable lands for the second generation, discrimination, marginalization, lack of accessibility to basic needs including health and education are the areas that should be addressed urgently. Establishing an appropriate institutional and legal framework for Vadda community is essential to address these issues effectively.

Key words: Indigenous people, Livelihood diversification, Sri Lanka, Vaddas community, Well-being

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