

## The effectiveness of “Zakat” contribution in poverty reduction among Muslims in Sri Lanka

JAPS Perera<sup>1</sup>

Poverty is a widespread problem faced by humanity today. Reducing poverty is a challenge to the developing countries including Sri Lanka. A number of poverty alleviation programmes have been implemented by successive governments in Sri Lanka. Still poverty prevails and therefore finding sustainable and realistic approaches to tackle the issue of poverty is important. *Zakat* is a charity based poverty reduction strategy that can be applied to reduce poverty among Muslims. Developing *Zakat* as a supporting strategy in poverty reduction would positively impact on poverty reduction effort in Sri Lanka. Hence this study addresses this issue and tries to bring several new insights in to poverty alleviation policy making.

The objectives of this research were to study the effectiveness of *zakat* contribution and to investigate the possible ways of developing *zakat* as a supportive system of poverty reduction. This research was done in Kegalle district and the respondents were selected through a purposive sampling method. It being a qualitative research, case study and the informal interview method were adopted to collect data. Having considered “*Zakat*,” as a religious philanthropic contribution that can be recognized as a form of Social Capital, the concept of Social Capital was applied to discuss the findings of this study.

The study revealed that provision of *zakat* to the needy has bridged the gap between the ables and unables. The *zakat* recipients have been able to overcome poverty situation by utilizing *zakat* productively. Unbiased selection of recipients, well organized nature of *zakat* distribution has made it effective. *Zakat* can be developed as a supportive mechanism of poverty reduction through government mediation by strengthening international links to receive more funds from Islamic countries, by educating the public of the effectiveness of *zakat* from grass root level to the top and by including *Zakat* in policy papers meaningfully.

**Key words:** Poverty, Zakat, Social capital, Muslims, Sri Lanka

<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Studies, The Open University of Sri Lanka