

Hunger is a Shameful Crime in Sri Lanka

When, food can be a free gift of nature

Hunger in Sri Lanka today has become one of the worst crimes. However, those who could and should take urgent remedial action have not yet decided to look at this situation with concern that it deserves.

October the 16th is declared the World Food Day. It is a day to bring to awareness the shame of hunger and starvation that prevails worldwide.

World Food Summit Commitment

World Food Summit, held in Rome from 13 to 17 November 1996, with representatives of 186 countries, including 41 Presidents and 41 Prime Ministers participating, highlighted the shocking fact that nearly 840 million, about 115th the world population go to sleep hungry every day. About 200 million of them are little children.

Though with some reluctance on the part of the richest countries such as the U.S.A., the leaders finally agreed that "food is a human right" which is obvious and so vital to those hundreds of millions of people, now in all the parts of the world (including the West). For whom "right to life" is threatened as a result of being deprived the "right to food".

What the World Food Summit (WFS) attempted was to convince the world community that 1/5 of its people (, and about 20% of whom, little children who should be fed nourished and protected by the adults) having to go hungry, starve and become' malnourished, in a world that is producing more food than necessary, to feed every body sufficiently, should not be tolerated. This was shameful when the world has entered the third millennium with all its claimed achievements in science and technology. Communication revolution is said to have brought into human society the possibility of such close links and mutual concern and assistance. The WFS succeeded in making a joint commitment to eliminate hunger and death caused by starvation and under nourishment. It was seen as a responsibility of all the govefnnlents, the civil society, the private businesses and the international institutions such as the UN organizations, the World Bank etc.

However, the final declaration made by the Heads of State could only say, that hunger in the world would be reduced by half by the year 2015. Cuban leader Fidel Castro in his very short speech said that it was shameful for the world leaders to accept the situation that half the world's hungry people would continue to be hungry even after the year 2015, nearly 20 years after accepting the above joint responsibility.

"Food for All"

As a strategy of achieving the above goal a campaign "Food for All" has been launched under the guidance of FAO in which all countries are expected to participate and contribute to.

One of the programmes envisaged is a "Special programme for Food Security" in 85 selected low income, food deficit countries, of which Sri Lanka is identified as one.

Sri Lanka -A Country of Hunger, Malnutrition and Starvation

Sri Lanka, a country that claimed to have achieved the best social development results (as indicated by a high physical quality of life index) in this part of the world, South Asia and was among the advanced countries in this respect just a few decades ago, is today a country that has deteriorated very rapidly, to the lowest rank. This has been the trend particularly during the last two decades.

The Sri Lanka Position Paper on Food Security presented by the government to the World Food Summit in Rome in 1966 says the following regarding the overall nutritional status;

The nutritional status of the Sri Lankan population has not compared well with the other indicators such as high literacy rate etc.

The main nutrition disorders commonly found in Sri Lanka are deficiency disorders, which include protein, energy malnutrition and micro nutrient deficiencies such as iron, iodine and vitamin A.

The per capita energy intake in the country has declined during the last decade according to a Medical Research Institute (MRI) study. In 1979, the average intake was 2,316 K cal/day and this had declined to 1,548 (which is a 33% reduction). It would be seen that the energy intake is much less than the amount recommended by the FAO / WHO which is 2,530 K cal/day for men and 2,200 K cal/day for women.

Between 1980 and 1990 the average energy intake has reduced from 2,119 K cal/day to 1,548 K cal/day.

It also says the following about low birth weight and nutritional status of children.

"Statistics show that the prevalence of low birth weight, which is associated with maternal nutrition, is as high as 18.7 %" (recent World Bank reports and the figures quoted by some of the prominent nutritionists recently say that between 28% to 30% of the babies are of low birth weight.)

Thus, a significant proportion of children begin life with a nutrition handicap. The following figures indicate the effects of malnutrition among children in the different sectors.

Nutritional Status of Children by Sectors

Sector	Stunting% (Height for Age)	Wasting% (Weight for Height)	Under Weight% (Weight for Height)
Colombo	18.9	12.2	30.5
Other Urban	16.3	17.1	29.6
Rural	22.8	16.4	38.3
Estate	54.4	9.6	53.1

[Source: MRI 1996]

This report further says, "In children, prevalence of wasting is on the increase indicated by a deficit of weight to height. This is due to under nourishment associated with poverty and lowering of purchasing power.

Prevalence of Wasting and Stunting

Age (Months)	Wasting		Stunting	
	1980/81	1993	1980/81	1993
03-05		3.1		4.9
06-12	14.1	6.8	18.5	11.9
12-24	24.6	17.7	34.0	25.9
34-36	10.9	15.1	33.7	23.0
36-48	4.1	18.7	41.5	26.9
48-60	6.6	17.8	48.5	28.2

Why Hunger is a Crime in Sri Lanka?

Island wide study done by UNICEF several years ago (in 1993) said that 60% of the children below 5 years were malnourished. It is well known that 25% of the growth of brain cells of a person takes place before birth and about 85% of this growth should take place before the age of 5 years. A child victim of malnutrition during this age period will not achieve this growth and it cannot be recovered later in life.

65% of mothers giving birth are said to suffer anemia. Thus they give birth to low birth weight babies.

Sinhala newspaper Divaina reported the death of a child six months old and the mother gave evidence at the post-mortem saying that the child was born pre-maturely after seven months of pregnancy. The mother did not have the capacity to breast feed the child. They were a family surviving on daily wage labour not finding work every day. It was not possible for them to earn enough to buy milk to feed the child and the child died since she was not fed.

It is rarely that children faint at school assemblies or during class hours and teachers say that many such children often hide the fact that they come to school not only without breakfast but with hardly any dinner the previous night. There are many children in these schools who walk out of the school during the lunch interval when other children have their lunch, merely to hide the fact that they have not brought any lunch with them.

It is said by those who visit the war affected areas of Vanni district these numbers of children fainting in school can increase up to 20 -30 daily, while in other village schools it could be just 3 or 4 per day.

It is also to be understood and recognized that children who are subject to such handicaps, disadvantages and injustice in their very early ages, are expected to enter into the tremendous battle for survival in education.

It is not only among the rich and middle classes in urban areas that the little children below grade 5 are pushed so hard to jump the first hurdle in their race in education at the grade 5 scholarship examination. They are then expected to compete with richer children with all the additional advantages of attending schools with good teachers and additional tuition outside.

The possibilities and facilities made available to the richer sections of society outside the official education in schools and the complete monopolizing of the media by sellers of children's fancy food and goods have completely removed the concern and consciences needed in broader society to look into the educational, health and food needs of these poor children and their families.

This crime of hunger and malnutrition against the weakest, the youngest and the most vulnerable is shameful and totally intolerable, in a country such as Sri Lanka, since it is largely a result of the conscious decisions taken by the people at the topmost levels" of decision making, policy and planning levels.

It is even worse when one looks at the facts not only of early history, but also of the early post independence decades, when such hunger and malnutrition had not existed in Sri Lanka at any time. This needs to be brought to the urgent attention of the leaders for two reasons. Firstly, because the policies and plans at both national and international levels in relation to agriculture, trade and food security seem to be oriented not towards improving the situation of the poor and the hungry, but towards making their situation worse. This is done in the name of protecting trade rights of the rich multinational and local big businesses at the cost of rights of the poor farmers and the rural women to use their abilities and limited resources in their surroundings to feed themselves, their little ones and ordinary people in their own country. This is in spite of the fact that they have proved that they could do this, if unobstructed, at low cost and in a sustainable manner.

These decisions that came in the form of "free trade" , "open and globalized market", "modern and advanced technology for higher and better yields", "commercial agriculture" and "export orientation" and also in the form of international agreements such as GATT (which included TRIPs -Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights agreement, WTO, SAPTA (South Asian Preferential Trade Area) would further eliminate the rights of the poor in the villages, towns , plantations, the coastal and inland fishing regions to produce or have food in ways that are economically viable to them.

It leads to a process that would take away the right and the potential they have in using not only their land, water and other natural, environmental resources, while eroding the traditional, historical knowledge base and experience in feeding themselves, their children and the yet to be born. Their ability and the traditional, cultural practices of recognizing their responsibility to look into the food and nutritional needs of their neighbor are being made impossible.

Secondly, these trends demand serious consideration and rethinking, because we, at least in Sri Lanka and several other countries with similar natural, historical and cultural background, still have a tremendous potential to obtain a considerable share of the food, nutrition and health requirements of the poor as a "free gift of nature." What is necessary is to decide to create conditions, policies, strategies, plans and attitudes that would allow and enhance the capacities of rural small scale food producers to use their potential to strengthen the contribution that their natural environment could make, utilizing their own capacities in subsistence farming for house hold, community level and local food security.

It can also be shown that such a process would have tremendous potential in contributing to the overall growth of the economy and provide meaningful livelihoods when compared with the little we have achieved, within the last 20 years, when we believed that to overcome poverty and to provide more employment opportunities we could achieve rapid economic growth by bringing in large scale foreign investment which would strengthen our position within the international market.

The economic costs and the social or human development losses that we have incurred in the 20 years efforts to attract and strengthen foreign and local private sector investments have been tremendous with hardly any achievements in terms of poverty reduction through "trickling down" of the expected "growth". This article, however, does not provide enough space to go in to a detailed discussion of such losses.

A few facts, however, would amply illustrate this aspect.

1. Income disparities have increased tremendously during this period making Sri Lanka only second to Brazil in the World Bank's listing of countries on the basis of income disparities. (World Development Report 1993)
2. Rural poverty in Sri Lanka has had the sharpest increase among 114 countries studied by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) between 1965 and 1988.

In 1965 only 13 % of the rural population in Sri Lanka was below poverty line and in 1988 it had increased to 46%. The number of rural poor had increased from 1,163,000 to 6,101,000. (IFAD Study "State of World Rural Poverty" 1992)

3. Youth uprisings caused about 60,000 disappearances in the South between 1988 to 1990 while, the war in the North has led to at least another 60,000 deaths mostly of the youth. The reasons for both these events and the continuing tendency among the youth to adopt such violent means include the fact that the economic processes adopted in the country make it impossible to meaningfully absorb and include a large section of our population within the globalized market.

The adjustments made over the last 20 years have resulted in loss of livelihoods for many more people than the employment opportunities that this process created.

The proposals now made by the World Bank and the top economic advisors to the government such as the National Development Council envisages a process of eliminating further millions of small farmers from their land and from cultivation of domestic food crops. (e.g.: Non Plantation Sector Policy Alternatives - Report of the World Bank in March 1996, the Joint Report of the World Bank and Sri Lankan experts of March 1998 titled "Sri Lanka in the Year 2000 - An Agenda for Action, and the "Agriculture Policy Recommendations" Report and Action Plan of the National Development Council of December 2, 1996, all aim at policy adjustments towards "freeing land market" "freeing labour market" etc. to create much more cheap labour and cheaply available land resources to attract large investors in export oriented commercial agriculture and industry, at the expense of local food production and agricultural livelihoods for the rural poor.)

These processes and policies are now being accepted and implemented regardless of the failure that we have had in this strategy during the last 20 years and the obvious disadvantages we face in the processes of globalization when GATT , WTO, SAPT A etc came in to implementation hundreds of thousands of rural small farmers, small fish workers, plantation workers and even industrial workers are likely to lose their livelihoods and the resources for producing their food or the access to food due to loss of employment.

Globalized (Liberalized) Market in Sri Lanka Benefits Only the Rich

It is fairly clear that our efforts to enter effectively into the globalized market have not benefited the poor in the country and Sri Lanka as a whole has failed to benefit from these efforts so far.

The new proposals though expected to create greater attraction to investors and to foreign capital are very likely to create opposite results since the intensification of poverty will only weaken the local market, the technical skills base, the productivity of our labour and eliminate our capacity to compete for the type of higher technology industries etc.

As already seen, the political environment of increased social and political unrest and the need to increase investments on internal security and arms and loss of democratic environment is likely to create much bigger disadvantages even for the envisaged export oriented growth and attraction of foreign capital investments.

Recent administrations of failure and claim of IFIs and under Development Agencies to give fresh priority to Poverty reduction

In the recent years 1999 and 2000 the World Bank, UNDP, Asian Development Bank and the European Union etc. have admitted that the Poverty reduction strategies adopted, so far by these international financial Institutions and development agencies have not succeeded. It has been estimated that world poverty will further increase in the coming decades. The WB has always been saying that its top most priority is poverty reduction. Asian Development Bank has now prepared new "Poverty Reduction Strategies" and has asked each of its members, fund receiving, poor countries to prepare "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers" (PRSPs) for the respective countries before the end of 2001. This short time target, we feel would only make the existing lack of participation and openness worse. This is likely to lead to a situation where the poor country Governments would merely approve the strategies proposed by ADB, WB and others merely to get the loans. For instance the poor people in Sri Lanka do not know that the WB, ADB etc are concerned about poverty reduction. They do not know of the existence of such strategies. The organizations representing the poor such as those of the farmers, fish workers, trade unions of the plantations, industrial workers, women workers of the free trade zones, rural women's organizations etc. do not know that such processes of preparation of poverty reduction strategies existed. Neither have any of these financial institutions and development agencies made any attempt to invite such organizations of the poor for such discussions. These people do not believe that these agencies are sincere in their claims to be concerned about poverty reduction. Rather their experience has been that they are the cause of poverty increase. This is what has been happening in the past. The new strategies do not differ very much from what has been adopted so far and they are not likely to make any improvement of the situation of the poor.

Failed Poverty Alleviation Strategies

The above considerations should compel us to think seriously about alternative approaches and strategies to feed the hungry and to eliminate malnutrition among children and mothers. Poverty alleviation strategies worked out so far under the guidance and assistance of the World Bank such as the Janasaviya, Janasaviya Trust Fund and the Samurdhi Movement have clearly failed to make any worthwhile impact on poverty, hunger and malnutrition. This is mainly because these were intentionally designed so as not to make any change in the so-called "free market" structural adjustments and "globalization" processes which are the main processes that create and intensify poverty. While the main economic strategies in their effort to create cheap labour, high expenditure on providing infra-structure, on liberalized imports and tax benefits to the richest have consciously reduced services and opportunities to the poorer sections of society to produce and to sell their products, the above poverty alleviation approaches have only attempted to keep the poorest within the market by providing them some relief.

Almost all attempts at providing self-employment to the "targeted" poor communities has failed since the market, as it is planned, work to their disadvantage.

The overwhelming concern that the top policy makers had in looking after the rich investors have allowed very little concern about the poor and the hungry. This is proved by the fact that the Janasaviya Trust Fund (JTF) later renamed National Development Trust Fund (NDTF) failed to utilize much of the funds obtained from the World Bank for projects to help the poor and to overcome the shocking situation of malnutrition. About 1300 million

rupees allocated were taken back after six years. Over 500 million left over was from allocations for nutrition of children.

Another indication of this lack of concern for the hungry was the omission and delay of the government of Sri Lanka to apply for the Special Programme on Food Security for which Sri Lanka was entitled, being among the 85 low-income food deficit countries. In spite of several reminders by FAO office in Colombo since March 1997 the relevant ministries had not taken any action to enter into this programme until mid October 1997.

Food and Nutrition for the Poor Can Be a Free Gift of Nature in Sri Lanka.

As we already described hunger and malnutrition has become a serious problem in Sri Lanka not because we lack the natural environmental resources or the human resource potential to overcome these but only because the policies and approaches adopted have completely failed to give serious attention to the hunger and malnutrition among the poor.

Sri Lanka has had a long history when the ordinary people in the villages knew and had the capacity to make use of the free gifts of nature to feed and nourish the people sufficiently. This capacity and the knowledge base had been weakened and destroyed gradually during the period of nearly two centuries when we allowed the international market forces to dominate and decide on the economic processes. During the last two decades, particularly when we allowed these same market forces to take complete control over the production and marketing processes, the poorer sections of society, the rural small scale producers and the poorer consumers have been almost completely pushed out of survival within the market economy.

Thus; it is now more relevant than ever before for these poor to think of the advantages and the potentials they have in finding ways and means of feeding themselves and nourishing their children outside the market economy that no longer sees them as necessary and useful.

If one carefully analyses the responses that are emerging, throughout the world, to the existing crises in the present development processes such as those identified and expressed at the world summits of the United Nations from the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 to the World Food Summit in Rome 1996, such as the crisis in environment and rapid destruction of natural resources (Food Summit in Rome), human rights violations and suppression (Human Rights Summit in Vienna) growing poverty, disparities and social disintegration (Social Summit in Copenhagen, 1995), suppression and exploitation of women (Women's Summit in Beijing in 1996), the responses that emerged from the people, the civil society strongly emphasized that "market" as it is structured today, can not solve any of these problems and in fact they, are being aggravated by the present processes of Globalization and restructuring.

The right, the capacity and the need to allow the potential of those who are now pushed out and marginalized in these processes to find effective solutions too were high lighted. The NGO Declaration at the World Food Summit particularly emphasized that "market alone cannot solve food insecurity" and that it was necessary to strengthen the small producers and revive their traditional knowledge and experiences. The clear conclusions of the study "State of World Rural Poverty" published by IF AD in 1992 was that recognition and strengthening of the contribution made by small, rural producers was the needed approach to overcome rural poverty. It is well recognized that this was necessary to prevent

the present processes of environmental damage caused by large-scale commercial agriculture and by the rapid displacement of small farmers from their present farmlands pushing them to deforestation and to an unproductive urbanization.

The tremendous growth in the concern for safe food and the desire to adopt natural, ecological ways to produce them is obvious, in spite of the obstacles and restrictions created by the dominant forces in the “market,” utilizing national and international political domination and financial control by the International Financial Institutions.

“Non-market” Approaches to Food Security

“Economy” traditionally included several aspects. If we accept the broad and more complete definition of “economy” as the ways adopted by the people for their material survival it has very meaningful and substantial components such as the “economy of nature” and the “non-market subsistence activities” of the people which includes activities conducted by the households and often by small communities as their livelihoods that are usually not linked to market and are not given any market value.

In Sri Lanka too this has been a strong component. Apart from the purely economic need that kept these aspects of people's economic life alive, there have also been a strong cultural background and a set of social and religious values that helped and sustained them.

The logic of the present model and strategy of development as stated by the World Bank and our own policy makers who follow the same logic is as follows;

They claim that their primary aim is to reduce poverty, hunger and related problems of the poor. It is said that to do this growth is necessary. For growth we need capital investment for industry and agriculture, to provide jobs etc. This capital has to be attracted from outside, by attracting foreign investment. To do this we, then have to provide cheap labour, land, resources, political stability, subservient labour force etc. Having done this now for 20 years, it is said we need to provide more.

Thus further reduction on social spending, further privatization, further removal of labour protection, further freeing of land markets, labour markets, natural resources to be used by the expected investors. These taken together are most likely to lead to a massive process of loss of livelihoods, increased hunger and poverty etc. This amounts to saying that "we need to make people poorer to reduce poverty". "We need to reduce employment and increase loss of livelihoods to reduce unemployment" and a series of other equally absurd statements.

A much simpler approach to remove hunger

Much of hunger and poverty is in the rural areas. Urban hunger and poverty increases as and when the rural poor are forced into migrating to cities, simply by destroying their rural livelihoods, without alternative opportunities and livelihoods created in the cities. This is very well seen in the present processes of urban migrations of the rural poor, in most third world countries. Sri Lanka has a special feature where the youth thus rejected to be absorbed by the economy tend to engage themselves in rebellion or war.

Thus, maximizing the potential that exists in the rural areas to provide sustainable livelihoods, maximizing the food availability in the rural surroundings at low cost or no financial cost, maximizing the overall productivity while strengthening the sustainable use of natural resources base for Such livelihoods, minimizing the need for external inputs that have to be obtained at high cost in the present market, adjusting the consumption patterns that are created not for better living but for the needs of market expansion are some of the essential elements of such a non market dependent approach.

We can easily understand this approach by trying to workout a common package of approaches in sustainable, low cost, food production.

Most rural people have only small plots of land, which needs to be used for the maximum period possible, with the highest productivity possible. Thus, the package to be utilized would include,

- Protection and replenishment of the fertile topsoil, by giving back the fertility that is removed in farming, by adding organic manure, utilizing methods of crop rotation etc.
- It is necessary to retain as much water as possible in the soil, for the longest period possible, by preventing soil erosion, planting trees, keeping the soil covered, increasing the bio mass.
- Using non chemical farming methods, integrated pest management in paddy and other crops where this has been proved to be possible.
- By adopting methods of farming that would be as close as possible to the natural Eco - system, using the environment, conserving it in a manner that maximizes the free food availability and availability of other requirements such as fodder, fuel etc.
- There is much potential to increase the water availability, in most of our water resources, the tanks, reservoirs, wells and in the soil, if these method of conservation are applied sufficiently widely. Tree planting very widely not only in the forest reservoirs or in areas identified for reforestation, but also in our home gardens, village surroundings, hills, catchments etc. is quite possible. The idea could be to bring the forests into the village using agro- forestry, to reverse the process that had taken place so far of villages expanding into the forests, destroying them.

How to create attractive livelihoods in the rural economy

There is serious rethinking needed in working out strategies to ensure the survival of large sections of the world population who are rejected as unacceptable or unnecessary to the “Globalized market” that is been so rapidly developed today. Many of them cannot survive unless viable alternatives are worked out.

In Sri Lanka this could well be about half or more of the total population. The development of science and technology, production processes, consumption patterns and attitudes, for quite some time, have been influenced and “distorted” by the requirements and dictates of the market forces. As a result most of the scientists, technicians, scholars etc. decide on their subject matter on the basis of the possibilities and potentials they would have in selling their knowledge in the market that pays them well. Thus, the contribution that they make towards some of the latest requirements in scientific and technological developments needed for those who are not effectively in the market is minimal. This is one of the reasons why some of the latest advancements in the fields of alternative sustainable agriculture, organic fanning, ecological approaches, protection of bio diversity etc. have been very slow

in coming to Sri Lanka. Almost a total ignorance or a total rejection could be seen, of some these latest developments that are taking place through out the world as necessary for future survival and for solving the serious development problems that have arisen today.

The approach that we have described as necessary to meet the food, nutrition and poverty alleviation needs of the poor in general and those of the rural areas in particular should be based on this alternative science and technology. Since much of this is based on the historical, traditional knowledge that our rural farmers had for centuries and since it is a science that can easily be grasped by and person who simply uses his/her experiences with nature, it can easily be given to our people, The large numbers of young people who are now rejected after some years of schooling, or at the university entrance lever or even after university education, as unemployable could become a very useful and effective vehicle to take these changes to the village communities. In fact the contribution they could make to the increase in productivity both at national level as well as at the village household and community levels would be so high that they could easily be sustained by this additional enrichment that they would bring to the lives of the poor.

When compared with the massive investments that the successive governments have made to provide infra structure and other incentives to potential investors with very little returns and results, this absorption of the youth for this task, even if they are to be given some remuneration by the government is fully worthwhile- This can be a very well recognized occupation if it is done with the necessary education and training on the new developments of science and technology for sustainable

Annex 1

Need to Begin the Process of formulating Poverty Reduction (or eradication) strategies with the proposals of the poor themselves

Any honest effort to develop poverty eradication strategies should recognize that it is the poor themselves who have the right and the ability to formulate Strategies for this purpose. This recognition is even more necessary today since the strategies formulated and imposed from the top, by the financial powers of the world and at national level have failed. There is a growing demand today for more participation and democracy. There is also a worldwide resistance growing against the attempts made to impose such plans upon the people although they claim to be for reduction of poverty.

The organizations of the poor, the Farmers' Movements, the fish workers, plantation workers, women's organizations, industrial workers, environmental organizations and human rights organizations have had their proposals for many years. We propose that the Agencies now should be prepared to begin with these proposals, if they are sincere about, openness, participation, dialogue, As an example, we give below, the proposals and demands made by the Farmers movements in Sri Lanka, for improvement of their situation and for reducing poverty and hunger in the Country. These demands were also included in the People's Memorandum Signed by 150,000 and presented to the People's Alliance Government in January 1995. They are based on the struggles of small fanners in Sri Lanka during the last two decades.

Farmers Demands made at the Hunger Strike in Polonnaruwu in August 2000

Major Demands

1. A National Policy for protection of domestic agriculture and small farmers should be declared.
2. A permanent, independent commission should be set up by the government to study the crisis of domestic agriculture and farmers and to recommend solutions, in consultation with farmers.
3. A minimum price of Rs.15 /kg. should be guaranteed for white raw (Sudu Nadu) paddy. (This was the price demanded when the cost of production was about Rs. 11 / kg. but these farmers who numbered about a million families could not get more than Rs. 8 / kg in ally part of the country.)
4. Importation of domestically produced crops such as rice, potato, big onion, red onion, chili, etc should be suspended immediately. (These are the major domestic food crops grown in the country. These are cultivated almost entirely by very small producers). Such imports should only be allowed at times of shortage in the country, as decided by a Commission set up for the purpose, comprising of the Ministers of Agriculture and Trade, three representatives of farmer organizations and a retired judge.
5. Taxing of farmers for irrigation or marketing of water should be prevented and the leasing out or sale of water resources in bulk, reservoirs and channels to multinationals or farmer

companies should not be done. Measures to prevent a water crisis by proper integrated water management, conservation and prevention of pollution must be planned, designed and implemented with people having sufficient control over such resources. Water should remain a common property.

Other Demands

6. Government policies should be formulated to permit the farmers, the right to set the selling prices of their agricultural products.
7. Agricultural implements should be available at affordable costs to small and poor farmers, to be imported tax-free.
8. Just and appropriate compensation should be given, without political bias, to farmers who suffer damage as a result of losses in agricultural activities
9. Land belonging to farming classes should be allowed to remain in their own hands and permanent titles should be given to such farmers, without the possibility of transferring such land to persons outside their blood relations, instead of the false land grants now given in the form of “Swarna Boomi” and “Jaya Boomi” deeds or long term lease holdings.
10. Women's rights' should not be considered secondary in granting land or in inheriting land ownership
11. Legal provisions should be made, not to allow the breaking up of paddy lands to parcels less than one acre
12. Provision of irrigation for agriculture should not favor big agribusiness and immediate steps should be taken to provide irrigation at suitable times to minimize pest and other losses.
13. The Kanna (pre season) meetings to decide on the farming and irrigation calendar should continue to remain a right of farmers. This right of farmer participation, which was traditional, should be re-established instead of the present trend of taking centralized decisions at the top without farmer consultation.
14. A national policy of protecting the small tanks for percolation and preventing sedimentation of larger water reservoirs should be established.
15. Maintenance of larger reservoirs and major channels should be the responsibility of the Government.
16. Importation and distribution of poisonous agro-chemicals that are destructive to humans, earth, animal life, plants and environment should be stopped and environmentally friendly, ecological, sustainable agriculture should be adopted as the government policy (importation of herbal products that are environmentally friendly should be permitted)
17. Immediate steps should be taken to prevent the sale of national assets that are necessary for future generations, to rich foreign companies. (proposed sale of the Eppawala

Phosphate deposits, setting up of the Voice of America Radio Transmitting Station, building of the thermal power station in Norachcholai, selling water reservoirs and canals are some examples)

18. Prevent the sale of Government farms used for agricultural research and seed production. Proposals to close down the paddy marketing Board should be rejected. (This has now been done. In August 2000 the Government, in response to farmers' demand agreed to initiate a government institution to undertake purchasing of all agricultural products, as a mechanism of providing small farmers better opportunities to sell their produce at reasonable prices. This promise was not implemented.
19. Legal arrangements should be made to provide grazing land for cattle and to protect cattle as a necessary resource for the farmers.
20. A policy of granting land under the Mahaweli Scheme should be formulated to prevent political discrimination in land allocations to ensure land grants only to those who qualify, under suitable criteria.
21. Immediate measures should be taken to see that various Ministries responsible for agriculture such as the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, Land, Agrarian Services and Trade are brought together under one Ministry so that an integrated approach towards agriculture could be developed.
22. Agricultural education adapted to day, promotes the use of agro-chemicals that are destructive to life and environment. These bring large profits to big companies while making the costs of production beyond the reach of small farmers. This education should be changed to a system of education on conservation farming, friendly towards environment
23. Immediate arrangements should be made to provide a systematic, practical education and training on ecological agriculture to school leaving youth.
24. Legal protection should be provided to prevent the illegal transfer of our genetic resources to foreign countries and big enterprises.
25. Immediate steps should be taken to provide Tamil speaking officials to Tamil and Muslim farmers for their administrative needs.
26. Protection should be given to the paddy farmers by arranging the purchase of rice instead of paddy.
27. The decision to give up paddy farming to be replaced by exports crops such as gherkin, melon baby corn, tobacco, cut flowers etc as recommended by the World Bank should be stopped.
28. The one man commission (Kapilaratne Commission) appointed in 1994 to look into the reasons for the farmer suicides during the UNP regime and to find remedies has submitted their report many years ago. This report should be published and made known to the people.

29. Free and fair elections free of violence should be conducted to allow free expression of people's political decisions and aspirations.

Formulated by:

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Note: The farmers launched a hunger strike asking for a meeting with the President on these demands. On the fifth Day (Aug. 18, 2000) Prime Minister gave a meeting at which it was agreed to purchase paddy at Rs. 13 /kg through out the country and to set up a Government Institution to purchase all agricultural products at reasonable prices. These promises have not yet been carried out satisfactorily.

Annex 2

Proposals on several urgent issues made by MONLAR in early 2000

Based on 10 years of experience MONLAR prepared this set of proposals on several issues of current importance for consideration by the political leadership and scholars in the country. The first proposal relates to a settlement of the war and the ethnic conflict. The others relate to problems of poverty, food insecurity, agriculture and livelihoods, which we consider to be of equal importance. We received several very positive responses from Sri Lanka scholars. MONLAR is presently involved in studying the relevance of these proposals scientifically and in dialogue with the people.

An Invitation for a process of study on humanist solutions to some urgent problems in Sri Lanka

We, the Movement for National Land and Agricultural Reform (MONLAR) would like to invite a small group of important scholars, intellectuals, and social leaders to work together and do some serious thinking on two issues of extreme importance at the present moment in our society. This is about the obligation of civil society in finding humanitarian and rational approaches to peace and security and the economic well being of a majority of the poor people in Sri Lanka.

We have been engaged in intense activity related to these issues at least during the last ten years. Some of these specific activities are listed briefly at the end of this letter. With this background of experience and information, we would now like to request your assistance and guidance in bringing them up as concrete proposals for serious rethinking by the decision makers of the country. We would like to see if some of these proposals could be worked upon by an important group of concerned citizens to be presented as suggestions arising out of fairly broad consensus among an influential group of citizens.

The issues are briefly described in this letter and the positions we suggest are flexible and open for changes based on discussion.

The suggestions aim at protecting the most important social values, to prevent further dehumanization and insecurity of individuals and the entire socio-political and economic Environment.

Some of you may want to work on both these as related issues while some others may prefer to select one of them. We would appreciate and respect your choice and preference and try to accommodate them.

Since much of the content of these issues are already very familiar we would like to present our proposals directly.

Proposals

Issue 1: War and the ethnic Issue

1. We suggest that the government should declare its willingness to stop all military attacks aimed at achieving a military victory in the Northern war, with a declared time target (of say about three to six months) and begin an all out effort to reach a powerful, non-military, political settlement to the ethnic problem, with the view of making it politically “unnecessary” and “impossible” for LTTE to continue its military approach and also create a climate that would enable the mobilization of the full strength of the ordinary unarmed, non-violent people of all ethnicity in Sri Lanka and the peace loving people throughout the world. This is to make it impossible for either of the parties in the war to justify their continuation of the war in any form.
2. The short period from the date of this announcement and the target for stopping military attacks should be utilized to strengthen defense of all civilians in the border areas, in Colombo and the rest of the country and particularly to take maximum precautions see that civilian population in the war areas are affected to the minimum possible. Government should take special care also to see that civilian population in the war areas including the Tamil and Muslim majority areas in the North and East should be secured. The defense arrangements in the whole country should be designed with equal concern for the security of people of all communities, the Sinhala, Tamil and the Muslim.
3. A process of building confidence among the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people that a solution that ensures dignity, sovereignty and identity of all ethnic and cultural groups in the country could be worked out and that such a solution would not necessarily affect the dignity, sovereignty and identity of anyone ethnic group, should be undertaken with maximum effort by all.
4. For this purpose widest possible opportunity should be given particularly to the Tamil and Muslim communities and their leaderships to express their concerns and fears and the conditions they feel should be created to reach this mutual confidence.

In doing this we must recognize that the “relative Silence” and the attitude of “leaving it to others” seen in the large sections of civil society, so far, has been a weakening factor in working towards a rational solution. An all out effort should be made to change this attitude by devising various forms of getting active participation of informed groups in civil society. The government, the other political parties and the rest of civil society including the religious leaderships should be invited to utilize their full strength to convince those in doubt, particularly among the Sinhala people willingness on their part to accept these conditions aspired for by the Tamil and Muslim communities will not make their own situation insecure or less dignified.

A serious effort should be made to explain and compare the relative advantages and disadvantages of adopting such a non-violent and non-military approach with those of adopting an all out military approach attempted so far, hoping to make proposals for a political solution to the ethnic issue after winning the war. The experiences of the last years of war has shown us that the war thrust leads to further distancing of relationships and trust between communities and world finally make it impossible to

reach a settlement based on dignity and mutual trust. All the sacrifices made in the war by all people will thus be in vain if what we could achieve in the end is not a settlement based on faith, confidence and respect for dignity of all ethnic groups.

Difficulties of reaching a situation that would make the Tamil and Muslim communities confident and happy about their dignity, identity, and sovereignty after a victory in the war, even if such a victory is seen as possible should be seriously considered.

It is easy to understand that full, active and convinced participation of the Tamil, Muslim, and the Sinhala people is necessarily to achieve a settlement of the war. This can only be done by mobilizing the full force of unarmed, non-violent people of all ethnicity, which has been proved to be impossible within a programme of war. Further intensification of the war to reach a quicker solution would make it even more difficult.

6. With such a targeted approach to a non-military process declared, the government should make an appeal to the whole of civil society within and outside Sri Lanka, meaning the international community to actively intervene in convincing the LTTE that the military approach on their side should be ended and come to a process of non-military settlement.

The process of democratization in the Northern areas could only begin within a non-military process. This is, in fact, true of the South too.

Issue 2:

On the need for rethinking economic strategy and working out a strategy of economic development suitable for the specific needs and priorities of Sri Lanka, based on the most recent experiences in Sri Lanka and in the world of trade liberalization and globalization.

Background to the proposals

There is an urgent need to make a serious re-assessment of the most recent developments in globalization and trade liberalization, its impact on Sri Lanka and on many other countries. It is useful to realize that the new experiences have resulted in a new trend. Following the crisis that emerged in Asia and the admitted failure of market liberalization and growth strategies to reduce poverty, there is an effort in many countries to think and work out alternative approaches to suit the specific situations and requirements.

The strongest proponents of structural adjustments, such as the World Bank now talks of country specific planning with participation of civil society organizations and are proposing new approaches such as "Comprehensive Development Framework" to include other concerns such as the social development aspects and social consequences of structural adjustments, rather than the application of a single prescription for all developing countries. They have also admitted that the World Bank's strategies for poverty alleviation applied during the last 50 years have not worked. The simple assumption that "economic growth trickles down alleviating poverty" has not proved to be right. Poverty in the world has kept increasing and will continue to do so in the next decades too.

As some of you know we, MONLAR have been engaged in intense study, dialogue, campaigning and also implementation of practical alternatives, on these and related issues during the last ten years. We have done this in collaboration with many other organizations in Sri Lanka and out side. We have learnt from the experiences of those outside as well as from the experiences of our own people. We have collaborated with organizations and groups of people such as farmers and rural communities in Sri Lanka in developing practical alternatives.

We now feel that the situation demands serious rethinking of the path that has been adopted in Sri Lanka during the last 22 years, under two governments. We have had dialogue, correspondence, and other forms of exchange with the Government, World Bank, IMF and we have also made representations on the proposals made by the World Bank and the business community for the future.

We are providing herewith copies of these exchanges for those of you who would like to study them in detail.

At the present moment, we Would like to draw your attention to some of the alternatives that we put forward for consideration as those applicable island wide for poverty alleviation, employment generation, reducing hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, protecting livelihoods of those whose livelihoods are made insecure by the processes of market liberalization, environmental conservation, food safety, health and sustainable use of natural resources, protecting biological resources and wealth of indigenous knowledge as our inheritance. These in turn will also be necessary requirements for protection of labor and human rights and prevent the process of Sri Lanka becoming a country of increasing violence and insecurity.

The approaches here will also provide Sri Lanka better opportunities in using our comparative advantages in the international market, compared to the costly efforts that we have made during the last 22 years with out much success. We feel that our proposals will also help in reducing the cost of living to the poorer sections of society.

We feel this is the right moment to make these proposals not only because we are making a new beginning in the new year, a new millennium and under a new government with the p A having a new life span, but also because of the nature of the proposals tllat have been made by the world Ballk and the business community as necessary to continue the same economic strategy, which we feel would be very damaging in social and political terms.

The alternatives summarized here can be discussed in greater detail and some of the practical applications with successful results can be demonstrated in the field. The efforts made by various organizations including ours, have been carried out to a sufficient length of time and we feel together they have reached sufficient extent to be meaningful for consideration as programs applicable on a national scale.

They are also based on the thinking and approaches that are emerging through out the world as alternatives in sustainable development as against the present approaches of trade liberalization promoted by the WTO which has come up against world wide questioning, criticism and resistance. Particular emphasis was given to similar approaches for food

security at the Global (NGO) Forum on Food Security held parallel to the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996.

Proposal 1 - On Food Security and Rural Development

Developing a national scale strategy and a nationally coordinated approach based on small scale conservation farming adopting non-chemical/organic methods by rural household's arid communities with small scale planning by households, small rural communities assisted by Samurdhi Groups, local NGOs, Pradeshiya Sabha, and Provincial Councils etc. These should be assisted by helpful national level policies.

Primary aim of this approach should be to achieve household and community food security nutrition and economic self reliance to the maximum degree possible, using low external (chemical) input dependent, low cost methods such as integrated pest management, use of bio fertilizers locally produced, water and soil conservation approaches etc. This can be extended to achieve maximum food availability at community level for those who cannot effectively achieve food security in the market. Food availability and the availability of plants with medicinal value in the natural environment and the' traditional practice of the people of sustaining this economy of nature has been one of the key factors of food security in our society for generations. This we feel could be revived and strengthened easily.

Proposal 2 - Low cost I sustainable approach in paddy farming

It is often said today that paddy farming in Sri Lanka has become, almost non viable to small producers and non profitable. The World Bank in its report on Non-Plantation Sector Policy Alternatives in March 1996 stated that there was no comparative advantage in growing paddy in Sari Lanka and that it was better to import rice, wheat, and wheat flour. However, the role of paddy farming in our society and its contribution to food security cannot be easily disregarded.

Application of IPM (Integrated Pest Management) and introduction of straw and other organic fertilizers has been proved to reduce the cost of production of an acre of paddy by about Rs. 3,000 without any reduction in yield. There are about 30,000 small scale paddy farmers who are practicing this some of whom have been trained directly through Farmers' Field Schools run by CARE Sri Lanka and others trained by fanners with training.

The plant Protection Division of the Agriculture Department assisted by F AO has been doing this for several years and there are other NGOs and trained officials of the Agriculture Department implementing this Programme. In all these cases the above results have been obtained.

By applying this alone, on an island wide scale (say on a million acres of paddy) the total saving on pesticides could be Rs. 3000 million in one season. These savings will not only benefit the national budget, but will go directly 10 small scale paddy farmers, which would be a tremendous contribution to poverty alleviation and food security. There are many other benefits to heath of farmers as well as consumers, improvement of soil fertility, prevention of water pollution etc.

Protection of indigenous seed resources and diversity is another area of extreme importance. The threat to bio diversity and the loss of our rights to the biological resources

and the historical knowledge of the people has become a worldwide concern. Third world countries such as India and African countries have already seen this danger and are fighting to protect these. This and the danger posed by the introduction of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) by the Big TNCs has come up as a serious issue at GATT and WTO negotiations. There is tremendous opposition growing in the Western countries too about the introduction of GMOs in food and agriculture due to uncertainties of their safety and also the uncertainties that exist about the impact of GMOs on nature. The protection of seed diversity and indigenous seed resources is of importance 'also due to the very high cost of the Bio-tech seeds that are being introduced by the TNCs.

Government policies supportive to the small farmers should include agricultural extension services in sustainable, non -chemical farming, seed production by farmers themselves, helpful marketing services including protection from unplanned imports are essential. It is necessary to realize that similar measures are adopted in all countries, including the most powerful countries such as US and EU, in spite of all that is said about “free markets” and “level playing fields”.

Proposal 3 -Water Policies

Careful consideration of the policies of Water Marketing that are now been proposed is necessary .The new concepts of Integrate management of water, taking into consideration of the multiple uses of water, the need to conserve water considering the possible emergence of a water crisis appear to be essential. Marketing of water is also proposed due to the very high cost of irrigation today and recovery of theses costs is seen as necessary in economic terms. However, applying free market principles to deal with these needs, by declaring “water as a commodity” and allowing the private sector to handle marketing of water could be disastrous in a country like Sri Lanka where there are such a lot of “poor” users of water who depend on water as a “free gift of nature” essential for their survival.

Marketing of water could also have very serious ecological implications, due to the fact that water plays a crucial role in sustaining the eco-system. The ancient irrigation systems were designed considering water to be an inseparable part of the eco-system and not as a commodity that could be isolated. Co modification of water can easily result in irrigation and other water management systems that give little consideration to this nature and the function of water.

The Globalization process has already lead to big TNC s such as the “Monsanto’s” beginning to develop water businesses which naturally would lead to the poor people losing their access to water.

Proposal 4 – Policies to protect other crop producers.

The sudden opening of markets to imports of onions, potatoes, chili, rice, and many other agricultural products has resulted in serious difficulties to small farmers the sudden change that was made in 1977 in Sri Lanka from a policy of protection and support to import liberalization and reduction of government support had disastrous consequences.

It is said that in today’s situation of trade liberalization small farmers can no longer survive in any part of the world. However, no country in the world can afford to leave the farmers and its agriculture totally unprotected. No government in the world can be imagined

to be so thoughtless not to see the social, economic consequences of such a policy. In fact very few governments have thought of giving up the necessary protection of the main livelihood of its people.

One of the biggest issues of controversy in the GATT and WTO negotiations has been on the issues of protection and subsidies to agriculture. United States says that it is essential for the US economy to expand international trade in order to sustain the present standards of living of its people. Trade in agricultural produce forms a major component of these exports. It is for this purpose that US is compelling all other countries to open up their agricultural markets and eliminate protection.

This is sufficient reason for us to realize that our small farmers and their livelihoods should be protected to the maximum possible. However, unfortunately we seem to be doing the exact opposite. We have even gone beyond the present requirements or obligations that have been imposed upon us by GATT and SAPTA in reducing tariffs and opening the markets. We have even proposed that the signing of SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) be brought forward from 2005 as proposed earlier to 2001. The reasoning behind this seems to be the hope that if we create a more open market in the region more of foreign investors would come to our country to utilize these opportunities to expand their trade in the region. This is part of the dream of making Sri Lanka a Trade Center and a financial center in Asia like Singapore or Hong Kong. It is difficult to accept this reasoning, not only because it has failed the last 22 years, but also because it is not wise to sacrifice the livelihoods of millions of people of a country to facilitate the process of a few big multinationals benefiting by entering the Asian or South Asian market. This seems to be even unwise when we know that even if such investments come there is no assurance that they will not leave suddenly when conditions change, as they did in the other countries in Asia.

There are many ways in which we could have prepared our farmers to face this situation, which are still applicable. We have shown that there is ways in which small farmers could be assisted to reduce their cost of production considerably and in the process make their products much better, by reducing their chemical content.

We can learn a tremendous lot from a country like Cuba, which was compelled to convert into organic agriculture when the country could not afford to use the imported chemicals and fuel driven machinery. They also found that small farmers could do this far more efficiently and effectively compared to the bigger mechanized farms. We also could learn from the ecological and sustainable methods of traditional farming that Sri Lanka had for a long time in history. One of the serious mistakes was due to the error in giving priority to export expansion over the need to achieve food security.

This reasoning becomes further illogical since it is said that the aim of attracting foreign investment is to achieve faster growth, which would, then trickle down to reduce poverty, hunger, and unemployment.

The logic then becomes as irrational as saying that we must create more and more unemployment, poverty, and hunger so that the rich becomes richer in order to reduce poverty and hunger. We must allow the rich to take away all that they earn to prevent them leaving the country. We must keep labor cheap, (therefore the people poor) to attract investors and prevent them leaving.

It adds up to say that “We must keep the people poor, consciously, to overcome their poverty”

If we understand the logic and experience so far that poverty reduction can not be the result of increasing the gap between the rich and the poor and by making the rich richer, by taking away all policy support and assistance given to the poor to subsidies the rich and strengthening the already strong, we must then address the needs of poverty reduction directly. Agriculture research, extension and education at all levels must be geared to meet the food security needs, to strengthen the contribution made by small farmers providing wider opportunities for livelihoods and employment in this field.

We have to adopt poverty reducing approaches in industry (protection of employment and labor rights), agriculture and in trade as against present proposals of the business community and World Bank to increase creation of cheap labor leading to further increase in poverty unemployment and hunger.

Proposal 5: Strengthening Domestic Market

Removal of existing monopolies

Overcoming the existing monopolies in the domestic market, presently controlled by TNCs such as Unilever, Nestle, Hayleys, Coca-Cola, Ceylon Tobacco, and company producing Lion Beer, Shell, and a few other company's. A more competitive, diversified market and production in some of the consumer products used daily not only by the rich but also by most average households, could provide much lower costs and greater opportunities for productive employment.

If one tries to imagine the massive expenditure on the advertising in order to maintain these monopolies, which are added to the prices, the real production costs could easily be much lower. This in Sri Lanka is a very dear illustration that the so-called "free market" is not really free; it does not provide the best (lowest) prices and freedom of choice to the consumer. Neither does it provide diversity of products. The items produced by these companies in fact are not those that require exceptionally advanced technologies. In fact items such as soap, tooth paste, soft drinks, cigarettes, margarine, ice cream etc are items that can easily be produced by many others in many different way and the prices can be much lower.

Countries such as Japan that succeeded in international competition were able to do so with the capacities that they developed in the internal market. Therefore these countries adopt a conscious policy of not depending on cheap labor industries.

This is because if a country depends heavily on cheap labor as an attraction for investments, such a country will have to consciously keep a majority of its people poor. This in turn will lead to a weak internal market and people who will not have the skills that are required by investors. This could be one of the major reasons why Sri Lanka has failed to attract investments in spite of the fact that it has offered one of the cheapest labour countries over the last two decades. Therefore, the new proposals to create much more cheaply labour should be seriously thought about.

Failure to attract large investors to our transport services may be because most of our people are too poor to use such expensive transport facilities that big companies can offer.

Proposal 6: Education geared to meaningful inclusion of youth in productive engagement in Society

One of the main weaknesses of our education has been that it was not geared to training of a majority of our youth for meaningful inclusion of the youth in our society. The present trend's of market orientation of education is making this situation of alienation of youth worse.

Present emphasis seems to be to change the mainstream education further to create a very small number of young people who could be absorbed into the newly developing fields of communication technology and services required by the globalize market (e.g. education in computer technology) Providing such opportunities to the few who can enter into such fields is all right.

But what is wrong is the disregard for the large majority of youth who are destined to drop out at schools level or at levels below higher education. Many who receive university education after a very competitive process are also left out of employment it is obvious that this problem cannot be solved by making the selection more and more competitive. Already the level of competition in education has become socially destructive when one looks at the ways in which our society has expressed the tremendous frustrations that has been created by this process.

The Presidential Commission on youth that looked into the reasons for youth rebellion in 1989 reported that one of the main reasons was the frustration and anger that was created by the very large disparities that existed in educational opportunities. But, the present process of marketing of education or privatization is making this situation far worse.

We propose rethinking and reformulation of our approaches to education to help the large numbers of youth presently dropped out to make a meaningful contribution to the improvement of the life situations, food security and agriculture of their own local communities.

Youth can be easily trained to serve their own rural communities to improve agricultural productivity on the lines suggested earlier. By helping the youth to be a powerful agent of change in the existing approaches in agriculture there are tremendous possibilities of creating meaningful livelihoods, employment with dignity and also large opportunities of higher learning in ecological agriculture and related industrial and technical fields.

In such all approach it would not be necessary for the government to pay them salaries since part of the contribution that they would make towards improving the productivity of the rural households and communities could easily be contributed back to the youth as payment for their services.

This can be illustrated by using the example that we have already given. A young instructor with very simple training could help several groups of farmers to adopt IPM in their paddy farming. Four groups of farmers with 25 in each, if trained in IPM over four days of the week could be trained to save Rs. 3,000 on an acre of paddy in a season.

If each of these farmers could be convinced to pay the trainer Rs. 500 for a season this trainer would earn Rs. 50,000 for the season, while improving the farmer's income by Rs. 2,500 on an acre and this farmer could use this every season since then without additional expenditure. The number of young people who could be thus utilized to carry out a national scale process of developing ecologically sound approach to agriculture, including other aspects of strengthening the nature's contribution to the people's economy, reducing poverty and improving the natural resources base for sustainable development is very large. In such a process opportunities could be provided to those young people who are able to improve their education and skills on these lines to reach very high levels of academic learning to be scientists needed for the future.

This could be a much more meaningful re-orientation to enter into the new world requirements of environmentally sustainable ecological agriculture with soil, water, forest and bio-diversity conservation.

Proposal 7: Changes needed to accept Tamil Plantation Workers as Citizens with Dignity

There is a long history of human beings, even large sections of populations, being used as mere tools, animals or slaves for profit making. The plantation system in Sri Lanka was dearly one such case, developed and used initially by the British. Removing this form of bonded or slave labour should have been one of the highest priorities after independence in Sri Lanka, even though plantations were the highest income earner for a very long time. Gaining independence to a country means nothing, if sections of the population have to remain and work under less than human conditions to make profits for some others.

The present processes of privatization of plantations Is not likely to change this situation. It is likely to make this situation worse.

Serious thought should be given to the possibility of adopting a completely different approach in the plantations. Allowing the Tamil plantation workers and their families opportunities to become citizens with dignity requires that they should be able to enter into our society with the type of education, health, food and nutrition, housing and other requirements and opportunities for social up-liftmen available to other citizens. The major reason for not permitting them to have these opportunities for more than 150 years is that they were kept in a state that allows them to be used only as cheap, subservient, labour .in the tea economy. This is something that cannot be justified even if the tea industry was profitable and successful.

Apart from the very practical reasons demanding the conversion of a good part of plantation economy into other economic activities, there are other reasons for looking at the potential in the hill country for a more ecological approach to agriculture, reforestation, soil and other forms of conservation which would also permit those living in the plantation areas a life of dignity and enable them to use their full creative potential.

What are the economic possibilities of using less land for tea, improving the quality of tea by producing things such as organic tea and making land and other resource available to plantation worker families and other village communities in the hill country to change the hill country into a region of ecologically sound agriculture? Agro-forestry and related industries,

making it possible for plantation and other families to be food secure and may be produce an excess of organic fruits, vegetables and medicinal plants.

Such an approach would also provide new livelihood opportunities, prevent soil erosion, assist water conservation, and improve forestry and bio diversity which have been some of the major environmental problems, particularly in the hill country. Freeing plantation workers and villagers to decide and design their agriculture, their homesteads and to feel free to develop their own lives and livelihoods would lead to a much more efficient and effective contribution not only in productivity but also in other activities in society.

This approach can also serve our export requirements. The comparative advantages that we have in producing organic food and the fact that we have the possibility of a large number of families to attend to relatively small land plots can also be an advantage. Such a process can be greatly assisted by introducing the approaches suggested earlier in the education system in the plantation areas too.

Sri Lanka thus has great potential to provide a very effective model for a poor third world country to face the challenges of the new millennium of globalization of market.

These are only some rough ideas that may help in developing the directions that we need for rethinking. These we feel could be developed much more on the experiences and thinking that is taking place elsewhere among others concerned with alternatives to avoid present dangers and crisis.

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