

## **Increasing female-headed households in Sri Lanka: problems, obstacles and challenges**

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Although Sri Lanka's performance in comparison to other South Asian countries is impressive in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with special regard to literacy, school enrolment, gender equality in education and health services, the condition of women have not always fared well on equal scale many of them may be found pitiful, poverty-stricken dependent war victims in refugee camps and impoverished and empowered in facing multiple vulnerabilities (double burden of nurturing and being primary decision-maker and income-earner in women-female households), problems, obstacles and challenges, as they have been as heads of households.

There has been a significant increase in female-headed households due to the large numbers of men killed or lost through migration throughout the war. This increase is seen primarily in the Tamil communities in the north-east, but some Sinhalese communities in the south also now have greater numbers of female-headed households, as a result of the armed violence and civil war. In the Sri Lankan context this has serious and gendered implications for families, communities and societies. Tamil culture accords a very low status to widows, and women living alone without a male family member are looked upon with suspicion and suffer various forms of social exclusion.

This paper will examine the structural implications of female-headed households and process of desirable structural transformation. And also this paper will illuminate on the 'feminisation of poverty' in order to understand the poverty and vulnerability among the female-headed households. It will also examine the phenomenon of women migrating as housemaids to the west Asia, as a coping strategy in the emerging situation of impoverishment. Sri Lanka has assumed important place in the process of 'feminization of migration'. This study utilizes available secondary data, which are largely of a quantitative and qualitative nature.

**Key words:** Female-headed household, Poverty, Vulnerability, Social exclusion, Impoverishment and empowerment

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