

**ROLE OF NGOs IN THE UPLIFTMENT OF WAR
AFFECTED WIDOWS IN SELECTED D'S DIVISION OF
BATTICALOA DISTRICT**

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict and civil war has been described as the country's most destructive problems. The war has gone over 16 years, causing around 53,355 widows of age between 17 and 25, in the island and incalculable damages to personal and public properties. In Batticaloa district alone 10,500 widows were created during the 16 years period.

Prolonged armed conflict highlighted the need for psychosocial and economic support to be given to especially for the widows who were the sole breadwinners of the family. More than 60 NGOs actively involved in providing assistance to uplift the standard of living of the widows. This study is evaluating the effectiveness of the NGOs programmes. From the villages under study 47 widows were selected for the evaluation.

The study shows that the programmes of upliftment by NGOs generally have no effect on widows. However the psychomotives training (60%), micro business training (50%) programmes contributed more towards the upliftment of the widows.

BACKGROUND

Sri Lanka has devastated due to the ethnic conflict over the last two decades. The cost of 20 years of war is incalculable, had caused many forms of social, economical, political, cultural, physical, mental, and ideological damages to the populations specially in North and Eastern Province. The economic costs of the war was Rs.1,443 billion (1998-2001) which includes resources spent on war, value of physical assets (both productive and socio economic assets) damaged and destroyed in the North & East, in particular and elsewhere in the country and lost opportunities of growth and development.

The most significant consequences of the war may be termed as the losses of lives, especially heads of families (which triggered single parent female headed households and widows). The human loss comprises of death and injuries, homelessness and displacement, (More than 800,000 people have been displaced as a consequence of the armed conflict in the Province), loss of skill due to the migration, psychological transformation of fear-psychosis, learned helplessness etc.

The war has gone over 16 years, causing around 53,355 widows aged between 17 and 25, in the island and incalculable personal and public properties. In Batticaloa district alone 10,500 widows were created during the 16 years period. Prolonged armed conflict highlighted the need for psychosocial and economic support to be given to especially for the widows who were the sole breadwinners of the family. More than 60 NGOs are actively involved in providing assistance to uplift the stranded of living of the widows. This study is evaluating the effectiveness of the NGOs programmes.

Table 1: War affected widows since 1990

AREA	NUMBER OF WIDOWS
Jaffna peninsula	19,100
Trincomalee district	6000
Batticaloa district	10,500
Other districts of N-E	6500
Families of armed forces (N-E)	11,255
Total	53,355

Source: UNICEF 2002

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- The overall objective was to identify the war affected widows and the causes in the district
- Specifically it aims to estimate their socio-economic status and the difficulties they face in day to day living; and to evaluate the role of NGOs in the upliftment of the standard of living of war windows.

REASERCH METHODOLOGY

From the 15 DS Divisions in the Batticaloa district, 05 DS Divisions were selected. From each of them five villages were selected, and from these villages 100 widows were selected randomly for the study.

Data were collected by a protested using structured questionnaire to personal interviews.

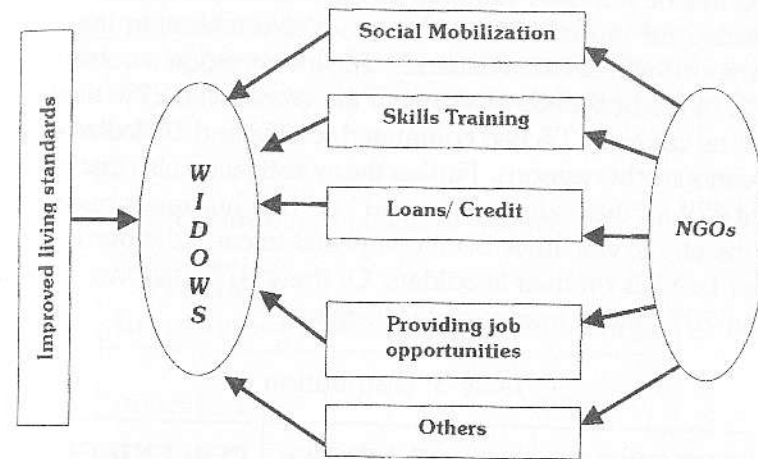


Figure 1: conceptual framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Cause of death of husbands

Reasons for death	Number Respondents	Percentage
War	47	47
Natural death	26	26
Suicide	13	13
Others	14	14
Total	100	100

Source: Survey data 2002

Widows of hundred families in the Batticaloa district were selected for my research with a view of establishing the true cause of death of their husbands. The investigation revealed that 47% of the husbands died due to the ethnic war, 27% died of natural causes, 13% had committed suicide and 14% died due to various other reasons. Further the investigation also disclosed that 47% of the widows, who had lost their husbands because of the ethnic war, have been compelled to carry the burden of their families on their shoulders. Of these 47% widows, more than 70% hailed from remote villages.

Table 3: Distribution

AGE GROUPS	NO. OF WIDOWS	PERCENTAGE
1. (17 – 20)	19	40.4
2. (21 – 25)	28	59.6
TOTAL (n)	47	1000

Source: Survey data 2002

In this analysis of the war widows in the Batticaloa district, the alarming revelation is that almost all of them were very young at the time of death of their husbands. Out of the 47 war widows identified, 40% of them were between the ages of 17 and 20; and the other 28 were between the ages of 21 and 25; hence of entire population of 10500 war widows in the Batticaloa district, almost all of them are had been below the age of 25 at the time of death of their husbands. Further more it was also disclosed that their late husbands were also comparatively young at the time of death.

The 20-year horrendous war had brought untold hardships and misery to the suffering masses. It has destroyed a large section of the younger generation thereby transforming those who were dependent on them for their livelihood as helpless and pushed into poverty.

Table 4: Previous employment of war widows' husbands

Previous Employment	Numbers	Percentage
Agriculture	12	25.5
Fishery	10	21.4
Business	03	6.3
Laborer	11	23.4
Others	07	14.9
Self Employed	04	8.5
Total (n)	47	100

Survey data 2002

In the study regarding the above-mentioned 47 war widows, the past occupation of their late husbands were also taken into consideration. It revealed that their unfortunate husbands had been engaged in lucrative jobs at the time of their death.

Specifically, the husbands of 12 widows were employed in the agriculture sector, 10 were in the fisheries sector, 3 were doing petty business enterprises, it were manual laborers, 4 were engaged in self – employment activities and the rest (07) were doing various other jobs. Although some NGOs had taken

meaningful measures to uplift the living standards of those families which were affected by the lost of their husbands, the widows have out shown any progress in effectively continuing the past occupation of their late husbands or earn sufficient income by them.

As proof for example, when the present occupation of the 47 war widows were examined, it would be seen that 16 of them were laborers, 07 are petty business entrepreneurs, 03 are engaged in animal husbandry, agricultural and home gardening; 08 are doing various odd jobs and 09 are unemployed from the above analysis another pertinent truth that could be adduced is that 9 % of the war widows are without any form of income as they are unemployed. As a result another important fact that emerges is that, apart from the general poverty factor that has been in existence traditionally over the years in the Batticaloa district. an additional increase of 60% in the poverty level due to the war has been observed at present. This is a direct of many families having to loose their employment and all other modes of income. This is the root cause for the high level of poverty experienced by the war affected families of Batticaloa district at present.

Lack of suitable employment opportunities to war widows resulting in their poor income generation level is another factor that has plunged the families of war widows into poverty. Out of a total of 47 war widows, 14 earn less than Rs.600 per month, 12 earn less than Rs, 1000 per month, 13 earn less than Rs. 2000 per month, 4 earn less than Rs.3000 per month only 01 earn more than Rs. 4000 per month. This shows that the poverty alleviation programmes implemented by several NGOs to improve the income level of war widows and reduce poverty from the portals of war effected society, have not been completely successful.

Further, the investigation also established the fact that in the Batticaloa district more than 50% of the war widows are living under the poverty line. It is therefore evident that this situation

is the causative factor in obstructing the enhancement and, upliftment of their living standards and development of their children's skills, education and healthcare. Majority of the war widows whose incomes are marginal hail from backward areas such as Valaichchanai, Kaluvanchikudy, Muthalaikuda, Vavunathivu etc.

Table 6: Educational Status of the War Widows

Education	No. of Widows	Percentage
1. No Schooling	21	44.6
2. Grade 1-5	10	21.2
3. Grade 6-8	04	8.5
4. Grade 9-10	05	10.7
5. G C E (O/L)	04	8.5
6. G C E (A/L)	02	4.3
7. Higher Education	01	2.2
TOTAL (n)	47	100

Source: Survey data 2002

Another aspect which employed is the poor standard of education of the war widows. Out of the 47 affected war widows, 21 have not attended any school at all, 10 have studied up to year 5; 09 up to year 10; 40 up to G.C.E. (O/L); to up to G.C.E. (A/L) and only 01 is a graduate. As their educational standard is found to be very poor, many NGOs have been confronted with considerable difficulties in raising their living standard the poor educational standard of war widows;

difficulties force in freeing their from culture restrictions and overcoming suicide hurdles; redeeming them from the economic bondage they are subjected to, are some of the hazards the confront them at present.

The most salient feature of the research was to analysis the part played and remedial action taken by the NGOs in eradicating poverty among the war widows and uplifting their living standards.

Table 7: Vocational Training Provided by NGOs

Type of training	Location	No. of women	Percentage
Carpentry	Kaluwanchikudy	04	8.5
Carpentry	Batticaloa	02	4.3
Electrical Wiring	Batticaloa	02	4.3
Computer	Batticaloa	01	2.1
Typing	Muthalaikudah	09	19.1
Welding	Kattankudy	01	2.1
Motor Mechanism	Batticaloa	02	4.3
Weaving	Kattankudy	12	25.5
Bicycle Repairing	Batticaloa	04	8.5
Bicycle Repairing	Batticaloa	06	12.7
Masonry	Batticaloa	02	4.3
Radio Mechanism	Kallady	02	4.3
TOTAL		47	100

Source: Survey data 2002

Regarding occupational training, facilities have been provided in the fields of type writing handloom industry, masonry work, carpenter practice, bicycle repairs, radio repairs and mat weaving in Batticaloa, Kaluvanchikudy, Kattankudy, Muthalaikuda, Kalladi, Valaichchanai, Eravur, Chenkalady, and Kokkadicholai areas. Despite this job oriented practical training only 20% of the widows (ie 10 widows) have been gainfully utilizing the skills attained to earn their living. Specifically, majority of them have been attracted by the handloom industry. Successive action taken by the NGOs to promote the savings habit among the war widows have proved futile. Although 40 widows out of the 47 were motivated to improve their savings habit only 09 of them have shown any interest in saving a considerable part of them income. However, in this regard only 18 out of the 47 widows were all to obtain financial assistance from the NGOs this demonstrates war although several meaningful actions programmes have been implement by the NGOs to help the war widows, they leg legend in growing loans or other forms of financial assistance to widows.

In the absence of constructive guidance or proper assistance to war widows, it is greatly distressing to note that they, by sending their children of school going age have been even to work are depriving the children their basic education. Specifically, out of 47 families of war widows, 28 families had been observed to earn their living by sending their children to for labour work. Majority of the children who go to work, instead of schools, are below 14 years of age and their tragic situation is posing another serious that to the war affected families NGOs, and the government in training to reduce poverty.

As far as Batticaloa district is concerned, although many NGOs have instead action to provide feasibility study reports and have laid the foundation to implement many development programmes to put an end do the trials and tribulations of war widows, several programmes have been improvement yet and therefore remain dormant. Many of the proposed development programmes were used merely as stepping-stone only to obtain

foreign aid by projecting the image of war widows, to international donor agencies.

Specifically, when you consider villages take syankerni in Chenkalady, Sathukondan, and Pillaiyarady in Batticaloa and Kokkoddicholai in Paduvankarai it could be seen that more than 100 war widows live in each of these villages. Although several NGOs have received foreign aid to provide financial assistance to these unfortunate human beings, it appears that these villages have not harvested the benefits of it yet. Iyankerni villages, the war widows are still living in small wattle have daub cottage or cadJan huts as they have not been provided with proper shelter do live in.

Table 8: Present Employment of the War Widows

Types of Employment	Number	Percentage
Laborer	16	34.1
Business	07	14.9
Livestock	03	6.4
Agriculture, Home Gardening	04	8.5
Others	08	17
Unemployed	09	19.1
TOTAL	47	100

Source: Survey data 2002

Table: 9 Income Structure of Widows

Income (Rs)	No. of widows
300 - 600	14
601 - 1000	12
1001 - 2000	13
2001 - 3000	04
3001 - 4000	03
4001 <	01

Source: Survey data 2002

Problems faced by widows

The problems encountered by in NGOs in boosting the living standard of war widows in the Batticalao district is another import and area of my research. In this regard two kinds of problems have been identified, they are:

1. Several educational, social and cultural problems faced by the war widows.
2. The problems faced by the NGOs in raising the living standards of war widows.

1. Social and cultural barriers faced by war widows. To resolve their problem many enduring effects have to be taken to free the war widows form the bondage they are subjected to as a result of the traditional that backward social and cultural values upheld by the Tamil community. (eg, dressing only in what clothing, being presented from freely mixing in public or taking part in

public functions, being considered as assign of ill omen in auspicious ceremonies ect.) in trying to resolve the above problems many NGOs had to face defect at the beginning in the case of backward regions. Further, family restrictions, pressure from people of high standing in society also presented the war widows from mixing freely with the outside worked. These restrictions and controls thrust on the war widows are challenges in equality of social status and depreciation of the fundamentals human rights of individuals.

2. Two income levels

Widows of several households have not made any genuine attempt engage themselves in new income generating activities, as they appear to be satisfied with the present status que. Another reason for the above situation is after the loss of their husbands the widows. Have been depending on their parents and relatives for their livelihood. As a result of this the widows don't show any interest in planning for their further livelihood, or boots their present living standards although the sources of income are at their footsteps. Because of their lazy lifestyle, they have not been attempting to engage themselves in new economic ventures. This is a critical problem facing the war widows at present.

3. Take of employment opportunities

This problem is inter - connected with the problem regarding income. Apart from the lack of vocational training facilities to war widows to under take various type of skilled and semi - skilled fobs, hindrance in society is presenting them from during certain types of fobs. Further non - availability of proper facilities to engage themselves in certain type of work; being unable to do certain fobs due their social standing although they like to do them (eg. Not used to worth in a place where the majority of workers are males); inability to overcome the problems faced in lunching new

enterprises; restrictions faced in marketing their outputs produced and some of the drawbacks faced by war widows in connection with employment opportunities.

4. Two level of saving and investment

Investment problems have been faced by war widows because the chief breadwinners of their families are no more. Due to this, not only there present savings have been hampered, hit their push savings have also been exhausted as they were spent an essential families needs further, another reason for their inability to save at present is the deterioration of their family income. Consequent to this they are unable to launch new ventures on a sound footing. Further more, these who are already involved in income generating ventures are not in a position to expand them due to financial constraints. As a result of this their incomes have been an the decline some causes they have reached a stage where the income is negligible or nil. This pathetic plight has been forcing the above families into indebtedness; or in other worth many such families have been compelled to borrow money to safeguard their occupational activities form declining.

5. Poverty and low living standard

Majority of the families affected by the war are from backward areas. Therefore these families are traditionally very poor. They have been trapped within the tentacles of unbearable poverty. Therefore their living standard is at low ebb. The brutal number of the chief occupants of the families into poverty. On account of this the majority families of the female-headed families in the Batticaloa district have been transformed into a new category of war poverty stricken families. The second issue is the difficulties confronted by NGOs in uplifting the living standard of war widows and putting and to their tears and turbulent lives.

1. Problems faced in enumerating the correct number of war widows or difficulties faced in identifying them.
2. After identifying the war widows, the impediments faced in providing their with correct and suitable training in the educational sphere. This is crucial because of the comprehensive view that a mother's education will in tern help her children's education, healthcare etc.
3. Problems faced in providing lone, facilities to the effected families; selecting the deserving beneficiaries to provide financial assistance and recovering the loans already provided from the recipients.
4. Non – availability of adequate funds what many NGOs.
5. Strict restrictions imposed by the securities forces on NGOS operating in uncleared areas

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The NGO s should identify the target groups by conducting field survey,

Upliftment programs should include, the way of increasing income, providing suitable vocational training.

Provide efficient marketing facilities to the products, produced by self employment of the widows.

Identify the widow's ability based on their educational level before granting loans for self employment.

Provide educational facilities to the children of the widows.

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