

## Social development in independent Sri Lanka: achievements and challenges

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Sri Lanka is considered as a success story in the sphere of social development and considered as a test case due to its tremendous achievements particularly in the areas of basic education, health care and some other basic need provisions including foods in the midst of comparatively lower per capita income. As revealed by social development indicators, some of the achievements are comparable with high income countries while ahead to the many countries in the same income range. Indeed, these achievements are acknowledged as a reward for the public investment on social welfare for long period of time. However, there are emerging concerns over the quality, accessibility, effectiveness of the social welfare services and contribution of these achievements to economic growth. Likewise, poverty incidence is remaining as a central challenge further and concerns over the quality of and accessibility to education and health care services are growing. Within these circumstances, the problem arisen obviously is that why these anxieties are though successive governments have devoted much of its resources for social development?

The purpose of this paper is to critically analyze the social development achievements and relevant public policies in Sri Lanka, since independence. The main findings, after reviewing and analyzing the relevant literature and data were: though public investments on social development have brought about tremendous success, and have contributed to minimize gender and ethnic disparities of social development and accessibility to welfare services, the achievements have not been adequately exploited for the economic development. In addition to that, there are vast disparities of quality and accessibility of social services not only inter-regional but also intra-regional. Accordingly, following conclusions were drawn: the inadequate performances of public investment are mainly due to the political interest of those investments rather than economic rationality; policy mismanagement has largely caused to incompatibility of social development and economic growth; and on-going ethnic conflict has severely curtailed the outcomes of social development expenditure and growth performances.

**Key words:** Public policy, Social development, Poverty, Economic growth, Quality and accessibility

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