

# Reaching People First: A New Paradigm to Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation

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## Abstract

*Sri Lanka's long history of the strategic endowments in direct public intervention in anti-poverty measures goes back to the British colonial period. All successive governments since independence have continued the same policies. It is obvious that these policies and programmes have contributed towards the mitigation of income poverty to some extent, but, the unanswered question is whether those achievements have enabled a substantial improvement in the quality of life, particularly of the people living in rural areas, at least to an acceptable decent level. The authors of this paper tested this assertion in a thorough qualitative investigation in seven different rural locations in the country. The study triggered the discussion around the fact that the reduction in income poverty itself might not simply be an indicator of a reasonable improvement in quality of life. Even if huge amounts of public money have continued to be pumped into rural poverty alleviation for decades, as long as the key focus is on attacking income poverty, other faces of poverty are left unattended, an improvement in quality of life will be unlikely. A critical discussion on the perceived reasons for the failure of the decade-long poverty alleviation efforts suggests the need for an alternative community-centered strategy. While community is the focus, it will also bringing in all public, private and community sectors together in a partnership effort to attack rural poverty in all its aspects, not only income poverty. Again, being community-centered, it enables a paradigm shift from the conventional top-down to a meaningful bottom-up strategy towards overall poverty alleviation in the country.*

**Keywords:** Poverty Alleviation, Rural Development, Quality of Life, Community Partnership, Paradigm Shift

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