

RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT
AND
RURAL WORKERS

(PROCEEDINGS OF A SEMINAR)



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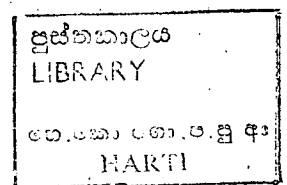
First of a series of study seminars to be conducted by the ARTI, the seminar on "Research, Development and Rural Workers", provided a forum for the policy planners of the government, the researchers of the Institute and the other interested parties to exchange their views on a study conducted by the Institute about the hired labourers in peasant agriculture in the country. It was thought that a seminar of this nature would help a great deal primarily in getting the much needed feed back from planners who could make use of the findings of the Institute studies in policy options. It was also felt that this will be a step in the right direction to enhance the quality of the studies conducted by the ARTI.

Dr. H.N.S. Karunatileka, Senior Deputy Governor of the Central Bank, who presided over referred to his long association with the Institute. He made a critical appraisal of the work of the Institute. He remarked that the Institute since its inception had covered a considerable area of work but in the process had quite often forgotten the macro aspects of the research work that have practical implications for those who deal with policy planning. He mentioned about the excessive concern the Institute had tended to show towards a micro approach.

He further added, "The quantative aspects of the ARTI studies are sometimes very inadequate. The basic requirement for a seminar of this nature could have been truly a broader perspective of the manpower situation in the rural sector. This exercise should begin with a strong data base. The Institute has not conducted an islandwide or a comprehensive sample survey, where the findings could be applicable to the economy as a whole. To make a study of the employment situation in the rural sector some effort could have been made to assemble the data

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that is available on the supply and demand condition for labour, and this has not been attempted".

He stressed on the fact that a seminar dealing with the labour supply for farm development or the socio-economic condition of rural workers should have covered such areas like the districtwise availability of labour, the seasonality of the shortages, the quantum of the proportion of unpaid family workers and the proportion of workers that receive remuneration. He was of the view that these aspects should be the base for a meaningful discussion on the manpower situation in the country.

Quoting figures from a consumer finance survey carried out by the Central Bank 1978/1979 Dr. Karunatilaka stated that the unemployment situation at present, was different from what it was in 1973. "The unemployment", he said" in the rural sector, according to this survey had declined from 24.5% in 1973 to 15.4% in 1978. Even in the urban sector it has registered a decline from 32.1% to 21.2%. Taking the island as a whole the unemployment rate is 15.3% today as against 24% in 1973.

He added that if the unpaid family workers are excluded from the total the unemployment situation in the rural sector had shown a little difference between 1973 and 1978.

He suggested that these statistics should be the take off points for further research. He referred to the effect such implications could have on the cost of production of all items, paddy even tobacco and crops like gingelly, cowpea or chillies. He remarked that a statistical base of this type was not present in the studies of the ARTI, and said that any examination regarding unemployment situation of the rural workers should stem, from the macro data that is available.

Dr. Karunatileka was of the view that research could not be isolated or confined to particular areas, sometimes not even scientifically selected and draw conclusions that have a national applicability.

Suggestions and observations which have a bearing on broad policy making had not been forthcoming from the studies so far, he said.

Talking on another important factor related to agriculture and the distribution and size of the work force, Dr. Karunatileka pointed out the districtwise distribution of employment and unemployment. "The Central Bank Survey", he said, "had brought out data which surface the fact that unemployment is far lower in the agricultural districts than in the other regions. He gave an unemployment rate of 20.2% of the work force in the Colombo district. The corresponding figure for Anuradhapura was only 3.9 and for Puttalam 9.5, Vavuniya 4.3, Badulla 9.4 and Kurunegala 13.6. The unusual figure of 18.8% registered for Hambantota, a largely paddy grown area need closer examination to the question whether, there is a seasonal migration to Hambantota or from Hambantota to the agricultural districts in the neighbourhood.

"Kegalle which is considered as an area of migrant labour supply to a good part of the dry zone has an unusual unemployment figure of 21.7%. In the context of the broader national needs these are the areas that deserve much attention", Dr. Karunatileka said. He emphasised on the need for macro data at least for policy perspectives. He added that the purpose of this seminar could have been better served if an attempt was made to deal with problems such as the availability of labour in the rural sector, their income distribution, socio-economic status and the quality of labour.

He referred to the peculiar aspirations of the unemployed and quoted unemployment figures for 1978 by educational levels.

The figures 4% for no schooling, 7.2% for primarily schooling and 21.9% for secondary schooling, 29.2% for G.C.E. (O.L) and the startling figure of 31.7% for (A.L) lead to deduct the conclusion that those who have passed the O.L. or A.L. and higher examinations would obviously not want to join the agricultural labour force.

"A study on labour supply situation of the country should take these

aspects into consideration", he said, Dr.Karunatilaka commented on the great concern shown towards the landless agricultural labour, and posed the question whether all agricultural labour should be provided with land, and whether the mere provision of land would be sufficient for them to get a sustainable income in the absence of other inputs. In such a situation the size of the optimum plot would be irrelevant, he added.

In conclusion, Dr.Karunatilaka remarked that in the absence of comprehensive and conclusive studies on agricultural wages, done by the ARTI, the Institute could better have resorted to other sources where data is available. In addition he posed further questions whether it is necessary to be so concerned about the landless labourers if their wages during the last few years, had quadrupled. "If the income they receive are sustainable, if they are able to get wages which more than compensate for the rising cost of living and if they get more than the mean wages in other sectors, is there really a problem"? he questioned.

Mr.T.B.Subasinghe, Director of the Institute who welcomed the participants to the seminar thanked Dr.Karunatilaka for the very forthright comments made by him on the activities of the Institute. He said that comments and criticisms of this nature would serve a very useful purpose in getting the much needed feed back for the studies. The Director talking on the composition of the Board of Governors of the ARTI referred to the representative nature of the Board and said that all important organizations in the agricultural sector were represented in the Board so that work of the ARTI could be linked to the on-going development projects.

He added, that in spite of making available the findings of over 35 research reports and nearly 20 occasional publications to these organizations there was very little interaction on the recommendations and suggestions made in these reports. Talking on the objectives of the seminar Mr.Subasinghe pointed out that it had now been decided to discuss the contents of important research reports regularly in similar seminars so that there is a constant flow of

information between the researchers and the development planners.

The intention of the Institute is to get comments and observations, specially from those who are involved in policy planning. He further, added that it is also necessary for research organizations to make the others know about the data available with them. Otherwise there will be unnecessary duplication of efforts.

He said that the information and data regarding the subject at hand were found in a scattered way, with bits and pieces in various studies conducted both by the Institute and other similar organizations. No attempt had been made so far to collect these information together in a comprehensive manner. The Institute has made a start in this direction. The Director invited the participants to make their frank comments and help the Institute in its task by coming out with suggestions that could create a strong link between the researchers and those who need the efforts of researchers in various aspects of development.

Mr. U.L.J. Jayantha Perera, R. & T.O, ARTI presenting his paper on the hired labour in the peasant agriculture observed, that nearly 40% of the peasant smallholdings sector earn their living mainly through sale of labour, quite often in agricultural work and at times in non-agricultural work. This situation implies that the wage earning households in this sector is almost equivalent to that dependent on their own farming. The difficulty he said, in identifying a distinct labour class, as in the case of other income categories, was not so much due to the absence of full time wage earners but to the fact that other cultivators and tenants who generally fell into the other occupational categories functioned as wage earners seasonally or on an ad-hoc basis. The geographically scattered nature of these labourers render them more impossible to categorise.

Tracing the origin and the growth of the hired agricultural labour in the agricultural economy, the speaker pointed out that this category of labour was increasing as a result of the interplay of

several factors: fragmentation, evictions and the near stagnation of non-agricultural, professional and industrial enterprises in the rural setting. Despite the increased wage rates during the last decade, the soaring cost of living made the situation worse for this labour grade and the increasing avenues of work that came up their way, through the ongoing development projects, did not result in a substantial improvement of their living standards. The policies and programmes drawn up for the upkeep of the farming community failed to identify the hired agricultural labourers as a major component in the manpower situation of the country.

Mr. Perera, commented on the forces that generated wage earners in the peasant sector, and pointed out that the scattered paddy small holdings in the country which are subject to further fragmentation due to various succession laws resulted in rendering the paddy plots economically non-viable. Faced with this situation, the small holder resorted to the next possible option he has, selling his labour.

Legislation that promoted large scale farming contributed to the emergence of this labour group. Mahaweli and other major development projects have projected for a large seasonal labour input for intensive farming.

Village expansion schemes and the LDO allotment schemes have had their share in making a substantial contribution for the growth of these labour, for the plots of land alienated under such schemes were just enough as a homestead and the allottees invariably had to look for other ways to earn a little more. They too resorted to hiring out their labour.

Even the small owner farmers seasonally work for the others for an extra income so that they can invest such earnings for improvements of their farms, in the absence of an effective credit system in agriculture. Lack of skills to do off-farm jobs and problems of contact, make the small farmer in the village dependent on the paddy economy, which operates at low level of efficiency and productivity. Such an economy enables the unskilled peasants to be absorbed as

wage earners.

The speaker then touched upon the question of mobility of these workers and divided them into three groups:

- 1) Those who find jobs within the village preferring to work under several employers.
- 2) Those who find work in the neighbouring areas and
- 3) Those who migrate to other parts of the country, seasonally, depending on the availability of work.

Drawing comparisons and contrasts between the estate workers and the hired agricultural labour, Mr. Perera, described the former as a direct outcome of the plantation economy, where an organized wage earning group of workers was necessary to run the estates. They are the descendants of Indian immigrant labour whose aspirations are quite different from those of the hired agricultural labourers, who are rather a disorganized group.

In conclusion he made the point that the rural workers in the peasant sector have diverse kinships with the land owners and the tenants in the area, and themselves aspire to own lands the deprivation of which in the rural setting is considered as an indicator of poverty and rootlessness, in the village.

Mr. Newton Gunasinghe, making his observations on the paper, said that the subject requires a comparative statement in relation to the other categories of population.

Referring to the small owner cultivators, he said that their lower living standards could be minimized by giving them land.

The problem with the hired agricultural labourers, he said, was that they did not get work regularly. He was of the view that their income was not necessarily lower than that of the small owner cultivators and pointed out the need for ways and means to increase their

bargaining power. Drawing comparisons with the situation in Kerala and West Bengal, Mr. Gunasinghe traced how powerful unions of agricultural labour had come up in those States.

Adducing reasons for the non-emergence of similar unions in the local context, he added that the absence of a free market of labour in the agrarian sector and the functioning of intermediaries between the owners and the labourers might have thwarted the rise of group attempts.

He posed the question whether the migrant labour continue to be a labourer in the agricultural sector or does he go into small enterprises.

Mr. Gunasinghe mentioned the necessity for maintaining a fairly large cadre of this category of population vis-a-vis the new development programmes going on.

Dr. S. B. D. de Silva, Deputy Director ARTI, observed the growth of agricultural labourers as a function in the capitalization of agriculture, a part of the agricultural process itself.

He commented on the need to explore the factors associated with the mobility of labour and said that the deterioration of their living standards might be due to the low productivity in the agricultural sector. He looked at the problem of agricultural labour as a phenomenon in the transformation stage of the agricultural economy, from pre-capitalized to a commercial, monetized structure. Dr. Silva further added that a pattern of development might be desirable where the rural surplus labour can have work in the confines of the rural sector itself. He emphasised on the need to have further investigations into the characteristics of surplus labour in the village economy.

M/s. J. Errington and R. S. Fieldson, ARTI, presented a paper on "labour supply for small farm development in the dry zone".

Introducing the paper, Mr. Farrington questioned the relevance of using census data on unemployment in the rural sector as Dr. Karunatilake had advocated. He pointed to the problems of finding a meaningful definition of unemployment which could be readily interpreted by field investigators as many rural workers are involved in casual or seasonal work. Under such circumstances it is more important to consider how much work is available to the labourer over the year as a whole, and what level of earnings can be achieved, rather than to ask whether, at a particular point in time, he is "employed" or "unemployed."

Mr. Farrington explained that in this paper attempt was made to investigate some of the factors which affect the amount of labour applied to farms in the dry zone, and to follow through the implications of the results for employment within the Mahaweli Project area.

The successful achievement of planned aims on new dry zone colonisation schemes depends on the simultaneous response by thousands of independent decision-taking units to the stimuli and incentives provided by the planners. While it is impossible to predict precisely what response will be forthcoming, the study of how farmers already settled in the dry zone already respond to the incentives provided by similar allocations of land, provision of inputs, prices, etc., should improve the chance of success.

The methodology which has been adopted involves the synthesis of data drawn from a number of different studies of dry zone agriculture which have been undertaken over the last decade or so. While this led to various problems over comparability and consistency of data, these were not felt to be serious enough to bring into question the main results obtained.

The methods of analysis and results were discussed by Mr. Farrington under three broad headings, and in the final section some of the implications of the results for the Mahaweli Project were considered.

(1) THE SELECTION OF APPROPRIATE ALLOTMENT SIZES

After a brief review of changing government policy and the existing literature on holding size, simple analysis (using scatter diagrams) was undertaken to test hypotheses on the relationship between the area of paddy cultivated and the input of labour per acre into paddy cultivation. As for all the data, the figures related just to the maha season. It was found that :

- (a) There was no evidence of any relationship between aggregate labour input per acre and the area of paddy cultivated over the range of holding sizes studied.
- (b) There was no strong support for the hypothesis that family labour input a per acre will decline as area cultivated increases.
- (c) There is some evidence that the input of hired labour increases as the extent of paddy cultivated increases.

(2) INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAMILY AND HIRED LABOUR AND FARM TECHNOLOGY LEVEL

Once again, the literature was reviewed and several testable hypothe-

ses obtained. The locations for which data was available were categorised into "high", "medium" and "low" tractor-use groups, according to the proportion of the land area cultivated by tractors and by animals, and average labour input figures were obtained for each of the groups. This was done for the total labour input figures, and for those for land preparation alone (as this is the operation most likely to be affected by mechanisation). The main results were that:

- (a) There is clearly a reduction in the total labour input per acre associated with an increase in the proportion of land cultivated by tractor. The extent of this reduction is difficult to quantify because of other influences on labour input, but 9 mandays per acre seems to be a reasonable estimate.
- (b) There is no evidence of a systematic relationship between the degree of tractorisation and the input per acre of hired labour, either for all operations or for land preparation alone.
- (c) The input of family labour per acre (both the total operation and land preparation figures) shows a clear tendency to decline as mechanisation increases. This suggests that family rather than hired labour is displaced by mechanisation.

(3) LABOUR INPUT AND THE RETURNS FROM PADDY

Some idea is given of the relationship between the input of labour and the returns to labour by plotting the labour input figures against the net returns from paddy, although it is realised that this latter figure is only a proxy for the actual returns to labour. When this was done on a per acre basis no clear relationships emerged but when done on a whole farm basis, stronger relationships did emerge (perhaps because the farm is the relevant decision making unit). It was found that :

- (a) There was a fairly strong relationship between the total labour input into paddy per farm and the net return from paddy per farm.

- (b) A similarly strong relationship existed between the input of hired labour per farm and the net return from paddy per farm. The marginal return to hired labour seemed to be rather higher than the average wage, suggesting perhaps there are non-money costs attached to the hiring of labour (e.g. the inconvenience of obtaining and supervising workers)
- (c) There was no apparent relationship between family labour input per farm and net return from paddy possibly suggesting that farmers prefer to take more leisure as their income increases.

(4) PROJECTION OF LABOUR REQUIREMENTS UNDER MAHAWELI

Finally, attempt was made on the basis of the earlier sections to forecast likely levels of labour requirement per farm under the Mahaweli Scheme, and from this to extrapolate over the whole project area and so obtain a very rough estimate of the total number of hired labourers which will be required.

The main conclusion was that if projected levels of paddy output are to be achieved, then the input of hired labour per farm will probably have to be more than 50% higher than is at present envisaged. This is because high yields are associated with labour intensive practices such as transplanting, weeding, etc., which cannot be carried out by family labour alone. Mechanisation is not likely to lead to any significant reduction in the hired labour requirement.

For the whole project, it was found that even with quite an ambitious estimate of the number of days which an individual worker can work in a season, the requirement for hired labourers will, if output targets are to be met, be around 400,000 for the Accelerated Programme, and 356,000 for the Balance Programme. With lower output targets (and consequently less labour intensive cultivation), hired labour requirements remain at about 240,000 and 214,000 workers respectively. Adding the figures for the two stages gives totals of over 450,000 and 750,000 under the different assumptions.

But it seems that some half to three-quarters of a million hired workers will be required under the Mahaweli Scheme, and at least in the early years of settlement, it is suggested that most of these will have to migrate seasonally from the wet zone. Thus, the Mahaweli Project may have social and economic consequences the extent of which has not been fully realised.

Prof. J. Jogaratnam, Faculty of Agriculture, Peradeniya University, commenting on the paper, said that the data presented in the paper related to a period of over 10 or more years, and hence, the difficulty in making any judgement or evaluation based on the synthesis of such data.

He referred to his personal involvement in some of the studies mentioned in the paper and added that in those studies, the basis of measuring labour use had been changed with every investigation in search of a proper methodology to generate reasonably accurate data to find out the effects of labour utilization on various aspects of agricultural production. With no such methodology at his disposal Prof. Jogaratnam said that he was hesitant to comment on the conclusions drawn from the data available in the paper.

He agreed with the point that there was no justification in carrying out in-depth studies on the size of holding, and remarked that any data in this context is only of theoretical value and had very little policy implications.

Prof. Jogaratnam, referred to an instance in the dry zone where a farmer had very successfully operated a diversified type of farm when just across the channel which brought water to that farm, another farmer found that his holding did not permit any diversified farming because of its very high black clay soil content. He said, that it did not make any sense whether the holding size is in the usually accepted range of 2 acres or much more, because the returns that the farm can generate depends on so many variables social, economic, physical and so on. He doubted, whether economic

- principles could give any guidance for making a decision on the size of holding. Talking on the relationships drawn in the paper between labour input and technology levels, Prof: Jogaratnam pointed out that these variables should have been studied in detail with new data, relating them to different sizes of holdings.

Mr. P. J. Gunawardena, Research and Training Officer, A.R.T.I. then read his paper on socio-economic conditions of rural workers in Sri Lanka, on the basis of the study conducted by the Institute.

Detailing the objectives of the study he said that the rationale in this enquiry was to get data and information about the hired workers in the peasant agriculture in Sri Lanka, the size of their growth and their socio-economic conditions so that this information can provide a guide line in any envisaged planning to improve the lot of this sector of population.

The study was conducted in nine villages representing, Polonaruwa, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Amparai and H'tota districts, using reconnaissance survey methods, village surveys, record keeping exercises and field observations.

High demand areas where migratory labour is employed, excess labour supply areas, and areas where labour requirements are met within the environs itself and where opportunities for non-agricultural employments are available constituted the criteria in the selection of the study localities.

Summing up the conclusions made in the study, Mr. Gunawardena pointed out that agricultural labourers who worked both full-time and part-time, constituted more than 50% of all engaged in agricultural occupations. This phenomenon was obviously seen in six out of nine villages. This category of labour consisted of not only the landless but also the small tenants and marginal owner farmers.

He further pointed out that grouping of these workers in to any

socio-economic category needed closer examination because, it can not be done just on the basis of occupations. In this context income-expenditure patterns and their general living conditions have to be the basic considerations in such categorization. Talking about the labour market situation that prevailed in the study areas, he added, that there were over 900 full-time and part-time agricultural labourers in the villages concerned. Employment was of a casual, full-time or part-time nature. The labour group concerned included adult males and females who were normally recruited for daily work or piece work. There were instances of contracts too. Mr.Gunawardena was of the opinion that the nature of demand for these workers was seasonal and was very often conditioned by the labour needs in keeping with such factors like new high yielding varieties, tractorization and so on.

Bringing in to light the factors associated with the wage, situation, Mr.Gunawardena said that wage situation was not merely the result of the supply and demand conditions. In the absence of institutional intervention and collective bargaining power he doubted whether this category of labour would get remuneration to commensurate with their services. The regional differences in demand and supply, the sex and age conditions, efficiency, patron-client relationships and degree of mobility were the determinents that conditioned the wages received by them. The functioning of customary conventions had always resulted in discrimination against women so far as as the wages were concerned.

He also said that the study had shed light on the employment factor too, specially in terms of the record keeping programme involving 178 agricultural labourers through out Maha '78/79' covering paddy cultivation, subsidiary food crops and chena cultivation. The study concluded that males predominated almost in all farm operations and a certain degree of specialization by women in areas such as transplanting, weeding and harvesting. In this investigation it was also found out that more work was available for this sector of labourers in locations where traditional labour intensive farming

techniques were practised and where non-agricultural employment opportunities were available. Areas where farming had taken to mechanisation tended to offer less work for them.

Mr. Gunawardena then proceeded on to the subject of unemployment and said that an analysis of data collected through the record keeping programme proved that 74% of the labourers in the sample had no work during the records, 55% were reported to be non-working days. He said that, just non-availability of work, bad weather, illness and social functions, had kept them out of work.

Touching upon the living condition of these workers, he remarked that when compared with the non-labour households in the rural setting, the living conditions of these workers were sub-standard. The existing socio-political and economic patterns that run through the village scene did not permit any betterment for these labourers who could do nothing on their own initiative.

Their houses, mostly wattle and daub and thatched with cadjan and straw reflect the inability of these workers to invest on improvements to their dwelling places which by any standard can not be called decent.

Income and expenditure patterns of these labourers, substantiated by the data collected through the record keeping exercise proved that the average monthly cash income varied from Rs.296/- to Rs.612/-.

Mr. Gunawardena pointed out how they spent the largest portion of their income on food and fuel and also a fairly large share on tobacco and liquid.

Mr. Gunawardena concluded that the usual socio-economic indicators tested in the study had proved that the agricultural labour households owned only 28% of the land including home-gardens. As for other indicators like radios, sewing machines, pressure lamps and agricultural implements they fell far below the non-agricultural households.

The total absence of any sort of group activity among these workers, he summed up, had resulted in the loss of bargaining power for them and had placed the land owners in an advantageous position so that they could get the services of the former at a lesser price. The dismal failure on the part of the hired workers to withstand the manoeuvring of the land owners and the employers had contributed in no small measure to the unequal distribution of income and the further strengthening of social class distinctions in the peasant sector.

Dr. P. Wickramasekera of the Faculty of Agriculture, Peradeniya University made his observations on the remarks made that clear evidence was available to prove that the proportion of the wage earner group was on the increase. He observed that if the situation has assumed a macro-phenomenon it was of vital importance in the context of policy implications. He said that in many other countries after the on-set of the "green revolution" there had been a noticeable increase in the hired labour group in agriculture. He questioned whether the same situation had been repeated in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Wickramasekera pointed out that the blanket term agricultural households had not provided any useful insight. He referred to the necessity to probe in to the intragroup variations of this category of labour, further disaggregating them as tenant, landless and so on. He was of the view that the mere part-time and full-time definitions along would not help much. He said that an analysis just on the basis of the demand and supply mechanism tended to overshadow the other relevant aspects, and remarked that a few family case studies in the study area would have thrown more light on this problem.

Talking on the employment situation that had been discussed at length in the paper, he said that limiting the reference period to the Maha season might not reflect the real employment condition. The Yala season with its low cropping intensity, would also have had certain implications on the employment situation.

He added that there was only little information on labour contracts and referred to the more commercialised contracts where intermediaries intervened. Sometimes the contractor was a poor labourer himself. He added that labour contract systems that prevailed particularly for ploughing, harvesting and threshing, needed further investigation in relation to the work opportunities available for the hired agricultural workers. He argued that the labour transaction in the villages might not always function within the labour market mechanism, because non-monetary and non-market forces too operated.

Dr. Wickramasekera commented on the standard socio-economic indicators used in the study to test the living condition of this group of labourers, to ascertain, to what degree their basic needs had been satisfied. He remarked that a mere cataloguing of such indicators did not serve any useful purpose. Study should have focused more attention whether this situation was due to the fact that they worked as labourers in the rural areas. The difference in the socio-economic conditions of this group relative to other sectors of population is more relevant. He added that an attempt to generalise through the conception of the researchers about the socio-economic condition of this group would yield only limited results and said that the view point of the labourers themselves, about employment and their living conditions would have served a better purpose.

Making a general overview of this broad subject, Dr. Wickramasekera detailed the following points as of crucial importance in reviewing the situation of the hired workers in the agricultural sector in Sri Lanka.

- (a) Their low asset base and the totally dependent nature on wage income and the work opportunities available.
- (b) Characteristics features of their employment opportunities for their income is dependent on the wage rate and the number of work days available. The study had pointed out

that 75% of the subjects had not found any work during the reference period. From a policy angle what is more important is to increase the work days which are conditioned by the seasonality of paddy cultivation with its peak and lean periods.

- (c) Market dependent nature - the hired workers depended on the market both for work and for their daily consumption needs. Some of the labourers would not like to have regular paid employment and prefer work on daily basis, because they need the cash at the end of the day. The market dependence had been worsened by reason trends to pay these labourer, in cash rather than in kind..

Touching upon the strategies that should be worked out for bettering the living conditions of this group of labourers, Dr.Wickramasekera illustrated how an income support scheme should be provided by the government for these people who lacked opportunities for work. He added that the impact of the withdrawal of the rice subsidy scheme and the introduction of food stamp scheme should have been studied indepth in relation to this sector of labourers.

Tracing the courses that might have led to the emergence of a hired worker group, Dr.Wickramasekera observed that the land alienation policy of the government, specially the colonization schemes were the second generation found it hard to get work, would have contributed to this situation. He also added that the village expansion schemes under which a quarter or half of an acre of land was given to the young people would also have had its share in generating such a labour group.

Mr.Newton Gunasinghe viewed the problem as a phenomenon that had emerged over a long period of time and stressed on the need to study the historical dynamics in relation to class formation in general. He said that definitions were needed to identify the rural workers. He made the point that the category of rural workers, discussed in the paper referred more to the labour process rather than to the class formation.

He added that those who were partially involved in agrarian labour in the capacity of wage workers had also been included as wage earners per se, along with small owner cultivators and tenants who might be supplementing their income with wages. Mr. Gunasinghe questioned on the correctness of the definition used in the study and defined a rural worker as a person whose reproduction of labour power was entirely dependent on wage nexus, and whose existence was exclusively dependent on wage labour. He referred to two other mutually exclusive categories, i.e.

- (a) Owner or tenant cultivators whose reproduction of labour power is partially dependent on the wage nexus and whose income from owner or tenant cultivation is not quite enough for them to exist.
- (b) Small owner or tenant cultivators whose income from their cultivation is sufficient enough for not to compel them to sell their labour.

He concluded that in a study on the labour situation such sectors too needed close investigation.

Mr. Kurukulasooriya of the Marga Institute described the landless agricultural labour as a residual category, the last segment of the unemployed. He said that they appeared in various forms in various places. Referring to a study conducted by the Marga Institute he pointed out that in villages hemmed in between large estates, specially in the up-country the situation of these labourers was by far the worst for a number of reasons. In such estates opportunities for village labour was very minimal, in contrast to the estates in the southern province where a substantial amount of village labour was absorbed in. Even a small cultivator in a village which was in between two estates encountered problems in disposing even the little produce he had due to the non-availability of selling outlets nearby. But a similar person in the coastal belt does not go through this experience.

He detailed access to infrastructure as another component of well-fare, and added that in some regions the access level is very high, whereas in other regions, the low income earner faced lot of problems allied to infrastructure.

He remarked that the income levels of the agricultural labourer, should have been examined in relation to the house-holds they belonged, because a certain component of hired workers would have been in high income house-holds. Another factor which he said, should have received close attention was the total resource base of the agricultural labourer by way of income in cash and in kind. These people had different quality home-steads drawing different income levels. He added that, the well being of this category depended on the total income, what he got from infrastructure and the income in cash and in kind.

He concluded that a peculiar phenomenon in the agricultural labour households was their scale of preferences, and questioned how a judgement could be made on their expenditure patterns when very often such a household which is far below the minimum recommended levels of nutrition, sometimes with one bed and few chairs for about five members, could own such items as pressure lamps and radio receivers.

Mr. Jayantha Perera then passed on to the policy implication in relation to the hired workers in the rural agrarian scene. He posed the problem, the objective researcher confronts, when he had to make suggestions within a particular political frame work, wherein the role of the researchers had already been designed by the bureaucrats and the politicians. He said that in Sri Lanka the role of the researchers had been conceived as one of enlightening the policy planners on various issues that envelope the development process. Research worker, quite apart from any independent thoughts, had to shape his ideas within the existing political thinking, against which he could not go. In such a situation he said that the conclusions drawn in any research, exercise were of limited value.

However, he said that it was encouraging to note that the acceptance of the development of the rural agrarian sector as an integral part of the overall national development, had created an increasing awareness about the landless agricultural labourer, as never before. He added that this recognition should definitely lead towards a planned programme to improve the lot of these labour category. He pointed out that several legislations that had come in to operation in the agrarian sector, aimed at safeguarding the rights of the peasants, and even the tenants but hardly anything had been said or done to offer a fair deal to the hired workers.

He deliberated on the difficulty that the planners would come across in identifying the rural workers as distinct from other categories. The political view point would continue to prevail in the selection criteria, evolved for these labourers for whom settlement plans had been envisaged under the Mahaweli Accelerated Programme. Mr. Perera held the view that if these labourers were given an assurance of a permanent resource base for them to get a sustainable income they would not want to continue as labourers any longer.

He also added that the withdrawal of the rice ration on the arbitrary income level of Rs. 300 per month had worsened the situation of the rural worker. A study conducted in the Kurunegala district had proved that the withdrawal of this subsidy, had more or less ironed out the other categories and now in the rural sector the only category of labour that existed was the rural workers in the agrarian sector.

He concluded that, politicization process could be the positive approach towards the betterment of the lot of these people. The Government can encourage the formation of group organizations and one way of assuring them, of sharing the benefits of development would be to ensure that these labourers too become partners of development. This can only be achieved through political involvement.

Mr. Kurukulasooriya then made his observations on policy implications and agreed that the objective researcher would find it difficult to present his case when the government had already laid down the desired objective. He said that it was a problem of political view rather than a lack of initiative knowledge or information produced objectively. Irrespective of the level of position one holds, the knowledge of one who knows what the people want and in which way to tackle the problems, is not likely to be written off. Mr. Kurukulasooriya, observed that the total collapse of the people earning low incomes, is a problem to be taken up seriously,

The villagers are no longer the malaria-ridden uneducated, hungry people of 1930s, and the people we had to deal with today are those who have different aspirations and a greater capacity to understand and express their problems", he added.

He said that the in-put dependency of the villagers was substantially high and the integration of our community with the world economic order, was going to make it higher. This dependency had brought into focus the money nexus of the villagers livelihood. The socio-economic and the Consumer Finance Surveys of the Central Bank had revealed that 70% of low income rural workers had a cash dependency, the need to convert even the very little they produce in to cash to enable them to have decent human existence.

He too stressed on the need to wield the organizational weapon, so that pressure can be brought on those who govern to have a second look at this neglected sector of people.