

## **The Impact of Women Empowerment Programs on Upcountry Tea Estate Women in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

*The term 'women empowerment' is a popular concept in the development discourse. However the empirical data regarding empowerment is not much available. Therefore, this study has focused on assessing the impact of women's empowerment programs which were implemented in the estate sector by the government as well as by NGOs in Sri Lanka. Basically, the study has focused on two main empowerment programs called Plantation Development Program (PDP) and Plantation Community Empowerment Project (PCEP) by the Government and the Care International as well. Most of the development plans do not assess the effect of empowerment programs that can be implemented within communities. Therefore, the objective of this study was to examine the ongoing approaches and the strategies related to empowerment of women.*

### **Introduction**

'Empowerment' is a widely spread concept in all aspects of development approaches which has been identified as a strategy of poverty reduction by the World Bank in 1990 (World Development Report: 1990). The word 'empowerment' is prominently used in relation to women, ethnic minorities and other marginalized groups with a view to providing them strength and confidence.

The United Nations decade for women (1975-1985) captivated public attention on the vital role play by the women in socioeconomic development. Subsequently, the concept 'women empowerment' emerged rapidly as a significant arm and slogan for the 1990s. Women empowerment is an active, multidimensional process which should enable women to realize their fully progressed identity and use their power in all spheres of life. It would consist of greater autonomy in decision-making, greater ability to plan their lives free them from shackles imposed on them by customs, beliefs and practices" (Devi: 1998: p. 44).

All UN member states who signed the Millennium Declaration are committed to promote gender equality and empowering women. Consequently, empowerment became one of the key constituent elements of poverty reduction and an important assistant factor in achieving development goals. Women's socioeconomic