

# Women and Poverty: Feminisation and Multidimensionality of Poverty in Resettlement Scheme in Sri Lanka

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## Abstract

This study examines the dimension of poverty among women in the resettled indigenous community in Sri Lanka. The present study investigates how the dimension of poverty exists and is improving among resettled indigenous women in Sri Lanka. The objective of the study was to identify the poverty dimensions among indigenous women. The study adopted a qualitative approach by interviewing 30 Women (n=30 [resettled indigenous women]), conducting three focus group interviews involving the young, adult and elderly women's groups through empirical observation and document reviews. Open-ended questions were used to explore respondents' experiences of poverty that they have faced in their community. The Research approach incorporated the qualitative explorative approach. Thematic data analyses were performed using the Granheim approach. The research findings indicate that indigenous women experience multiple dimensions of poverty. The notable dimensions are social, economic, food, energy, ageing, cultural, and societal poverty, which were emphasised by prominent chronic poverty experts. Poverty dimensions vary over different generations. The older generation lacked tactics for dealing with poverty, while the younger generation has effectively managed to overcome it. The middle generation has only partially succeeded in coping with poverty, with some individuals managing to do so while others have not. The various aspects of poverty have contributed to the precarious situation of women in the community. Notwithstanding the presence of policies, institutions, and processes aimed at poverty alleviation, these women remain highly vulnerable to extreme poverty as a community. Despite being resettled 35 years ago; these women continue to occupy rare positions in all aspects of development.

**Keywords:** indigenous women, development, poverty, resettlement, vulnerability

## 1. Introduction

The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less are women (Shahnazaryan, 2022). The gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has widened in the past decade, known as "the feminization of poverty" (Bradshaw et al., 2018). Gender plays a significant role in the effects and challenges of poverty (Ritenburg, 2016). Poverty disproportionately affects women and girls due to gender biases, unequal power distribution, and societal expectations (Paunovic, 2017). Women experience higher poverty rates in almost all societies (Shahnazaryan, 2022). People with disabilities, recent immigrants, and racialized individuals face additional disadvantages, with women being the most vulnerable in these groups (Lopera-Arbeláez, 2022). The concept of the feminization of poverty highlights the gender bias in the evolution of poverty over time (Mashhoodi, 2021).

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a comprehensive global indicator that evaluates poverty levels in over 100 developing nations across different regions globally (Cao, 2014). The assessment comprehensively assesses poverty by incorporating ten characteristics that indicate significant deprivations, such as malnutrition, child mortality, and insufficient access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, and absence of electricity (Walelign & Lujala, 2022). Within low-income and emerging nations, the manifestations of poverty demonstrate significant diversity across various countries (Bisht, 2009). The problem of women residing in poverty is a substantial concern in developing nations. Poverty disproportionately affects marginalized or minority communities (Nagl-Docekal, 2014). Women living in these social segments are more susceptible to poverty across various aspects (Bisht, 2009).

Multidimensional analyses of poverty can be the most appropriate methodological approach to understand the interconnections between gender and poverty (Shahnazaryan, 2022). This research focuses on the feminization and multidimensionality of poverty in resettlement schemes. The main research question is: What are the specific challenges faced by women in resettlement schemes in relation to poverty? In order to answer this research question, the main objective is to identify the specific challenges faced by women in resettlement schemes in relation to poverty. In addition to the main objective, a number of specific objectives were developed: a) investigating how gender dynamics intersect with poverty in these contexts, b) exploring the unique vulnerabilities and experiences of women in poverty, and c) examining the multidimensional aspects of poverty that affect women's well-being and livelihoods. Furthermore, the study aims to identify potential interventions and policy recommendations to address the feminization of poverty in resettlement areas and empower women to improve their socio-economic status.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1 Development Induced Resettlement Driven Poverty*

Project-induced resettlement can occur on a massive scale, and the cost of resettlement is also high (Terminski, 2015). More than 10 million people are involuntarily displaced annually to

make way for development projects (Cernea & McDowell, 2000). While most of these development projects are designed to achieve positive outcomes, there are also certain costs associated with them that must be borne (Nghah & Liman, 2015). For example, under the Three Gorges Dam in China, 1.13 million people were resettled (Wilmsen, 2016), with an estimated cost of over 100 billion yuan (about 10 billion euros) for resettlement (Sleigh, 2014). Given their size and cost, and especially because of the severe social impacts they create, whether large or small, any resettlement is a ‘big deal’ and not something to be taken lightly.

Every development project is usually undertaken with benefits in mind. On the other side of the coin, however, are the costs of implementing the projects. Most often, those in vulnerable situations who have less power, no voice, and virtually no control happen to be the involuntary bearers of these risks and costs, while the elite or affluent in society become the beneficiaries of the projects (Nghah & Liman, 2015). The notion that development projects may impoverish people might seem strange, if not contradictory, to those who own, finance, and underwrite (Downing 2002). Re-settlers are often impoverished for extended periods due to loss, difficult re-establishment, and insufficient compensation (Nghah & Liman, 2015). Development-induced resettlement can often lead to poverty among affected populations (Dubé, 2016). When communities are forced to relocate due to large-scale development projects such as infrastructure construction or resource extraction, they may lose their livelihoods, access to resources, and social networks (Cernea & McDowell, 2000). This disruption can result in increased vulnerability to poverty, as resettled individuals may struggle to find new sources of income or adapt to their new environment (Owusu et al., 2023). It is crucial for policymakers and developers to consider the potential impacts of resettlement on poverty levels (Guo & Kapucu, 2017) and implement measures to mitigate these negative consequences, such as providing adequate compensation, livelihood support, and community engagement opportunities (Ayeb-Karlsson, 2023). Addressing poverty has become a worldwide concern, and accurate measurements of poverty remain a fundamental issue (Lu & Shanguan, 2023). In most developed and developing countries, resettlement and compensation, for example, are the common policies employed to deal with not just development-induced displacement but also post-disaster development and planning (Badri et al., 2006). According to the World Bank (1994), much attention has been received by involuntary resettlement caused by large development projects because of the large numbers of people that are affected by these projects, especially in developing countries.

Development projects driven risk may be visible or invisible, direct or indirect, tangible or intangible (Faustina Oforiwa Bessey & Prince Olando Tay, 2015). The risks involved in Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement (DIDR), irrespective of the form, should be managed properly and in a timely manner. Otherwise, it can result in long-lasting impoverishment effects on the Affected Person(s), leading to what is known as ‘new poverty’ or ‘secondary poverty’ (Wimalawansa and Wimalawansa, 2014). The poverty exists in different forms and arises from a broad spectrum of circumstances; it may be man-made and systemic or environmental; meaning people are poor because they do not belong to a system (Abdul Azeez & Sebastian, 2016). The resettlement-driven poverty has been illustrated

through studies conducted in affected areas before and after project implementation; it also refers to the situation where project-affected persons are left worse off than they were before the resettlement, with the poor getting poorer (Aronsson, 2002).

The 'land is life' for many people (Colchester et al., 2007; Wickeri, 2011), and people everywhere have place attachment (a sense of place) to a varying extent (Vanclay, 2017). Project land acquisition and the consequent displacement and disruption can cause much hurt and hardship (Reddy et al., 2015; Smyth & Vanclay, 2017). The primary cause of resettlement-driven poverty is the loss of land, where landowners become landless: this is the most evident and principal risk that resettled persons are most likely to face; as they lose their ancestral and productive lands to development projects leading to impoverishment (Tan et al., 2005). This poverty may result not just from the loss of land but also from damages to the land's productive potential, loss of the productive value of land due to environmental problems. Landlessness mostly arises because the Affected Persons do not often gain access to alternative lands (Quagraine et al., 2017)

Resettlement can have a negative economic impact on the settlers and families, pushing them farther below the poverty line as displacement destroys their source of income and thus denies them decent livelihoods (Walelign & Lujala, 2022). Usually, a very small percentage of local persons are able to get these opportunities, and most often than not, they get menial jobs as they usually lack technocratic skills. The majority of development-induced resettlement schemes result in resettled persons being pushed down the socio-economic ladder, which can also be mitigated, especially in the physical and economic aspects (Xu et al., 2022). Most resettled persons and communities suffer from poverty resulting from their displacement and further resettlement (Elmon Mudefi et al., 2024).

Together, these studies provide important insights into the poverty resettlement schemes, highlighting potential socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts. It is surprising that studies exploring the impacts of resettlement schemes in the world have focused on issues that the resettlers faced, with little emphasis on the impact on women in post-resettlement schemes. The current body of research predominantly centers on development-induced displacement and resettlement and its impact on the resettlers. Although poverty can emerge as a huge impact of the post-resettlement process, women are more vulnerable to it (Letsoalo, 2019). Although some studies have investigated poverty as an impact of resettlement schemes, they have less focus on women and poverty in resettlement schemes (Aboda et al., 2019). According to the literature, it could be identified that there is a lack of research related to resettlement-driven poverty on women. To address this gap, this qualitative research study focuses on the poverty dimension among women in resettlement schemes.

### **3. Study Area and Methodology**

#### *3.1 Study Area*

##### **3.1.1 Mahaweli Development Project**

The Mahaweli Development Project (MDP) is considered the most comprehensive and ambitious development initiative in the history of Sri Lanka (Amarasekara, 2017). The MDP was initiated with the main goal of fostering rural development in the dry region of Sri Lanka (Dissanayake et al., 2016). The initiation of the MDP was motivated by multiple factors and aimed to achieve several objectives, including rural development, poverty reduction, and hydro power generation. The project plan, initially set for a duration of 30 years, was shortened to six years due to the government's intervention after coming into office in 1977 (Ministry of Lands and Land Development and Ministry of Mahaweli Development, 1987). The Master Plan was established in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (Schrijvers, 1988). The plan proposed the construction of irrigation infrastructure for both new and existing land, particularly for areas that have not been cultivated consistently due to a lack of reliable water supply (Aravinna et al., 2016). Additionally, the plan suggested the implementation of hydropower projects. The Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project (AMDP) was initiated to address three significant challenges that Sri Lanka was facing in 1977: high unemployment rates, excessive expenditure on agricultural imports leading to a loss of foreign cash, and the need for enhanced irrigation facilities and hydropower generation (Paranage, 2018). The program included the multipurpose projects of Kotmale, Victoria, Randenigala, and Rantembe in the Mahaweli basin, as well as Maduru Oya in the adjacent river basin (Withanachchi et al., 2014).

### 3.1.2 Maduruoya Reservoir and Dam

The Maduru Oya Dam is a hydrological structure constructed over the Maduru Oya River for the purpose of irrigation (Loucks & van Beek, 2017). The Maduru Oya Dam of the Maduru Oya Project is situated 77 kilometers from the heart of the river. The Maduru Oya Reservoir is formed by a rock-fill dam that spans 1090 meters in length (Rivera, Gunda & Hornberger, 2017). The dam has a central clay core that measures 41 meters (135 feet) in height. The reservoir encompasses a catchment area measuring 453 square kilometers (175 square miles) and has a storage capacity of 596 million cubic meters ( $2.10 \times 10^{10}$  cubic feet) (Paranage, 2019). In order to close the Maduru Oya reservoir, two auxiliary dams were constructed in addition to the primary dam. The saddle dams are situated on the left and right banks and consist of densely packed material, shielded on the upstream side by riprap (Gunda et al., 2015).

### 3.1.3 Resettlement of Indigenous Community

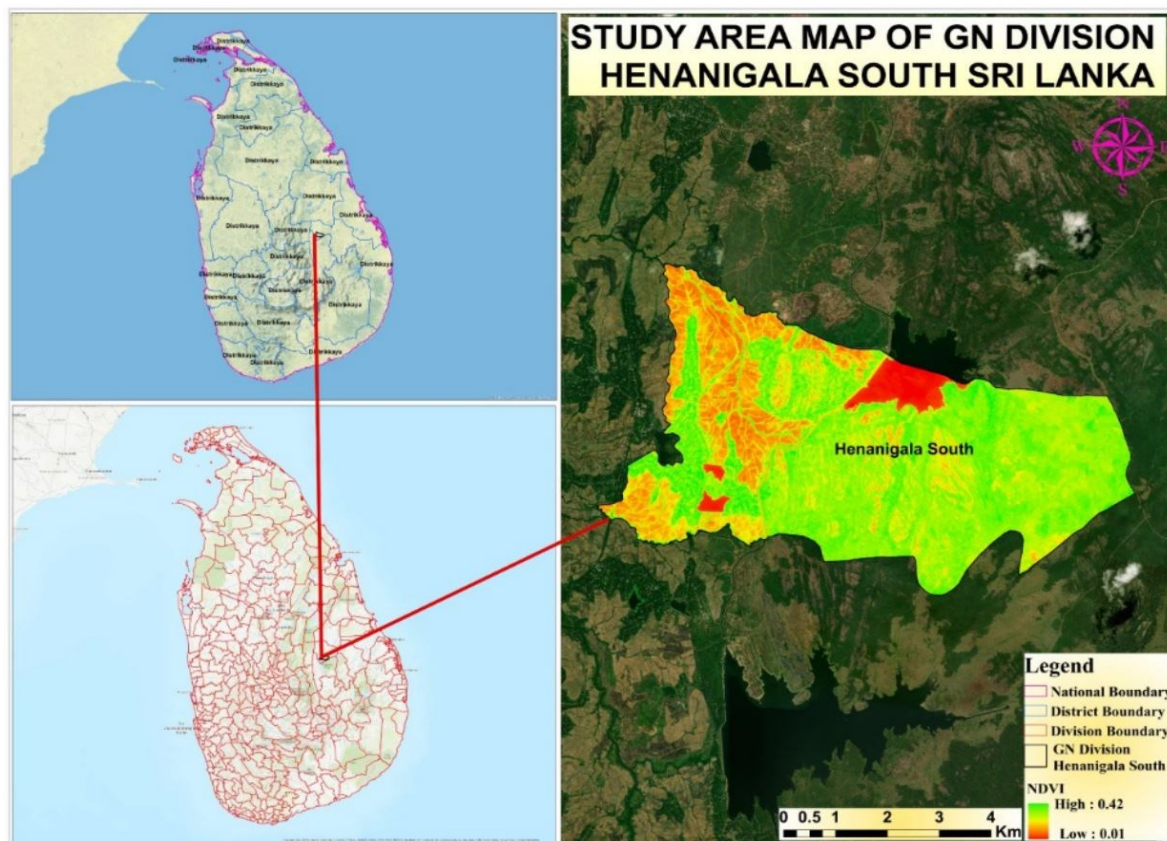
As the AMDP began, approximately 900 indigenous families were moved to two colonies located near the forest (De Silva, 2011). Every family received a plot of land measuring two hectares, together with a dwelling. One hectare of the land was designated for growing rice and vegetables (Chandraratne, 2016). The proposal suggested the conversion of the remaining section of tropical forest, which is inhabited by the indigenous people of Sri Lanka, into colonies and catchment areas for Wildlife Reserves (Attanapola & Lund, 2013). As the AMDP developed, the previous area known as "Veddass' Country" was divided into distinct "systems" that were identified with alphabetical labels (Obeyesekere, 2022). "System B"



claimed ownership of the northern portion of the forest, located north of the river Maduru Oya. System C, on the other hand, possessed the southwestern portion (Parker, 2012). The trees were felled, and the hunting areas and customary honey bee locations were cleared by bulldozers (Chandraratne, 2016). The Veddas Country underwent a significant transformation, evolving into extensive regions dedicated to rice farming, as well as the establishment of towns, villages, roadways, and infrastructure. Numerous individuals were relocated to different regions. The Maduru Oya National Park, covering an area of around 51468 hectares, was established on November 9, 1983, under the administration of the Mahaweli Environmental Authority (Attanapola & Lund, 2013).

### 3.1.4 Location

The researchers chose Henanigala village as the study area. The indigenous population residing in Henanigala were resettled there in 1983 as part of the Mahaweli Development Project (MDP). These individuals were directly impacted by the shift to a creole culture and changes in their way of life. They were also separated from the forest habitat in Kandeganvila. The Henanigala study site is depicted in Figure 1 and is situated in the 142/C Paranagama-Henanigala (South) Grama Niladarai (GN) Division of Dehatakandiya.



**Figure 1.** The Study Area Map

### 3.2 Methodology

This study focused on qualitative data to capture the authentic experiences of multiple generations within a resettled indigenous community. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Secondary data sources included research from the Mahaweli Development Authority in Sri Lanka, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and World Bank (WB) reports. The study employed a stratified sample strategy to select respondents (see Table 01). A cohort of women was selected from the study population to represent various age groups, marital statuses, and generations. Responses were categorized to gain insights into the perception of poverty across different generations. The study included three groups of respondents: the first generation, which consisted of the initial settlers, and the second and third generations, comprising the offspring and grandchildren of the first generation. A total of thirty indigenous women were interviewed, and three focus group discussions were conducted. The interviews aimed to delve into individual perspectives, while the focus group discussions focused on understanding collective views on various aspects of poverty across different generations.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the Demographic Profile of the Interviewees

| Category       | Variable                   | N  | %   |
|----------------|----------------------------|----|-----|
| Generation     | 3 <sup>rd</sup> generation | 10 | 33  |
|                | 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation | 13 | 43  |
|                | 1 <sup>st</sup> generation | 07 | 24  |
| Gender         | Female                     | 30 | 100 |
| Marital Status | Married                    | 16 | 53  |
|                | Unmarried                  | 08 | 27  |
|                | Window                     | 06 | 20  |
| Age            | 20-40                      | 13 | 43  |
|                | 41-60                      | 10 | 33  |
|                | Above 60                   | 07 | 24  |
| Education      | Illiterate                 | 11 | 37  |
|                | Primary                    | 13 | 33  |
|                | Secondary                  | 6  | 20  |

*Source:* Field study data – 2023

## 4. Result and Discussion

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis. The analysis encompassed both the explicit content, which refers to the participants' statements of their experiences, and the implicit content, which pertains to the underlying meanings conveyed by the participants' utterances. After reading all interviews multiple times, significant units with meaning were recognized and then compressed and shortened into codes. The codes were examined and

categorized based on their variances and similarities. After careful analysis of the categories, their inherent significance was deciphered, leading to the identification of six primary themes. The authors employed Graneheim and Lundman's methodology (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004) to perform the data analysis, processing, and coding. Essentially, the data analysis was predominantly conducted using the content analysis methodology proposed by Graneheim and Lundman. Graneheim and Lundman's explanation states that qualitative content analytical methodologies focus on analyzing the explicit or manifest content of a text, as well as the interpretations of its underlying or hidden meaning, known as 'latent content' (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). The aforementioned procedures are demonstrated in Table 2. The authors thoroughly examined the entire material and found components that carry meaning, initially individually and then collaboratively. All the authors of the present study contributed to the latter phase of the analysis in order to find recurring patterns.

**Table 2.** Thematic Data Analysis Procedure Using Granheim and Lundman’s Approach

| <b>Steps</b>  | <b>Description</b>   |
|---|--|
| 1. Interview transcription  | The interviews were taped and read again after hearing the recordings several times to comprehend their contents.  |
| 2. Unit for the formation of meaning analysis                         | All interviews were analyzed as a single unit. Primary codes were created by abstracting the meaning units.  |
| 3. Comprehensive sorting of similar codes                             | The grouping of similar fundamental codes into more Comprehensive categories was conducted.  |
| 4. Comparison of codes and establishment of subcategories differences | In contrast, all codes and data identified similarities and This process resulted in the formation of categories and subcategories.  |
| 5. Comparing subcategories and establishing primary categories        | The initial interviews yielded an initial set of codes, categories, and subcategories, and the emerging codes were considered to be the results due to the thematic analysis approach. |

#### *4.1 Result of the Study*

##### **4.1.1 Dimensions of poverty among Resettled Indigenous Women**

Table 1 summarizes the demographic profile of the research participants. The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 70, and they were selected from three categories, with 30 female participants. Most of the participants had low levels of education, with the highest level being illiteracy. All respondents were resettled, with 6 unmarried and 8 married participants. All women belonged to families with a monthly income ranging from 10000LKR to 15000LKR (\$35 to \$40).



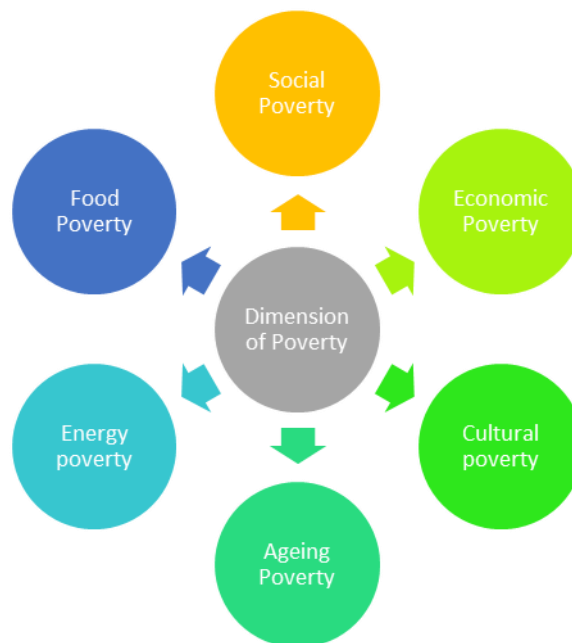
**Table 3.** The Thematic Dimensions of Poverty among Resettled Indigenous Women

| <b>Theme</b>        | <b>Subthemes</b>                  | <b>Descriptive Theme</b>                      |   |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Social<br>Poverty   | Health                            | Having health Issues                          |   |
|                     |                                   | Lack of health Facilities                     |   |
|                     |                                   | Issues with access for health facilities      |   |
|                     | Education                         | Sanitation Issues                             | Lack health literacy                                      |
|                     |                                   |   | Lack of awareness on education                            |
|                     |                                   | Cultural Barriers                             | Discrimination and Marginalization                        |
|                     |                                   |   | Lack of Facilities and Opportunities                      |
|                     | Infrastructure                    | Lack of Electricity and inability to access   | Lack of Water and inability to access                     |
|                     |                                   |   | Decrepit roads and inability to access                    |
|                     |                                   |   | Decision Making and Community Participation               |
|                     | Human Rights                      | No/opportunity to make decision in family     | No/ lack of opportunity to make decision in society       |
|                     |                                   |   | Lack of opportunity to participate community organization |
|                     |                                   |   | No Freedom  |
| Cultural<br>Poverty | Language Barriers                 | No Security                                   |   |
|                     |                                   | Low relationship with major culture           |   |
|                     | Religious Barriers                | Loss of indigenous language                   |   |
|                     |                                   | Religious assimilation                        |   |
|                     | Cultural Identity                 | Loss of religion belief and customs           |   |
|                     |                                   | Conflict among identities                     |   |
| Food<br>Poverty     | Access of food                    | Loss of indigenous identity                   |   |
|                     |                                   | Cultural Discrimination                       |   |
|                     |                                   | Access of quality and health food             |   |
|                     | Lack of food                      | Access of traditional food                    |   |
|                     |                                   | Skip meals                                    |   |
|                     |                                   | Unavailability of food                        |   |
| Energy<br>Poverty   | Availability of Energy            | Low energy variety and availability           |   |
|                     |                                   | Energy Deprivation                            |   |
|                     |                                   | Lack/ low infrastructure                      |   |
|                     | Access of Energy                  | Lack/ low Affordability                       |   |
|                     |                                   | Over control of energy Sources such as forest |   |
|                     |                                   | Energy discrimination                         |   |
| Ageing<br>Poverty   | Age care                          | Lack / no care                                |   |
|                     |                                   | No financial ability to fulfill care          |   |
|                     |                                   | Break down the social network                 |   |
|                     | Physical and Psychological issues | loneliness                                    |   |
|                     |                                   | Physical hardships                            |   |
|                     | Over Responsibility               | Gran child baring                             |   |
|                     |                                   | Gain responsibilities of children's family    |   |

|                  |            |  |
|------------------|------------|--|
|                  | Insecurity | Economic Insecurity                    |
|                  |            | No social welfare                      |
| Economic Poverty | Income     | Lack/ low income                       |
|                  |            | No proper income generation activities |
|                  |            | Debt Crisis                            |
|                  | Livelihood | No skills                              |
|                  |            | No/ lack education                     |
|                  |            | No/ lack opportunity                   |
|                  | Resource   | No land                                |
|                  |            | Lack / no Resource Access              |
|                  |            | Discriminatory Practices               |

Source: Field Study 2023

The following figure has been depicted of visual figure of thematic dimensions of poverty among resettled indigenous community.



**Figure 2.** Thematic dimensions of poverty among Resettled indigenous women

#### 4.1.2 Social Poverty among Indigenous Women

The table number 04 depicts the status of social poverty among indigenous women. Almost all respondents reported health-related issues. The majority of respondents had issues regarding access to health facilities (87%) and problems with them. The main issue mentioned by respondents from the third and second generations was sanitation problems. 80% of female

respondents faced difficulties with issues related to sanitary facilities, mainly due to poor water quality and menstruation-related issues. This was particularly prevalent among female respondents from the second and third generations. Female respondents reported health issues, with a percentage of 73%, mostly non-communicable diseases such as kidney and diabetes. A significant number of women in the settlement suffer from health problems associated with physically demanding work at an early stage of their lives. A large portion of respondents revealed that they have poor health literacy, with all respondents from these three generations responding equally to this (77%). For example, these respondents have no knowledge about menstruation or sanitary pads. Apart from a small number of third-generation respondents, including respondents from the younger generation, who did not have this literacy. Respondents from the first generation and the majority from the second generation stated that they have never used or considered using sanitary pads and are not familiar with those terms. However, a small proportion of young women reported using sanitary pads after childbirth.

**Table 4.** Social Poverty among Indigenous Women

| Number                                      | Statement   | Frequency | %  |
|---|---|-----------|----|
| Health                                      | Having health Issues                                      | 22        | 73 |
|   | Lack of health Facilities                                 | 16        | 53 |
|   | Issues with access for health facilities                  | 26        | 87 |
|   | Sanitation Issues   | 24        | 80 |
|   | Lack health literacy                                      | 23        | 77 |
| Education                                   | Lack of awareness on education                            | 18        | 60 |
|   | Cultural Barriers   | 28        | 93 |
|   | Discrimination and Marginalization                        | 25        | 83 |
|   | Lack of Facilities and Opportunities                      | 16        | 53 |
| Infrastructure                              | Lack of Electricity                                       | 16        | 53 |
|   | Lack of Water   | 29        | 97 |
|   | Decrepit roads  | 24        | 80 |
| Decision Making and Community Participation | No/opportunity to make decision in family                 | 23        | 77 |
|   | No/ lack of opportunity to make decision in society       | 20        | 67 |
|   | Lack of opportunity to participate community organization | 22        | 73 |
| Human Rights                                | No Freedom  | 24        | 80 |
|   | No Security   | 23        | 77 |

Source: Field Research 2023

Education-related issues faced by females mainly emerged as a lack of awareness (60%), cultural barriers (93%), discrimination and marginalization (83%), and a lack of facilities and opportunities (53%). These issues were mainly highlighted by respondents from the second

and third generations. Respondents from the first generation did not highlight these issues as they did not focus on formal education. The majority of respondents highlighted cultural barriers related to education, and a significant number of respondents highlighted discrimination and marginalization practices regarding education. Lack of awareness was mainly highlighted as an issue by the first and second generations, respectively. The lowest number of respondents highlighted issues regarding facilities and opportunities. Although this was the lowest percentage, it was more than half of the respondents. They do not have proper buildings in their schools, and the lack of teachers and educational facilities is highlighted in this scenario. Discrimination and marginalization have badly affected these female respondents' education. Although the first generation did not face the same issues, the second and third generations have faced these practices, which have badly affected their education.

Infrastructure-related issues are another issue these women are facing in the resettlement scheme. The main infrastructure issue related to their lives is the water facility. Being in a dry zone, they face this issue drastically. 97% of female respondents face water-related issues not only regarding household activities but also regarding other livelihood activities. In the hard dry season, these women have to travel long distances to find water, creating another vulnerable situation for them. The other issue was road problems (80%), which have created a number of issues regarding their livelihood and education. The lack of electricity (53%) is another infrastructure-related issue that has mainly affected female respondents living in remote areas in the scheme. Third-generation respondents highlighted this as the main issue regarding their household work, livelihoods, and children's education.

The conversation centered on the unequal distribution of power experienced by women in both community and household contexts. Female settlers expressed apprehensions about their limited access to participate in formal and informal institutions. Nevertheless, decision-making and community participation also badly impacted their social poverty. Being women in a marginalized and minority group, these women have no proper opportunity to engage with this. The majority of female respondents depicted that they have no or lack of opportunity to make decisions in the family (73%). A considerable number (67%) of respondents explained that they have no opportunity to make or take decisions in society as well. Living in a patriarchal context has caused this, and the women who have this opportunity were widows or third-generation respondents. The lack of participation in community organizations was another impact factor for decision-making issues. According to them, their stigmatization and marginalization have mainly impacted this. This situation was mainly depicted by respondents from the first and second generations. According to them, the third generation has overcome this issue to a considerable extent. In this area, the chairman of the water association is a woman who represents the third generation.

Human rights violations of these women are highly incorporated with social poverty. While 80% of respondents depicted that they have no freedom, 77% depicted that they have no security. Freedom is related to multiple dimensions such as decision-making and maintaining traditional ways of life. These freedom-related issues were mainly highlighted by the first and second generations. Compared with these generations, the third generation is partaking in their freedom. In relation to security, they have faced issues regarding a number of securities such as

social and financial. Human security concerns for Indigenous women include physical safety, access to justice, and protection from violence and exploitation. Social security issues can stem from cultural barriers, lack of community support, and limited access to social services. Economic security challenges may arise from limited job opportunities, unequal access to resources, and economic disparities within Indigenous communities.

#### 4.2 Cultural Poverty among Indigenous Women

**Table 5.** Cultural Poverty among Indigenous Women

| Number             | Statement                                  | Frequency | %   |
|--------------------|--|-----------|-----|
| Cultural Barriers  | Low relationship with major culture        | 27        | 90  |
|                    | Loss of indigenous language                | 30        | 100 |
| Religious Barriers | Religious assimilation                     | 29        | 97  |
|                    | Liquidation of religion belief and customs | 28        | 93  |
| Cultural Identity  | Conflict among identities                  | 26        | 87  |
|                    | Loss of indigenous identity                | 29        | 97  |
|                    | Cultural Discrimination                    | 21        | 70  |

Source: Field Research 2023

Cultural poverty refers to the gradual decline of cultural values and traditions, often due to limited access to cultural activities. According to Table 05, cultural poverty is prevalent among women. Language barriers, religious barriers, and cultural identity are the main causes of cultural poverty as reported by the respondents. A lack of connection with the dominant culture (90%) and the erosion of their indigenous language (100%) are highlighted as primary reasons for cultural barriers. After resettlement, these women lost their connection to their main cultural group and had to adapt to a new cultural environment.

Religious assimilation (97%) and the abandonment of religious beliefs and customs (93%) have led to religious barriers for these women, particularly among the first and second generations. The third generation respondents do not see this as a significant issue. While the first generation initially focused on their traditions and culture after resettlement, their culture became marginalized. In contrast, the third generation of the resettlement scheme has assimilated into Buddhism, the majority religion and culture.

Additionally, cultural identity has contributed to their cultural poverty. As a group with a strong cultural focus, these women value their identity. Loss of indigenous identity (97%) has been a major issue related to cultural identities, along with conflicts among generations regarding identities (87%) and cultural discrimination (70%). Women from the first and second generations are experiencing cultural poverty more than those from the third generation of the scheme. Third-generation respondents mostly reported no issues with cultural and religious assimilation, as they have integrated with the majority culture in schools and workplaces outside the schemes.



### 4.3 Food Poverty among Indigenous Women

**Table 6.** Food Poverty among Indigenous Women

| Number         | Statement                         | Frequency | %  |
|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|----|
| Access of food | Access of quality and health food | 23        | 77 |
|                | Access of traditional food        | 21        | 70 |
| Lack of food   | Lack affordability and Skip meals | 17        | 57 |
|                | Unavailability of food            | 20        | 67 |

Source: Field Research 2023

Table number 06 illustrates the nature of food poverty and its causes among the resettled indigenous women community. The main reasons for food poverty among these women were lack of access to food and insufficient food availability. The primary contributing factor was the lack of access to quality and healthy food, with 77% of respondents citing barriers to accessing traditional foods as a major issue. Before the resettlement process, these women followed traditional food patterns and used organic methods for Chena cultivation, and they did not face food insufficiency or access issues.

In addition to access issues, lack of food availability also contributed to food poverty among these women. A majority of women experienced food unavailability (67%), and a minority skipped main meals (57%) due to lack of affordability. In the post-resettlement period, the community had to transition from Chena cultivation to commercial agriculture. Many women mentioned that the lack of a social support system in the new settlement, compared to the pre-settlement era, was a major cause of food scarcity.

First-generation respondents highlighted various reasons for food poverty, including limited access to traditional food sources, changes in dietary patterns due to resettlement, lack of economic opportunities, displacement from their original lands, and challenges in adapting to new environments. Cultural disruptions and loss of traditional knowledge related to food preparation and cultivation also contributed to energy deprivation among resettled Indigenous women.

### 4.4 Energy Poverty among Indigenous Women

Table number 07 presents the nature of energy poverty faced by women in the resettlement scheme. Indigenous women who have been relocated are experiencing energy deprivation in this region. The area is characterized by a prevalence of low-energy types and extreme impoverishment. Availability conditions and access to energy have mainly contributed to energy poverty among these women. Prior to resettlement, they were rich in energy since they had limited wants regarding primary needs. Access to energy and availability of energy have become the main contributing factors to energy poverty among these women. Respondents have indicated that low energy variety and availability (70%), energy

deprivation (63%), and lack of infrastructure (57%) in the area have gradually contributed to the availability of energy in the area. Energy poverty has significantly impacted the second and third generations.

**Table 7.** Energy Poverty among Indigenous Women

| Number                 | Statement                                     | Frequency | %  |
|------------------------|---|-----------|----|
| Availability of Energy | Low energy variety and availability           | 21        | 70 |
|                        | Energy Deprivation                            | 19        | 63 |
|                        | Lack/ low infrastructure                      | 17        | 57 |
| Access for Energy      | Lack/ low Affordability                       | 25        | 83 |
|                        | Over control of energy Sources such as forest | 20        | 67 |
|                        | Energy discrimination                         | 19        | 63 |

Source: Field Research 2023

Furthermore, the table above indicates that a significant number of respondents suffer from low/lack of affordability for energy (83%). Increasing energy prices in an unprecedented way have become the main reason for this, according to the respondents. Prior to resettlement, they were totally dependent on firewood as an energy source. Apart from this, they used local oil extracted from various trees for lighting lamps at night. In the post-resettlement scheme, first-generation women have depended on firewood as the main energy source. According to women of the first and second generations, the over control of energy sources (77%) has become a considerable reason for access to energy. Limited access to forest and reservation areas has caused a barrier to access firewood as the primary energy source in the scheme. In addition to these factors, the attitudes of the majority community have also contributed to energy poverty here. The energy market is mainly controlled by the majority community people, and according to the respondents, these majority community people think that these communities are primary communities and can only survive from primary energy sources like firewood, kerosene, or local oil. Respondents have indicated that due to these attitudes, they have been discriminated against the main sources of energy (63%).

#### *4.5 Ageing Poverty among Indigenous Women*

Optimal health in old age is crucial for an individual's overall well-being. The data on aging-related poverty were gathered from respondents who were over sixty years old. The table 08 depicts aging poverty among women in the resettlement scheme. According to the data, issues such as aged care, physical and psychological challenges, overwhelming responsibilities, and insecurities have significantly contributed to aging poverty among these women.

**Table 8.** Ageing Poverty among Indigenous Women

| Number                            | Statement                             | Frequency | %  |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|----|
| Age care                          | Lack / no care                        | 5         | 50 |
|                                   | No financial ability to fulfill care  | 7         | 70 |
|                                   | Break down the social network         | 6         | 60 |
| Physical and Psychological issues | loneliness                            | 5         | 50 |
|                                   | Physical hardships                    | 7         | 70 |
| Over Responsibility               | Grandchild baring                     | 6         | 60 |
|                                   | Responsibilities of children's family | 5         | 50 |
| Insecurity                        | Economic Insecurity                   | 7         | 70 |
|                                   | No social welfare                     | 7         | 70 |

Source: Field Research 2023

\*Here the researcher has considered of women respondents only from first generation.

The main contributing factors to aged care issues among these women include a lack of financial ability to provide care (70%), breakdown of social networks (60%), and inadequate or improper care (50%). Traditionally, the responsibility of aged care in remote areas in Sri Lanka falls solely on women, a situation that remains unchanged even within indigenous communities. As women's participation in economic activities has increased, many families in settlements now rely on elderly individuals as primary caregivers. These women are either daily wage laborers or have no income-generating activities. With aging, they lose the economic ability to access proper care. Post-resettlement, the transition to a modernized lifestyle has led to a breakdown in social networks, ultimately resulting in poor aged care among these women.

Physical and psychological challenges are highlighted as priority factors contributing to aging poverty among these women. Loneliness and physical hardships are major concerns reported by respondents from the 1st generation. Physical hardships (70%) and loneliness (50%) are significant factors contributing to psycho-physical issues. Women living in settlements face health challenges due to early employment in adverse social and environmental conditions, prolonged exposure to intense sunlight and severe rainfall, and various health ailments. Despite their poor health, some elderly women continue to work out of personal necessity and the responsibility to support their families. Additionally, the respondents mentioned that the busy lifestyle of family members in the new resettlement scheme has left them feeling lonely.

Over-responsibility has also contributed to aging poverty among these women, with grandchild care (60%) and responsibilities for children's families (50%) being the main causes. As women's participation in economic activities has increased, elderly individuals in settlements are relied upon as primary caregivers. The younger female workforce in indigenous settlements is moving to urban areas or Middle Eastern countries in search of better job opportunities, disrupting the traditional practice of younger generations caring for

their elderly family members. Elderly women, such as mothers and mothers-in-law, are often left to care for families out of kindness rather than for monetary compensation, as family members, particularly women, seek employment outside the settlements or in foreign countries. While some elderly individuals passively receive assistance from programs like AMDP, others actively contribute to the advancement of their offspring and grandchildren, helping them break free from poverty. However, their efforts often go unrecognized or unacknowledged.

#### *4.6 Economic Poverty among Indigenous Women*

**Table 9.** Economic Poverty among Indigenous Women

| <b>Number</b> | <b>Statement</b>                       | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>%</b> |
|---------------|--|------------------|----------|
| Income        | Lack/ low income                       | 30               | 100      |
|               | No proper income generation activities | 28               | 93       |
|               | Debt Crisis                            | 21               | 70       |
| Livelihood    | No skills                              | 22               | 66       |
|               | No/ lack education                     | 26               | 87       |
|               | No/ lack opportunity                   | 25               | 83       |
| Resource      | No land                                | 22               | 73       |
|               | Lack / no Resource Access              | 23               | 77       |
|               | Discriminatory Practices               | 19               | 63       |

Source: Field Research 2023

Economic poverty among women in resettlement areas is another important dimension of poverty. Factors such as income, livelihood, and resources have contributed to economic poverty, according to the respondents. All respondents have indicated that they face issues with income, with the main contributing factor being low or lack of income (100%). The lack of proper income generation activities (93%) was also a significant issue, with many women working as daily wage laborers in agriculture, which is seasonal work, leading to a debt trap for 70% of the women. While a small number of first-generation respondents reported having debt issues, the majority of respondents from the second and third generations mentioned being in debt crisis. The presence of privately-owned microfinance institutions offering loans without collateral requirements has contributed to the debt trap among women in the resettlement area.

Livelihood issues were identified as another contributing factor to economic poverty among these women, with reasons such as lack of skills (66%), lack of education (87%), and limited opportunities (83%) being the main barriers. The cultural background of these women, which limits their access to education and job-related skill training, has hindered their ability to access job opportunities, particularly affecting the second and third generations. Cultural practices and discriminatory institutional policies have exacerbated these challenges.

Resource issues have also had a significant impact on the economic poverty of these women, with factors such as lack of land (73%), limited resource access (77%), and discriminatory practices regarding resources (68%) contributing to the problem. The resettlement policy prohibits women from owning land but allows them to inherit it in case of their husband's or the landowner's death, with this inheritance right being exclusive to indigenous women. The scarcity of land for agricultural activities has posed challenges for female settlers, especially as the land lacks the necessary resources for cultivation by the third generation. Women, who have a longer life expectancy than men, face increased poverty in their elderly years, particularly if they become separated and lose their material advantages. Female-headed households are more vulnerable to economic poverty compared to other family structures.

## 5. Discussion

Women living in poverty often face barriers to accessing critical resources such as credit, land, and inheritance. Their labor is often undervalued and overlooked, and they lack adequate access to healthcare, education, and support services. Their participation in decision-making at home and in the community is limited, trapping them in a cycle of poverty without the resources or support to change their circumstances.

The diverse and complex nature of poverty is evident in the opinions and ideas of individuals, influenced by various factors such as basic needs, sustenance, societal, economic, health, psychological, energy, aging, and cultural aspects. Respondents in resettlement schemes commonly describe poverty using terms like 'inadequate', 'deprivation', 'negative emotions', 'isolation', and 'helplessness'. The perception of poverty dimensions varies across generations, reflecting evolving societal views influenced by connections at local, national, and global levels.

There are similarities in the experience of poverty between older and younger individuals. Older people may have resilience from enduring poverty over time, but certain dimensions of poverty can have a greater impact as they near the end of their lives and are less economically active. The second and third generations of settlers prioritize land less than previous generations, as agricultural income is being replaced by non-agricultural sources. While land is still recognized as a valuable asset, the form of land ownership is identified as a primary factor contributing to poverty in the settlements. Generational differences in perceiving poverty elements highlight the changing significance of assets. The current relocation program lacks focus on addressing land as a factor contributing to poverty among the second and third generations.

### *5.1 Reasons for Social Poverty among Indigenous Women*

There is a significant lack of female involvement in resource management and decision-making tasks in both the private and public spheres (Becker, 1962). Women who seek to control family size and enhance their involvement in land and resource management face significant barriers in accessing family planning services (Kahsay et al., 2021). The unsatisfactory sanitation conditions directly exacerbate the transmission of water-borne



illnesses (Winkler et al., 2020). Women endure significant hardships due to waterborne infections and sanitary challenges (Winkler et al., 2020). Historical marginalization, institutional prejudice and discrimination, limited opportunities for education and healthcare, economic insecurity, and cultural hurdles have become the main contributing factors to social poverty among these resettled women. These circumstances have perpetuated a cycle of poverty that disproportionately impacts indigenous women, resulting in social marginalization, restricted resources, and fewer prospects for social mobility.

### *5.2 Reason for Cultural Poverty among Indigenous Women*

Cultural poverty among Indigenous women is caused by a variety of circumstances, including past trauma due to resettlement, the loss of indigenous practices and languages, forced assimilation, and current prejudice and discriminatory practices. These issues have further contributed to a loss of cultural identity, a breakdown in community support structures, and difficulties in preserving and passing down cultural knowledge to future generations. Cultural assimilation is commonly observed in this area, with micro cultures increasingly disappearing. These women strive to endure in cultural existence despite the dissolution of their cultural bonds. First-generation women diligently preserved their cultural heritage, whereas second and third-generation women are gradually relinquishing their cultural practices in order to adapt and thrive in new environments.

### *5.3 Reasons for Food Poverty among Indigenous Women*

Food insecurity, which is the lack of sufficient quantities of good-quality food, is inversely related to physical and mental health and directly related to poor dietary intake (Bawadi et al., 2012). Food poverty among Indigenous women is caused by a variety of factors, including inadequate access to affordable and nutritious food, loss of traditional food patterns, geographic isolation, a lack of economic opportunities, and historical displacement from customary territories. Furthermore, systemic challenges such as food deserts, insufficient infrastructure, and discriminatory policies have exacerbated food insecurity in Indigenous communities. Socioeconomic factors such as income below the poverty line, illiteracy, unemployment, and being the head of a household are among the factors that further increase the likelihood of food insecurity in resettlement schemes among women.

### *5.4 Reasons for Energy Poverty among Indigenous Women*

Women allocate a significant proportion of their time to gathering essential resources for survival, such as firewood (Ssenono et al., 2023). The exorbitant cost of electricity and gas is the primary factor contributing to the limited diversity and availability of energy (Dake & Christian, 2023). Consequently, women who have been resettled in indigenous communities are required to dedicate a significant portion of their time to gathering firewood for domestic use (Zhang et al., 2022). Energy poverty among resettled indigenous women has been attributed to several causes, including restricted access to reliable and inexpensive energy sources, inadequate infrastructure in distant or rural locations, a lack of control over energy resources, and historical marginalization. Women in indigenous communities struggle to gain access to modern energy services, forcing them to rely on inefficient and costly sources of

energy such as diesel generators, wood stoves, and gas. This reliance has led to higher energy bills, health problems from indoor air pollution, and limited opportunities for economic development.

### *5.5 Reasons for Ageing Poverty among Indigenous Women*

Gender has a significant impact on the experience and reaction to urban poverty due to unequal caregiving obligations, pay disparity dynamics, and inadequate government programs (Ritenburg, 2016). Several issues have contributed to Indigenous women's poverty in old age, including historical injustices, limited access to healthcare and social services, and poverty among the next generation, which also contributes to poverty in old age in the settlement. Malnutrition is more prevalent among women than men, especially among elderly women (Korwel et al., 2022). While suicide rates are currently low, they are rising among women. Intergenerational trauma, discriminatory policies, a lack of educational opportunities, and cultural barriers have all contributed to economic insecurity in elderly Indigenous women. Elderly women are particularly vulnerable to all aspects of poverty when they lack the support of their husbands or other relatives. The situation in the settlements is worsened by limited access to land, which is the primary productive resource. Furthermore, unlike their youth, elderly women now lack the same cognitive and emotional resilience to face the challenges they encounter in their later years as they strive to endure. A significant number of individuals experience feelings of insecurity, fear, worry, and desperation. In addition to these factors, estrangement has also been identified as a component of elderly poverty among Indigenous women settlers.

### *5.6 Reasons for Economic Poverty among Indigenous Women*

The primary factors contributing to poverty, as perceived by young people in settlements, are identified as lack of employment opportunities or unemployment (Kiaušienė, 2015). Consequently, women do not acquire any land rights. Inadequate education, coupled with a dearth of income-generating prospects (Mwaipopo, 2021), particularly for the younger generation, frequently motivates women to seek early marriage (Notermans & Swelsen, 2022). Women are disproportionately affected by a cycle of economic marginalization, which includes historical injustices, systemic discrimination, limited access to education and employment opportunities, unequal access to resources and services, and cultural barriers. These factors contribute to a cycle of economic marginalization that disproportionately affects Indigenous women, leading to lower income levels, higher rates of unemployment, and limited economic mobility.

## **6. Conclusion and Implication**

Various dimensions of poverty are evident in this geographic area, with the female population being more vulnerable compared to their male counterparts. These women are in a disadvantaged condition due to the multidimensional nature of poverty. While the monetary aspect of poverty has been a significant characteristic in the area, the non-monetary aspects of poverty are equally important. The indigenous adult population is primarily impacted by

income, aging, and health poverty. The education, financial, menstruation, and power elements of poverty have a direct impact on middle-aged women and the younger generation. Furthermore, women are evidently in a subordinate position when it comes to exercising decision-making authority in significant home concerns and at the societal level. Without any differences, women in all three generations bear a greater burden of unpaid household labor, agricultural production, child-rearing, and elderly care, which consume the majority of their time while also having to do paid work. Despite the various strategies employed by successive generations of women to escape poverty, their attempts are ultimately thwarted by their minority status and adherence to traditional lifestyles. The various aspects of poverty have contributed to the precarious situation of women in the community. Despite the presence of policies, institutions, and processes aimed at poverty alleviation, these women remain highly vulnerable to extreme poverty as a community. Despite being resettled 35 years ago, these women continue to occupy rare positions in all aspects of development. Addressing insecurities among women in poverty necessitates a specialized approach that takes into consideration their specific needs and challenges. This could include giving access to culturally acceptable living options including food, promoting sustainable agriculture techniques, preserving traditional knowledge, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. Collaborating with local communities, participating in culturally sensitive discussions, and prioritizing Indigenous women's views and experiences are critical steps towards solving poverty. Working together to solve these complicated concerns would assist in establishing a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in resettlement schemes.

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