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ஒவ்வொரு சிறுவர்களுக்காகவும்

SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS FACED BY WOMEN AND CHILDREN

IN TEA ESTATES IN SRI LANKA

2023

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Abbreviations

A/L	Advance Level
ADIC-	Alcohol and Drugs Information Centre
CDC	Child Development Centre
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CRC	Child Rights Convention
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EPF	Employees Provident Fund
ETF	Employees Trust Fund
ETP	Ethical Tea Partnership
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIES	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
INGO	International Non-governmental Organization
ISD	Institute of Social Development
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoWCASE	Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment
NCPA	National Child Protection Authority
O/L	Ordinary Level
PHDT	Plantations Human Development Trust
RPC	Regional Plantation Companies
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
STR	Student-Teacher Ratio
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

Executive Summary

This study on the tea plantation sector has two main objectives:- the first was to gain an understanding of the economic hardships and social conditions, faced by households in tea estates, including water sanitation and hygiene WASH, Education, Child Protection, and Social Protection; the second was to assess the current efforts of development agencies, Civil Society Organizations, plantation companies, and government/semi-government authorities to improve children’s rights in the tea sector.

The household survey focused on affordability of education, regular attendance at school, access to latrines and handwashing facilities at home and school, climate change impact on school attendance, etc to understand which are the child rights areas that are being impacted. Further, parental engagement in children’s learning, child disciplining methods at home and school, parent attitudes towards domestic violence,

The survey results revealed several key findings:

Of the nearly one million tea estate sector population, half are tea smallholders and only around 20% of the population reside on large plantation company estates where they also work.

climate change impact on workdays, access to social protection were explored to understand the home environment of the child and the effect that income poverty has on the fulfilment of children’s rights.

To achieve the first objective, 1,649 interviews were conducted, using a set of survey questionnaires, across the Central, Southern, Uva, and Sabaragamuwa provinces.

The sampling distribution was based on three main factors:

- Categories of tea producers (regional plantation companies, state estates, and tea smallholders).
- Worker/non-worker dichotomy (to include the large number of people who live on estates but are not estate workers).
- Gender (because the majority of the estate workforce are women).

Figure 1 | Resident population in RPCs and Govt estates; Source: PHDT 2021



Source: PHDT 2021



1. Insufficient income and poverty are key drivers of child rights violations, as evidenced by the current situation of children and adults living on tea estates. The size of their households, access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), as well as their income, are among the factors influencing poverty levels. 86% of respondents' families from the tea estates do not receive a sufficient living wage. Complications with housing and land rights and gender pay disparity persists. Furthermore, due to household expenses and current inflation rates 84%, of families are forced to resort to borrowing or cutting back on vital necessities, such as education for their children, as they can no longer afford educational materials or transportation costs.



2. Access to social protection mechanisms remains limited for tea estate families. Communities living in tea estates, as all citizens, would benefit from the introduction of a comprehensive and adequate national social protection floor that provides basic income security to all children, people with disabilities and older persons.



3. Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), which has a direct bearing on the health and safety of children, is an area of concern. While tap water within the household remains the primary source of drinking water for 49% of households, access to improved water sources is significantly less in the Southern province as households use dug wells for their drinking water. Furthermore, 27% of respondents stated they do not have drinking water available all year around mainly because of climate change. While boiling is the predominant stated method of treatment of drinking water, it is not clear if the water is boiled up to boiling point. Additionally, 35% of households across the surveyed provinces consider straining water through cloth an appropriate water treatment method. Therefore, there is room for improvement in terms of awareness of what constitutes good hygiene and access to safe drinking water.



4. Climate change is steadily becoming a key risk in the tea - growing areas where frequent and severe rainfall results in floods and landslides. This not only causes soil degradation, damage to tea bushes and reduced yield but also directly impacts female workers' incomes as they rely on daily wages and are not able to work in such weather conditions. Children are at high risk of missing out on their schooling if they are displaced as a result of climate-related events, or when schools are closed during extreme weather events.



5. The survey found that 22% of mothers and 16% of fathers who responded to the survey, believe that corporal punishment was important to raise or educate a child properly. This is an act of violence and a violation of article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.



6. Although irregular attendance in schools, especially at the secondary school level, has increased in the last few years, it is important to facilitate the private and public sectors to jointly work on addressing the causes of this irregular attendance, which mainly stem from poverty and lack of resources in school.



7. The importance of creating a positive learning environment for children at home, particularly in their early learning years, needs to be promoted among parents given that the survey findings pointed to large variations in the type of learning activities that parents engaged in with their child at home. Around 80% stated that they told their children stories, while 34% said they engaged in naming, counting or drawing things with and for their children.



8. Similarly, while 87% parents stated they had participated in at least one activity at their child's school, only 55% mentioned they had discussed progress of their child with his/ her teachers or participated in a school celebration or sporting event.



9. According to the parents, within the period from December 2022 to the end of February 2023, the biggest challenges in ensuring attendance of their child(ren) at school were the availability of essential education materials (52%), affordability of education materials (51%) followed by cost of transportation (40%) and lack of or limited transportation (27%). Around 6% of the parents mentioned lack of school meals as a challenging factor.



10. Only 10% of the respondents agree that engaging in social media platforms is beneficial for their child's future. Among the parents who stated that their children use social media platforms, WhatsApp (27%) followed by Facebook (13%) and YouTube (10%) were the most popular platforms.



11. Only 18% of the respondents stated they were aware of some kind of child engagement platform available on their estate. This indicates either the awareness on existing platforms needs to be strengthened among parents and children on tea estates or that the child engagement platforms are not functional in most of the estates.



12. Companies are undertaking diverse initiatives such as the support for quality education, addressing food insecurity issues to improve the socio-economic conditions of women and children on tea estates. However, these take place in pockets and need to be standardized and scaled up through a collaborative process between key stakeholders.

01

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka continues to grapple with the economic crisis. Core inflation as measured by year-on-year change based on the National Consumer Price Index was at 11.3%¹ in June 2023 and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at - 11.5%² in Q1 2023¹. The economic crisis since 2022 has resulted in the entire country being affected by severe price hikes and taxes.

The highest percentage of individuals living in poverty, based on the official poverty line as per data from the HIES 2019³, is in the estate sector at 29.7%, compared to 12.6% in the rural sector and 4.4% in the urban sector. The Rapid Needs Assessment⁴ (2022) conducted by Save the Children further revealed that over three out of five households (58.1%) across the nine districts surveyed have lost more than half of their income, with the highest percentage found in the Nuwara Eliya district (65.7%). This district has the highest concentration of large tea plantations.

Education activities has been disrupted since 2020, first due to the COVID-19 pandemic and later because of fuel shortages and power outages. Although online platforms were used during school closures, they have widened the existing inequalities in learning outcomes due to disparities in access to technology-related infrastructure facilities⁵. As of 2021, an estimated total of 103,704 children⁶ (2.3% of total child population of 4,571,441) under the age of 18 were engaged in work. Within the children living in the rural sector (3,553,550), 2.47% (87,854) were engaged in work. Comparatively, there were fewer children living in the estate sector engaged in work - 0.96% (2321). The impact of COVID-19

and supply-side shocks related to agricultural commodities have posed a risk of increasing all forms of malnutrition which could have a direct impact on household productivity. A hotter and wetter climate⁷ has a detrimental impact on the production of tea. Changes in temperature, rainfall, and the occurrence of extreme weather conditions have adversely affected tea estates, which in turn has led to a decline in annual tea production.

The tea industry in Sri Lanka, in addition to the individual efforts that companies have taken in different Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework areas, has initiated a Tea 2030 Roadmap Strategy. The Ceylon Tea Road Map group comprises stakeholders representing the Planters Association of Ceylon, the Ceylon Tea Traders Association and Tea Exporters Association.

Given this context and background, UNICEF commissioned an assessment in tea estates to gain a better understanding of the economic and social challenges for children related to WASH, education, child protection, social protection, and climate change. Health and Nutrition sectors were not included in this assessment given this data is routinely collected by the Ministry of Health. These findings will inform UNICEF's strategic decision-making on how to engage with key tea industry stakeholders to address these challenges. In March 2023, a comprehensive assessment that included a survey of 1,649 households in four key provinces: Central, Uva, Southern, and Sabaragamuwa. The findings from this assessment are presented in this report.

1. Department of Census and Statistics, 'News Release: The National Consumer Price Index, December 2022', 2022, < Department of Census and Statistics>, accessed 24 July 2023.

2. Central Bank of Ceylon, 2023, < GDP Growth | Central Bank of Sri Lanka (cbsl.gov.lk)>, accessed 19 July 2023.

3. Department of Census and Statistics, 'Household Income and Expenditure Survey', 2019, pp. 44.

4. Save the Children, 'Sri Lanka Crisis: Rapid Needs Assessment', 2022, pp. 14 - 31.

5. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 'The State of the Sri Lankan Economy, Challenges and Outlook As Reflected in the Annual Report 2021', 2022, pp. 14.

6. Department of Census and Statistics, 'Child Activity Survey 2016', <Preface (statistics.gov.lk)>, accessed 28 March 2023.

7. Gunathilaka, R. P. D., Smart, J. C. R., & Fleming, C. M. (2016). The impact of changing climate on perennial crops: the case of tea production in Sri Lanka. *Climatic Change*, 140(3-4), 577-592. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-016-1882-z>

02

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the assessment was to “understand the current economic hardships and the social conditions in terms of WASH, education, child protection and social protection faced by children in households in tea estates” in four of Sri Lanka’s tea producing provinces: Central, Sabaragamuwa, Southern and Uva. The information was achieved through desk review and primary data collection using a household survey questionnaire.

2.1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study’s conceptual framework is based on the understanding that child poverty is multidimensional and goes beyond income poverty. The framework draws from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognise the need to address poverty and inequality in all its dimensions, including education, WASH, social protection, and child protection.

The framework identifies key factors contributing to child poverty and looks at different areas of deprivation, including household economics, social protection, child protection, education, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and child and adolescent engagement. By using this framework, the study aims to generate a comprehensive understanding of socio-economic conditions faced by women and children in Sri Lankan tea estates and guide targeted interventions to address the issue.

The methodology used to realise this objective is detailed below:

2.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Key local and international sources such as those developed by research institutions, INGOs, local CSOs, and local and international media provided contextual insights and some baseline into the socio-economic conditions in tea estates. It highlighted key findings from prominent sources, with a focus on recent developments such as climate change, minimum wage vs living wage, COVID-19, and the impacts of the economic crisis.

2.3. DEVELOPMENT OF THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

The next step was to develop the household survey questionnaire that consisted of questions for individual household members. The study leveraged expertise in survey design and implementation to ensure the questionnaire addressed the following areas: WASH, child protection, education, social protection, household economics, child and adolescent engagement, climate change impact, and community engagement. The questionnaire was uploaded on the Question Pro’s survey platform, in Sinhala, Tamil and English. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted at an estate in Galle District to ensure that the questions were clear and understandable. Necessary language edits and revisions to the questions were made based on the lessons learned from the pre-testing.

After an enumerator training, the questionnaire was field-tested in Sinhala and Tamil among 30 respondents in the Nuwara Eliya and Kalutara districts. The feedback was used to further fine-tune the questionnaire.

2.4. DATA COLLECTION

To carry out the survey, a team of enumerators was assembled, comprising university graduates and final-year students from social sciences or environmental management fields. The enumerators were selected based on:

- a) Their fluency in the language and dialect of the provinces where the survey was conducted
- b) Their prior experience in data collection

Enumerator training was provided in Hatton and Colombo, followed by field-testing of the questionnaire with tea estate workers in Hatton and smallholders in Kalutara. The training covered the survey content, purpose, and methodology, as well as instructions on how to approach respondents, obtain consent, record and submit data, and maintain personal safety and ethics. Each enumerator was provided with a tablet for data collection. A total of 52 enumerators (28 Tamil-speaking and 24 Sinhala -speaking) completed 1,649 survey questionnaires between February 27 and March 4, 2023.

To maintain a high standard of work during the data collection process, staff was present on-site with the data collection teams. They provided the necessary support and facilitated access to each estate, assisting enumerators whenever required.

2.5. SELECTION OF TEA ESTATES FOR THE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY

Categories of tea producers: The household survey covered three categories of tea producers: (1) regional plantation companies (RPCs) – private companies operating on Government land leased for 99-years, (2) state estates – Government run tea estates on Government lands, and (3) tea smallholders – private ownership of tea fields of less than 50 acres.

Worker/ Non-worker Dichotomy: As 80% of the population in large tea estates (such as regional plantation companies and state estates) are not employed in the tea industry, the survey also included non-estate workers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the tea communities across different producer groups.

Male/ Female: As the majority of the workforce on tea estates are women, and given the specific issues the survey sought to uncover, 72.5% of the respondents were women

Figure 2 | Gender of survey respondents communities

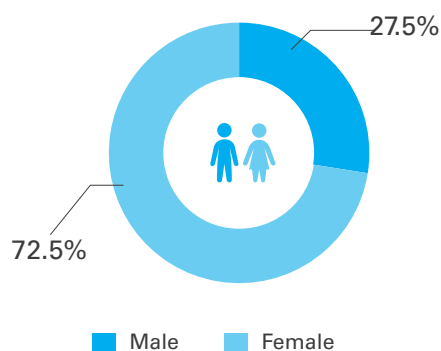
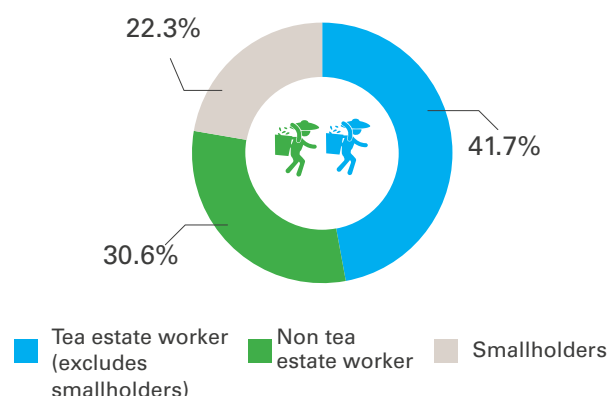


Figure 3 | Type of workers living on tea estate



2.6. ACCESS TO SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Permissions were obtained from the Planters Association of Ceylon and individual RPCs to conduct this survey for easier access of workers during working hours. The sample of estates was selected to ensure representation of at least one tea estate from Divisional Secretariat Divisions with a high concentration of tea estates and to cover different companies that own tea estates in each district.

Permission was sought from the Sri Lanka State Plantations Corporation (SLPC) to conduct the study in government estates in Kandy, and from the Tea Smallholder Federation Committee to access the smallholders in the sample districts.

The data collection team was able to access both estate and non-estate workers living on the estates with the support of estate managers and welfare officers of selected estates in the RPCs and SLPC. Similarly, the Tea Smallholder Federation district officers helped identify tea smallholders in selected Divisional Secretariat Divisions, which enabled the team to also include more vulnerable smallholders who owned only an acre or two of tea land.

Although the access facilitated by officials helped with the timely data collection process and efficient identification of eligible respondents across large geographical areas, it is important to note that the study's respondent selection was based on convenience sampling strategy, where units were selected for inclusion in the sample based on the availability at a given time, specific criteria to meet with and willingness to participate in the survey.

1,649 household surveys were carried out through a mix of door-to-door and direct at-workplace interviews (e.g. child development centres, health clinics, tea fields, muster sheds, and factories) depending on the arrangement of the estate officials.

Figure 4 | Age distribution of children of respondents

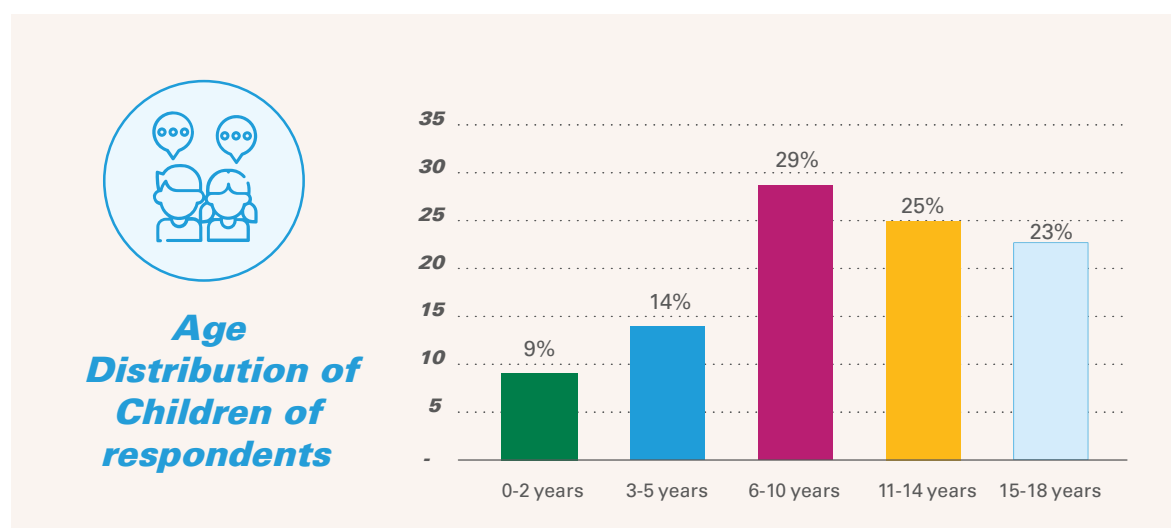


Figure 5 | Ethnicity of respondents

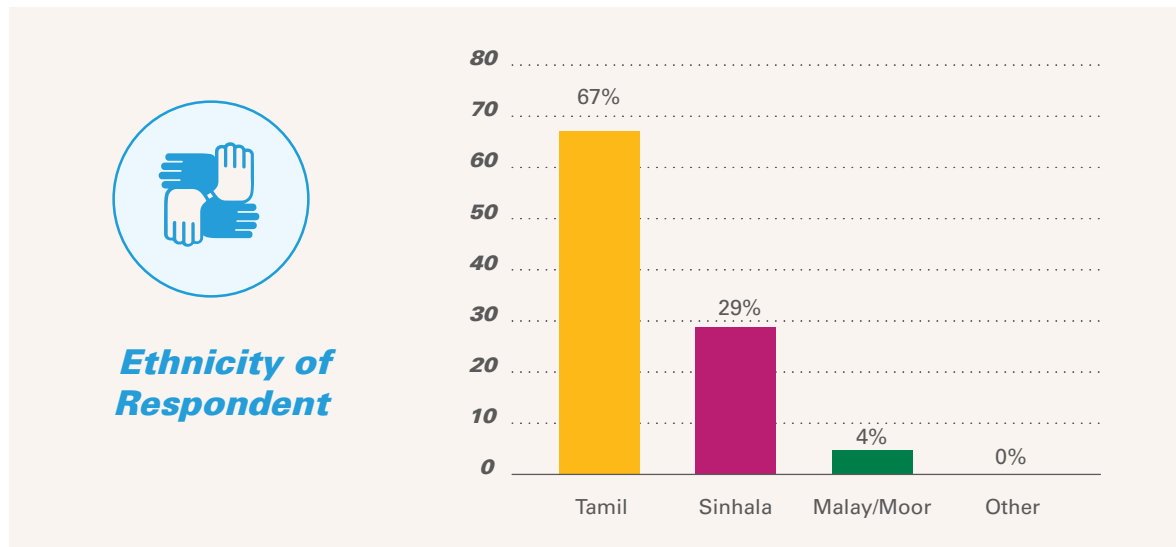


Table 1 | Sample size of workers in each of the provinces

Province	Categories of tea producer business entities	Estate Worker Category		Non-Estate Worker Category		Sub-Total
		Female	Male	Female	Male	
Central	Regional Plantation Companies	118	39	87	34	250
	State Estates	65	17	54	20	156
Sabaragamuwa	Regional Plantation Companies	111	58	67	26	262
	Smallholders	101	31	-	-	132
Southern	Regional Plantation Companies	88	66	23	7	184
	Smallholders	156	67	-	-	223
Uva	Regional Plantation Companies	175	39	151	49	414
Sub-Total		814	317	382	136	1649

03

Key Findings

3.1. POVERTY & INSUFFICIENT INCOME ARE KEY DRIVERS OF CHILD RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Child poverty is a major factor contributing to violations of child rights. In this section, we will describe the current situation of children and adults living on tea estates, focusing on their household composition, household economics, social protection, WASH, education, child protection and community engagement. We will also explore the underlying factors that contribute to their economic situation. To create a comprehensive picture, we bring together secondary data, data generated from the household survey, and information obtained through key informant interviews (KIIs) with stakeholders.

3.1.1. General living conditions

The estate sector, which is defined as land over 20 acres with at least 10 resident workers, has a population of approximately one million people, with around 70% living in large tea or rubber plantations managed by Regional Plantation Companies (RPC) and state-owned estates, and the remaining 30% in small and medium-scale private estates.⁸ According to the Q2 2022 labour force survey⁹ conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics, only 40% of the economically active population within the estate sector are women. However, this statistic excludes those engaged in the informal economy, such as domestic workers.

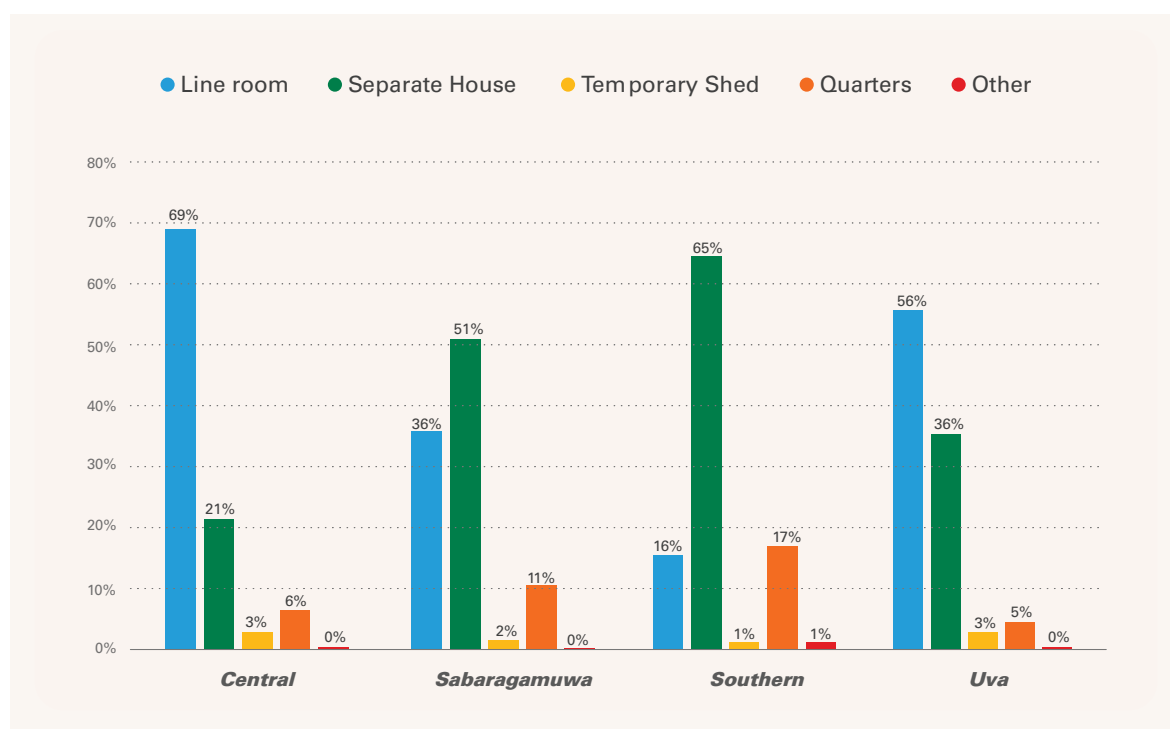
When considering the living conditions of the estate population in the household survey, around 44%⁷ live in one-room dwellings, in units of less than 500 sq feet. The household survey findings also corroborated this as 45% of the respondents stated they lived in line room dwellings.

The survey further identified that the type of housing varied across provinces. 69% of respondents in Central province and 56% in Uva province live in line rooms. This was in stark contrast to the 16% and 36% of respondents who live in line rooms in the Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces respectively. The key reason for this difference is that 40-50% of the respondents included in the household survey in the Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces are tea smallholders or workers on farms of smallholders, and they live in a village setting which means they live in separate housing. It is the responsibility of the government to provide housing for those who work on tea estates, whether they are private or state-owned. However, it is concerning that only 21% of respondents in the Central province and 36% in the Uva province who work on large plantation estates have been given separate housing by the government.

⁸ World Bank, 'Multi-sectoral nutrition assessment in Sri Lanka's estate sector', 2017, pp. 11

⁹ Department of Census and Statistics, 'Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Quarterly report 2nd Quarter – 2022', 2022, pp. 11

Figure 6 | Distribution of housing types



3.1.2. Housing and land rights

Our key informant interviews (KIIs) have shed light on the underlying structure that defines house and land ownership for plantation workers. The government has prioritized the concept of a “home for every plantation worker” through initiatives primarily funded by the Indian government. However, there are several issues with this initiative.

Firstly, progress is slow and solely dependent on the government accessing foreign aid, particularly from the Indian government. Secondly, land ownership or the deed of ownership for the house is not granted to plantation workers, which differs significantly from other state-sponsored housing schemes across the country. The ownership remains with the government. While the decision to assign land, deeds and funds for housing schemes lies with the government, companies have expressed concerns about workers being handed the deeds to the land and house. A major concern for the companies is that the sale of houses and land within the tea estates to external parties would hinder the business operations of tea production. Trade Unions are also more interested in pushing the housing agenda without resolving these core land rights issues. A representative of one of the RPCs suggested that these houses could be built on land on the outskirts of the tea estates so that workers come into the estates to work and return to their homes at the end of the day. This would allow the land and housing deed to be handed to the community and would have the added benefit of removing the “estate community” label. A key reason for the outmigration of youth from tea estates is because of the lack of dignity associated with this labelling.

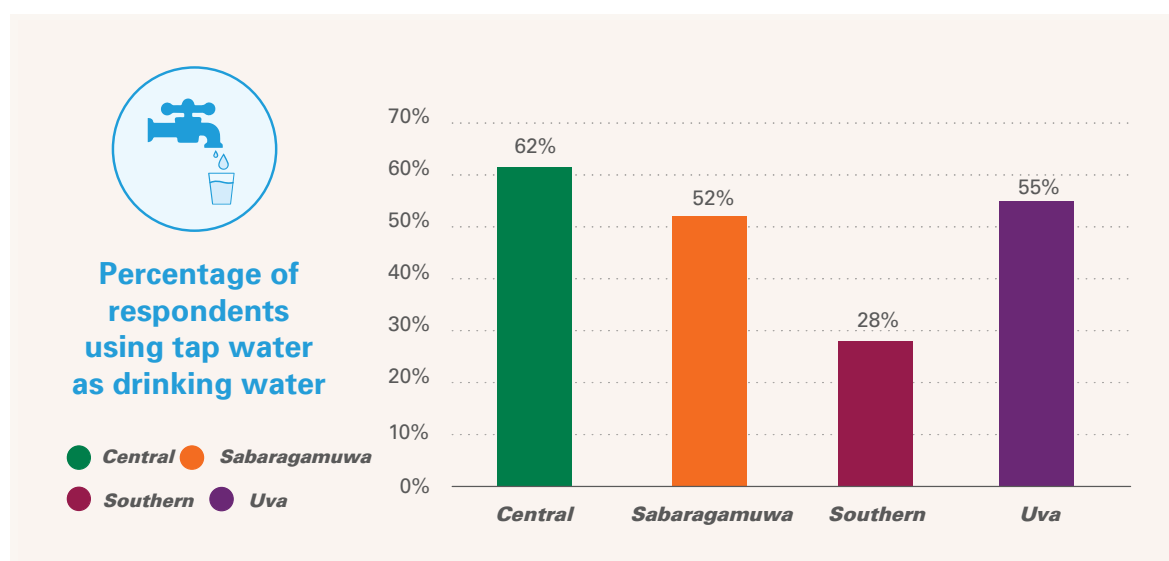
Land rights and housing is at the core of multiple issues faced by the plantation worker community living in large estates, whether they are owned by RPCs or the state. There is an urgent need for relevant stakeholders (such as the Land Registry Commission, Ministry of Estate and Urban Infrastructure Development, Ministry of Plantation Industries, National Building Research Organization, Planters Association of Ceylon, PHDT, and Trade Unions) to develop a housing policy and implementation plan that enables deeds to be given to workers, thereby ensuring their land rights.

3.1.3. WASH: Water, sanitation and hygiene

- Improved water sources

In the Central, Sabaragamuwa and Uva provinces, the household survey identified that improved water sources (tap water) within household premises is the primary source of drinking water, while in the Southern Province, drinking water is directly obtained from dug wells and only 28% have access to improved water source on household premises.

Figure 7 | Distribution of households using tap water as primary source of drinking water

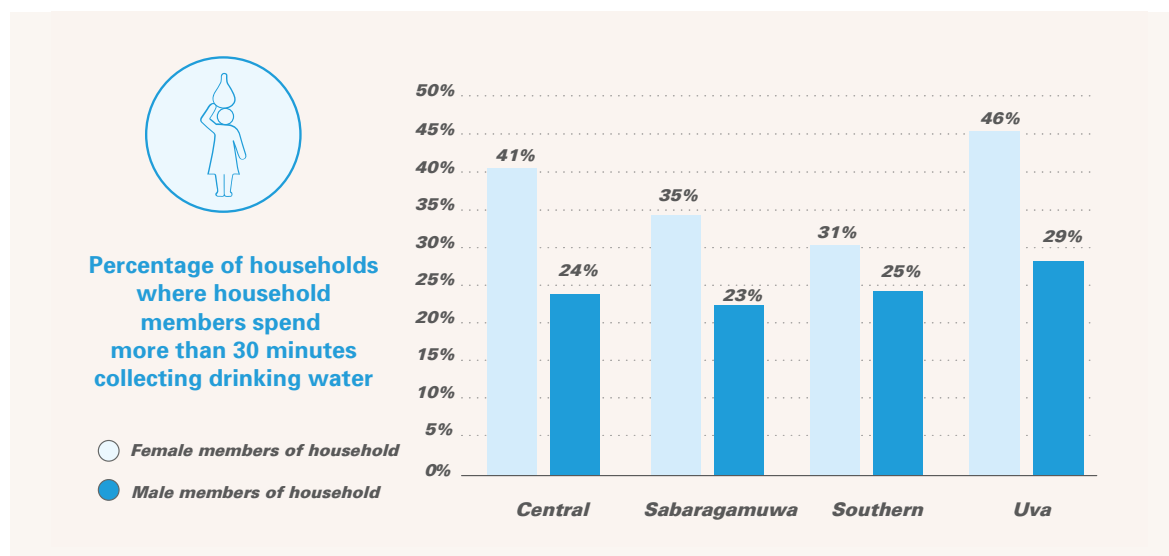


For estate households, access to improved water sources is a priority as only 43% of them have access to improved water sources, according to the 2020 data shared by the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT).

- Access to drinking water

According to the household survey, 38% of respondents across all four provinces stated that the female members of their household spend more than 30 minutes per day collecting drinking water while 25% of respondents stated that male members of their household spend more than 30 minutes collecting drinking water. Male counterparts do less household activities compared to females.

Figure 8 | Distribution of households where female and male members spend more than 30 mins collecting drinking water



- Availability of drinking water all year round

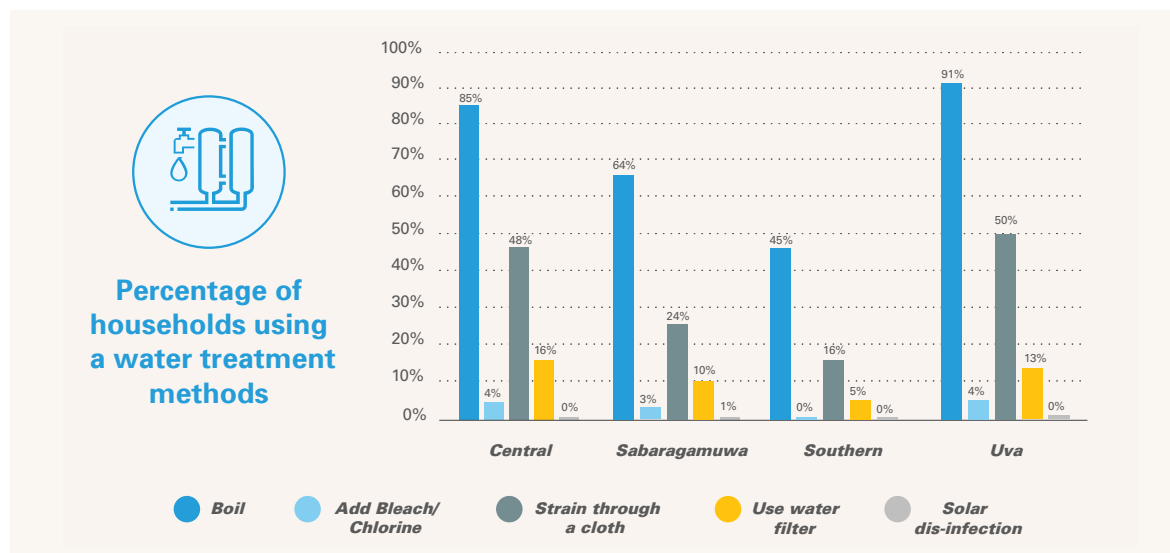
With regard to availability of drinking water all year around, 73% of respondents said they have drinking water available all year around. Among 27% of the respondents who reported reduced availability of water during some months, 42% stated this was due to water not being available at the source in those months, due to adverse weather conditions such as floods, landslides and droughts. A correlation analysis of source of water and unavailability of water in some months indicated that all water sources had the same level of unavailability and hence, there was no correlation. This implies that due to climate change, ground water sources are drying. This means that respondents had no access to water regardless of whether they had taps or dug wells.

- Treatment of drinking water

The household survey considered appropriate drinking water treatment methods as boiling, adding chlorine, using water filter and solar disinfection. 35% of households across the surveyed provinces use straining through cloth to be an appropriate water treatment method. While 72% stated that they boil water before drinking, it is not clear whether boiling of water is taken up to the right boiling point.

The Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) in 2019 reported that only 32.2% of the estate population have access to safe drinking water. Access to safe water is necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 6.1.1 and is a crucial component of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Therefore, there is a need for increased awareness on appropriate water treatment methods.

Figure 9 | Distribution of households using appropriate water treatment methods

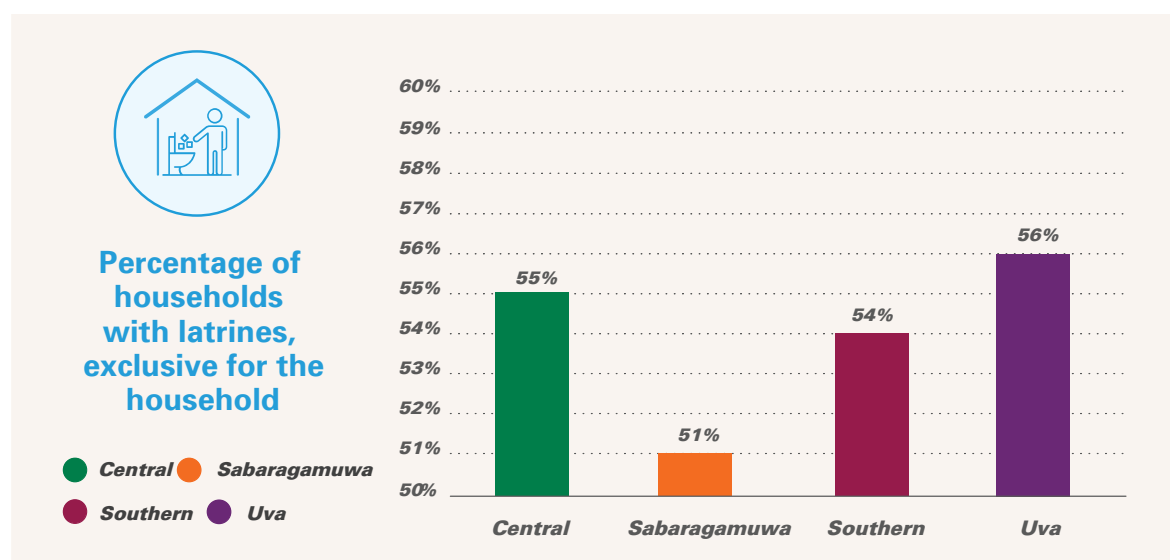


- Hygiene and sanitation

Hygiene is an essential component of both the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 6.2.1(b)) and the CRC). CRC article 24 (e) specifies that parents and children should be informed, have access to education and be supported in the basic knowledge of hygiene.

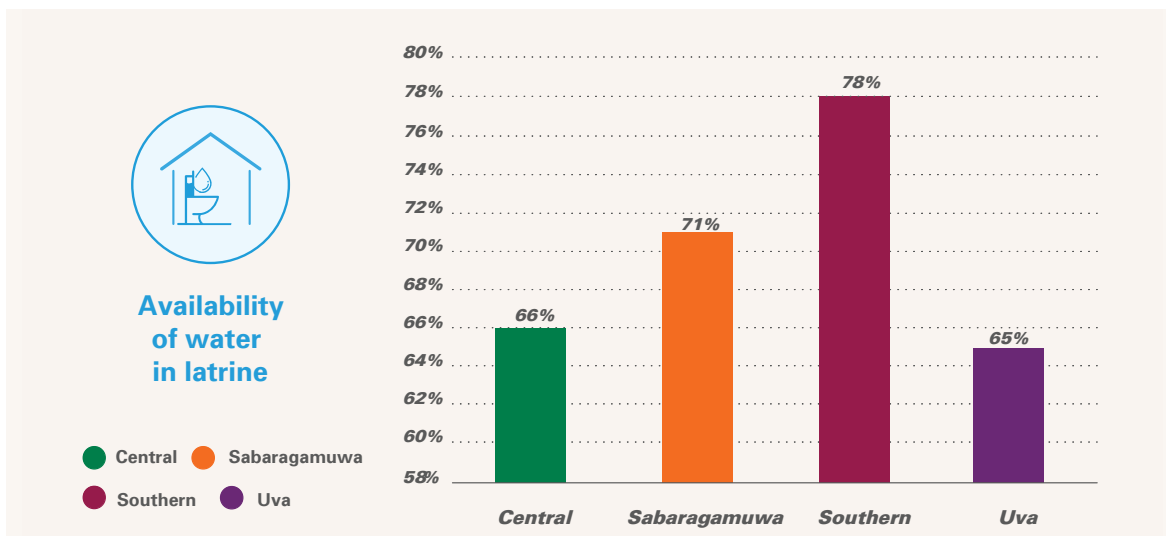
54% of the respondents from across the four provinces stated that they have access to latrines exclusively for their household members, while the remaining respondents have access to common latrines, shared by multiple households.

Figure 10 | Distribution of households with latrines available exclusively for their households



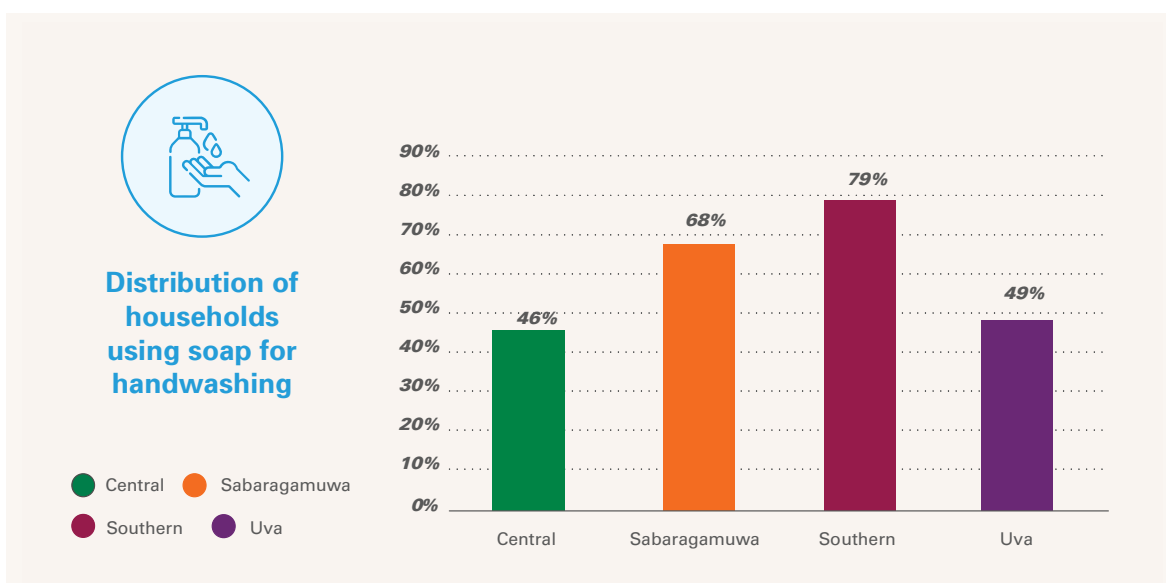
70% of respondents stated that their households across the four provinces had water available for their latrines and 63% that their water for latrines was from a fixed facility such as taps or sinks.

Figure 11 | Distribution of households with water available for their latrines



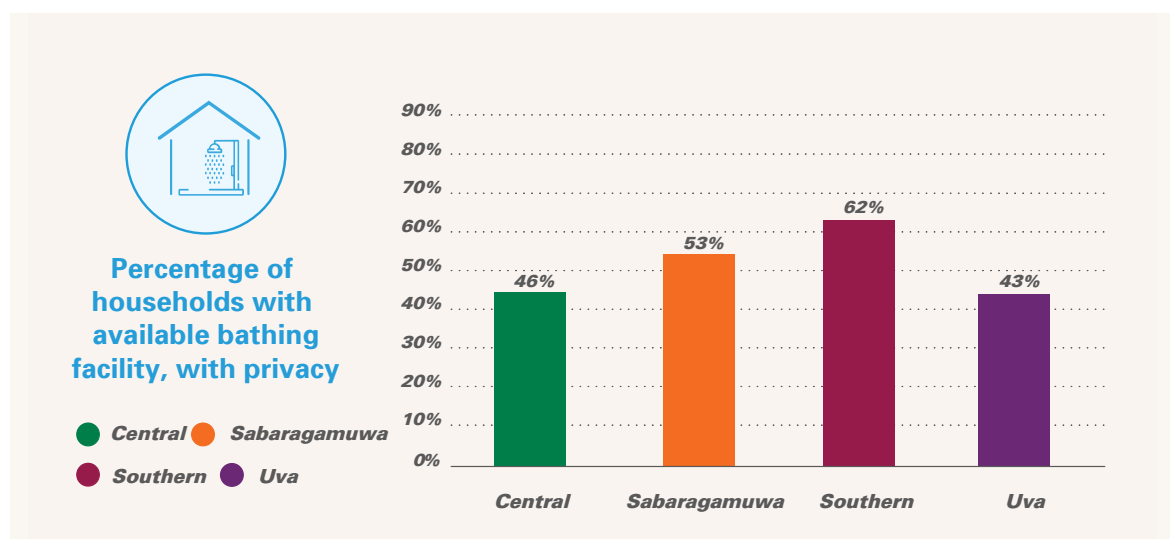
The survey further found that 60% of estate households use a hand-washing facility with soap and water, with the lowest proportion in the Central Province at 46%. Improving hygiene awareness, particularly in the Central and Uva provinces, is crucial to improve this situation.

Figure 12 | Distribution of households using soap for handwashing



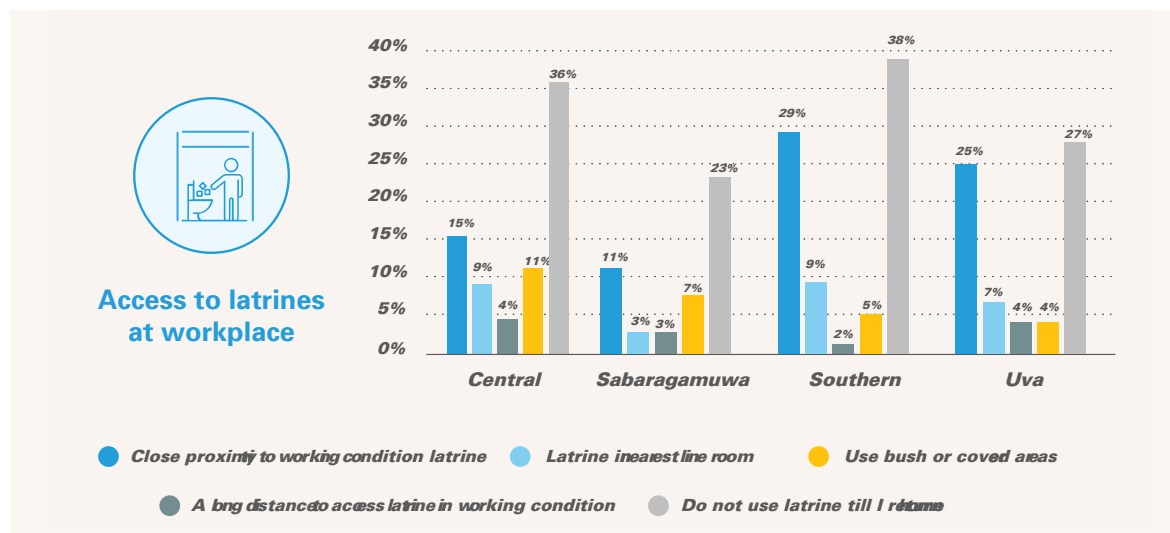
Access to private bathing facilities is an area that needs to be considered. Only 51% of the respondents across the four provinces indicated their households have access to bathing facilities which enables privacy for the users.

Figure 13 | Distribution of households with available bathing facility



Considering access to latrines in the workplace, the household survey found that this is a critical area that needs to be addressed by the companies. Only 2% of respondents stated that there were latrines available in their workplaces. Since the respondents were either male or female workers, who mainly worked in the fields, this indicates that there is a critically low number of latrines in the fields for the workers.

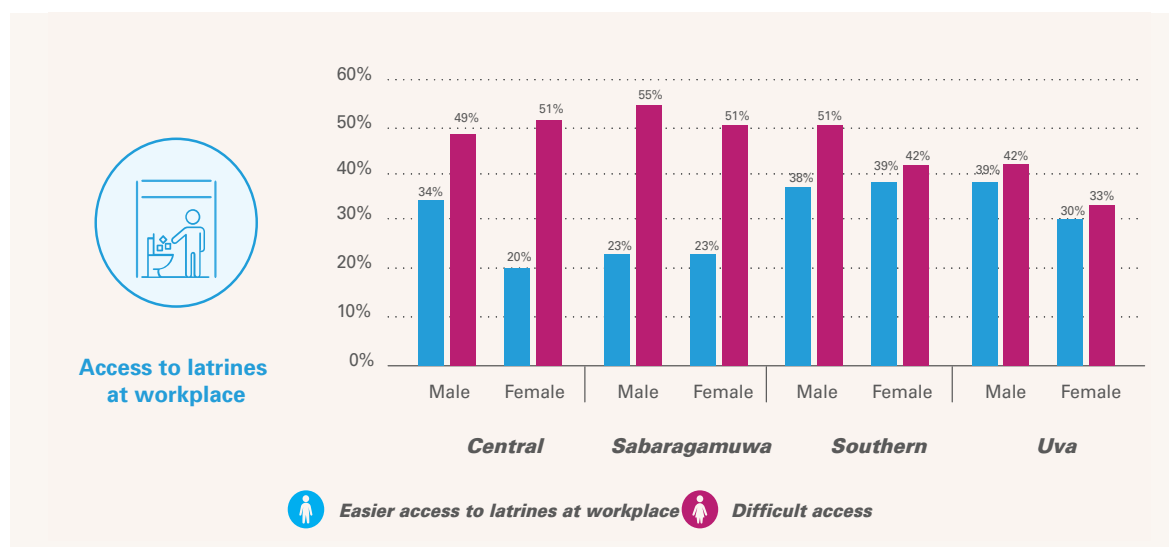
Figure 14 | Access to latrines at workplace (within 15 minutes walking distance)



When accessibility to latrines was explored, 20% of the 356 respondents (102 men and 254 women) stated that they could access a latrine in working condition, within close proximity of their workplace (i.e. latrines in working condition near the field or nearby factory that could be accessed within 15 minutes of walking to the latrine and back). During the key informant interviews with company management, it was mentioned that companies took into consideration the need to build a latrine in the fields, should the field be located at a distance from a factory or other estate building with a latrine. 31% stated they do not use the latrine until they reach home and 7% stated that they had to resort to using bushes or covered areas.

The above findings become critical when comparing other factors such as working hours. Female workers have to work from 8am to 5 pm in the fields and once they have met their targets for tea leaves, they need to work on other tasks assigned by their supervisors. For the same wages, male workers need to work until 10am or noon as their targets are on spraying weedicide or fertilizer etc. They are not expected to stay until 5 pm like the female workers. Therefore, not having latrines for male workers in the fields does not impact them the same way as it does for the women who work in the fields the whole day.

Figure 15 | Access to latrines at workplace (male - female breakdown)



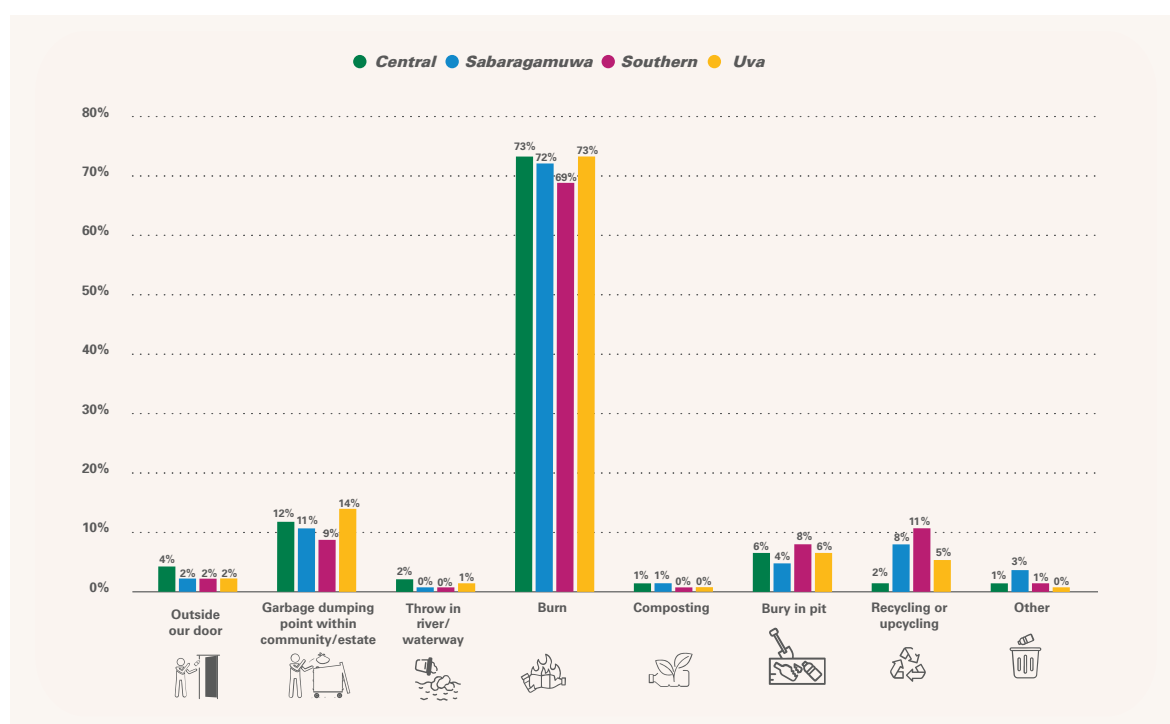
- Easier access to latrines at work place refers to being able to access a latrine in working condition at the field or factory location or the nearest line room within 15 minutes of walking (there and back)
- Difficult access refers to having to walk far to access a latrine in working condition, having to use the bushes or not using the latrine until they reach home at the end of the work day.

This underscores the pressing need to establish Occupational Safety and Health standards for field workers. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has started this dialogue with the tea industry stakeholders to develop the standards that includes access to sanitation facilities at the workplace.

3.1.4. Garbage disposal

The household survey found that the top three types of waste generated by households were food waste and plastics, sanitary napkins/ pads and diapers. Unregulated garbage disposal is a hindrance to hygiene and sanitation. Burning is the predominant form of garbage disposal adopted by the respondents, followed by burying the waste in a pit.

Figure 16 | Most prevalent disposal method of plastic waste



According to the survey responses:

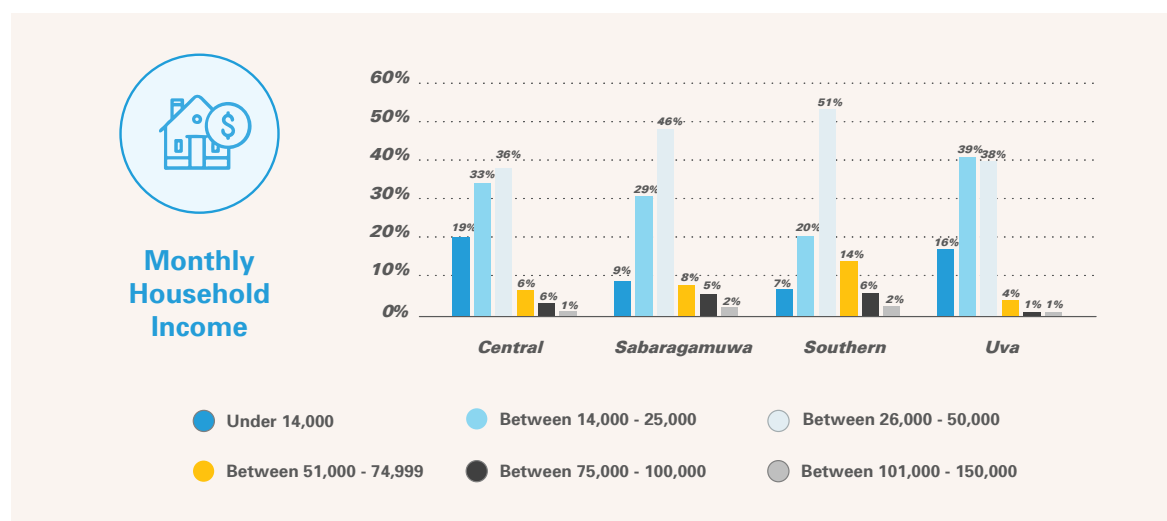
- 26% of households bury their food waste in a pit and 25% dispose of it at assigned garbage dumping points in their community;
- 71% of households burn their plastic waste;
- 46% of households dispose of their sanitary pads or adult or baby diapers by burning them and 31% burying them in a pit;
- 3% of households stated that they dispose of sanitary pads and baby diapers by throwing them in waterways like rivers or streams which further erodes access to clean water bodies.

3.1.5. Household income: minimum wages and official poverty line vs living wages

Income is a crucial factor in determining the well-being of children, making it a key area of interest in this household study.

According to the survey findings, the average monthly household income of workers living in tea estates ranges from LKR 26,000 to 50,000, irrespective of the type of estate. However, there are differences across provinces, with 51% of households in the Southern Province and 46% in the Sabaragamuwa Province earning a monthly household income between LKR 26,000 and 50,000, compared to just 38% of the households in the Uva Province and 36% in the Central Province.

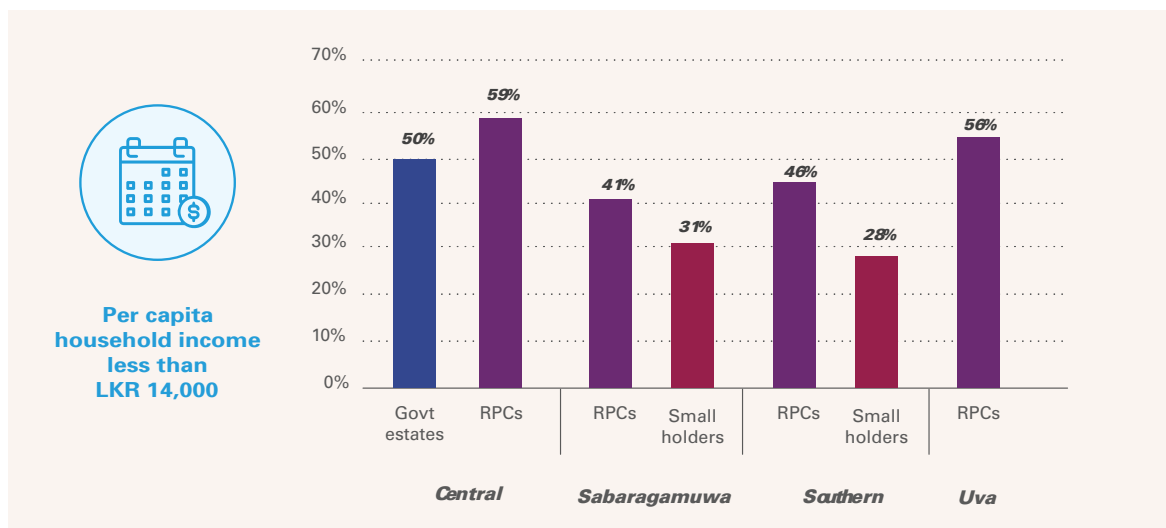
Figure 17 | Monthly household income reported by respondents



The national poverty line in Sri Lanka¹⁰ in December 2022 is set at LKR 13,777 per month per capita. From the household survey findings, it was noted that among the respondents living in RPC estates, 59% in Central Province and 56% in Uva Province had a monthly household per capita income below the national poverty line. In Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces, it was slightly lower at 46% and 41% respectively. Among the government estate sample in Central province, 50% of the respondents reported a monthly household per capita income below the national poverty line. Among smallholders, the number of respondents with monthly household per capita income less than the national poverty line was lower at 31% in Sabaragamuwa and 28% in Southern province.

⁹ Department of Census and Statistics. Poverty <Department of Census and Statistics >, accessed in April 2023

Figure 18 | Distribution of respondents with monthly per capita household income less than national poverty line



Despite a minimum wage of LKR 1,000 per day with a maximum of 25 days of work per month, both RPCs and government estates still have relatively high rates of poverty. It is important to note that respondents on smallholder farms mostly represent the farm owners themselves and not hired labourers.

The Global Living Wage Coalition defines a living wage¹¹ as “the remuneration received for a standard work week by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include food, water, housing, education, health care, transportation, clothing, and other essential needs including provision for unexpected events.” A living wage differs from a minimum wage, which is usually determined by the state based on the demands of the labour market. A living wage is often higher than the minimum wage and is linked to an improvement in socio-economic conditions.

Estate sector workers in Sri Lanka are currently paid a minimum wage¹² of LKR 1,000 per day as of 5th March 2021. This amount was only agreed upon after the government intervened in wage discussions between workers and estate owners in March 2021, resulting in a 37% increase from previous wages. However, as elaborated in the next section, a worker’s final wage is still dependent on achieving set targets, and deductions are imposed if targets are not met. As a result, the wage increase is limited, and the inflation resulting from the economic crisis has further reduced the real value of estate sector salaries.

¹¹ Global Living Wage Coalition. What is a living wage? <What is a Living Wage? - Global Living Wage Coalition >, accessed July 27, 2023

¹² Department of labour, Wages Board Ordinance Extraordinary Gazette Notification, 2021, <G 33870 - 11 (E) Wages Boards.pmd (labourdept.gov.lk)>, accessed January 2023

¹³ Institute of Social Development. 2022. Living wage for the tea estate workers in Sri Lanka. pp 20. Link: Rapid-estimation-LW-for-Plantation-workers-ISD-3rd-study-2022-1.pdf (isdkandy.org)

The Institute of Social Development (ISD), which has been conducting living wage assessments for plantation workers, has determined that a living wage in 2022 needs to be set at LKR 2,276 per day¹³ for a typical family of four, assuming 25 days of work and 1.5 income earners per household. This takes into account rising food costs and other expenses, as well as non-cash benefits such as access to free healthcare and housing.

Given that the current wage structure has a significant number of workers in the tea estates below the national poverty line per capita, and the independent study undertaken by the Institute of Social Development suggests that wages need to be at least double, it is critical for the RPCs and State estate companies to re-assess their wage structure by conducting a joint living wage analysis together with the global buyers so that the tea pricing and cost of production will enable living wages for workers.

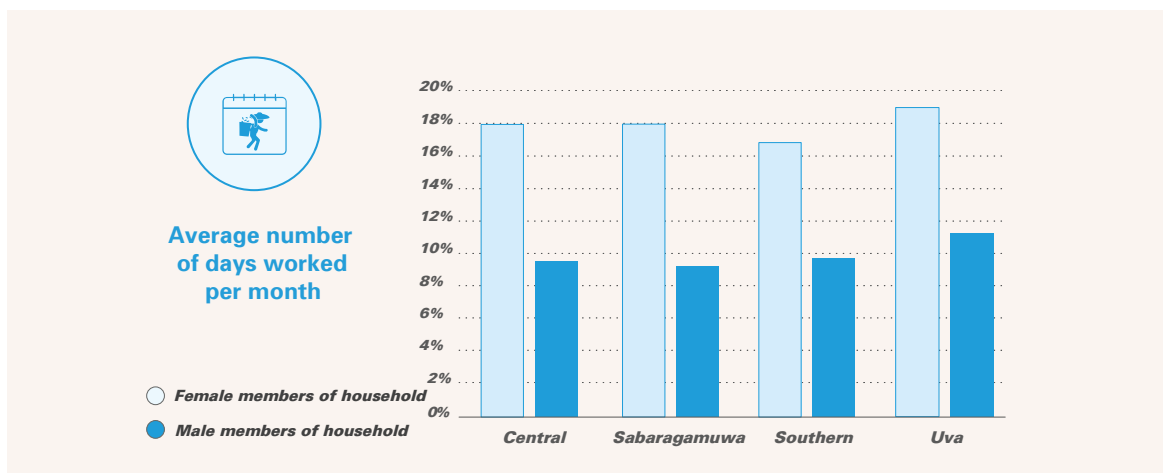
3.1.6. The gender gap in pay and working hours

Women, who predominantly work as tea pickers, are expected to work from 8 am to 5 pm to earn their daily wage of LKR 1,000. They are given specific targets in terms of the amount of tea leaves they need to collect within that time. Even if they finish their targets earlier, they are not allowed to leave and must continue working until 5 pm. Conversely, men are permitted to leave once they reach their daily targets, which usually happens between noon and 2 pm, giving them more time for additional income-generating activities.

This discrepancy in working hours means that women have to work longer than men for the same pay. According to the women trade union leaders interviewed for this study, this has been an issue that they have tried to raise at trade union discussions and collective agreement discussions. However, this has not been addressed as the companies have stated that they can instead increase the number of hours that men workers undertake to ensure equal working hours. Male members of the trade unions have opposed this suggestion as they are “not keen to lose their current benefits”. This indicates a clear gender wage gap, and the household income and activities are dependent on the gender of the worker. Although trade union leaders have been advocating to address this issue, the relevant decision-making institutions, such as the Department of Labour, Employers Federation, Planters Association of Ceylon, and male-led mainstream trade unions, maintain that men and women receive equal daily pay despite evidence to the contrary.

The household survey showed that in the Central and Uva provinces women earned on an average between LKR 15,000 and 25,000, while men earned between LKR 26,000 and 50,000. Whereas, male and female workers in Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces earned an average of LKR 26,000 – 50,000. This significant gender wage gap, particularly among workers on large plantation company estates (RPCs and government estates), emphasizes the need for extensive training programmes aimed at raising awareness of gender in the workplace, with a particular focus on wage gaps that arise from differences in working hours.

Figure 19 | Average number of working days per month on tea estates



Further, given that on an average, male workers work 18 days and female workers 15 days per month on tea estates, the household survey findings suggest that in the Southern and Sabaragamuwa provinces, there are additional sources of household income for the workers than in Central and Uva provinces.

3.1.7. Revenue share model / outgrower model

The revenue share model is seen as a pioneering intervention to increase the income of workers and improve productivity in tea estates, according to the CEOs of companies interviewed for this report and other key industry stakeholders.

Under this model, workers are provided with a plot of land within the tea estates to grow tea, which they can then sell back to the estate. While companies have provided examples of workers who have increased their earnings through this model, trade unions and international certification bodies view it as increasing the vulnerability of workers if not implemented with a guiding framework.

A key positive aspect of this model is that it allows individuals, who are not on the checkroll of the company, to generate some income from tea while being able to continue any other economic activities they may be employed in and for the company, helps to maintain tea bushes that might decline if not taken care of. However, when a worker who is on the checkroll of the estate signs up for the revenue share model, they are expected to work on the assigned plot of land outside of regular working hours. Therefore, this model raises concerns about the concept of a living wage, which is based on achieving a decent standard of living within regular working hours and not through working overtime or during holidays. There is a significant risk that in this system farmers would only be able to achieve higher revenue by working longer hours on the assigned tea fields. Union leaders fear that the revenue share model is essentially a model based on unpaid overtime work, packaged as an innovative model, which allows companies to avoid paying workers their due wages for working overtime. Another concern highlighted by trade unions is that workers entering the revenue share model are not entitled to Employee Provident Funder (EPF) / Employee Trust Fund (ETF) or other benefits as this model is not covered under the wages board. This leaves workers with little recourse should disputes or concerns arise, as they cannot take them to the labour courts. With companies increasingly bringing more acreage under the revenue share model, workers find fewer opportunities for formal, regular working conditions

with guaranteed levels of income. . There is a need for the Department of Labour to provide a guiding framework for companies implementing the revenue share model to ensure that safeguards are in place to protect the worker.

3.1.8. Classification of labour

Currently, the Department of Labour classifies all labour performed by men and women in tea estates as general labour regardless of its nature. In order to classify different types of labour as skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled, the Labour Department requires a proposal from industry stakeholders for review and approval.

Tea companies recognise that tea picking is a skill that directly affects the quality of the tea. They acknowledge that tea picked without proper care can damage the leaf and reduce the quality grading, ultimately decreasing the company’s income. Therefore, stakeholders need to review and reclassify different types of labour. This reclassification would recognise tea pickers’ labour as skilled or semi-skilled work, leading to increased wages. Currently, the lack of classification traps the workers, regardless of their skill level, in a situation where their work is undervalued. Furthermore, this affects women more than men as traditionally women work as tea pickers and men rarely engage in tea picking and therefore, the longer working hours combined with wages that are not aligned to skilled or semi-skilled labour has a greater negative impact on women.

3.1.9. Household expenditure

Limited income significantly affects the patterns of household expenditure according to the household survey. Food is the largest expense for all households, with the average monthly expenditure ranging from LKR 24,000 to 28,000 across provinces. Only 33% of respondents reported always being able to afford their food expenditure.

Figure 20 | Affordability of household expenditure - essential expenses

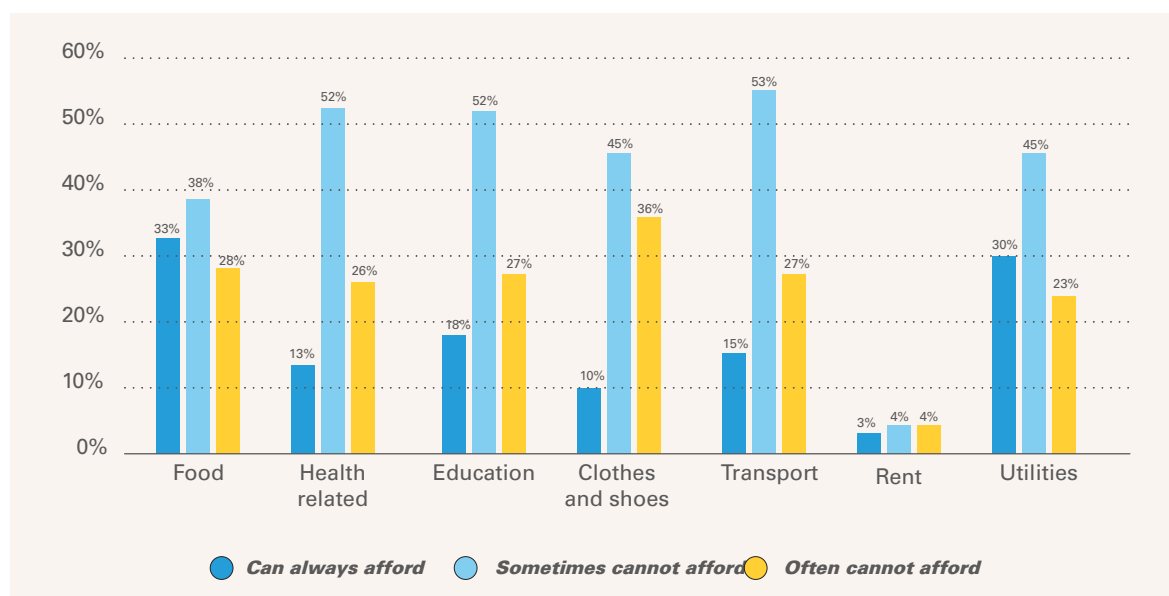
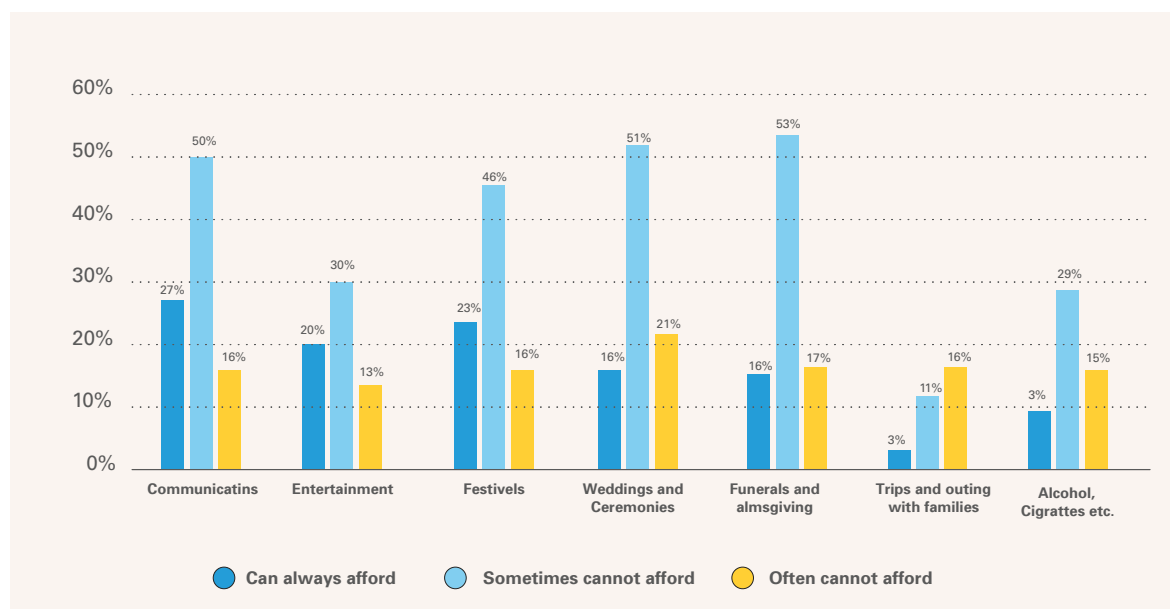


Figure 21 | Affordability of household expenditure – other expenses



Education-related expenses are the second-largest category of cost for the respondents, with parents spending around LKR 10,000 – 14,000 on school-related fees and educational materials. Around 52% of respondents reported sometimes not being able to afford these expenses, and 27% reported often being unable to afford education materials. Only 18% reported always being able to afford education materials for their children.

For respondents from the Central Province, festival-related expenses were the third-largest category of expenditure, with an average monthly expenditure of around LKR 10,000. This is significantly higher than in other provinces, where respondents spend LKR 4,300 in Uva Province, LKR 2,600 in Sabaragamuwa Province and LKR 1,500 in the Southern Province. However, it must be noted that there were two major festivals that the workers celebrated in Central and Uva provinces during the three months prior to the survey in March 2023: Thai Pongal in January and a major Hindu temple festival in February. Only 16% reported often having difficulty affording these expenses, with 23% reporting always being able to afford the costs.

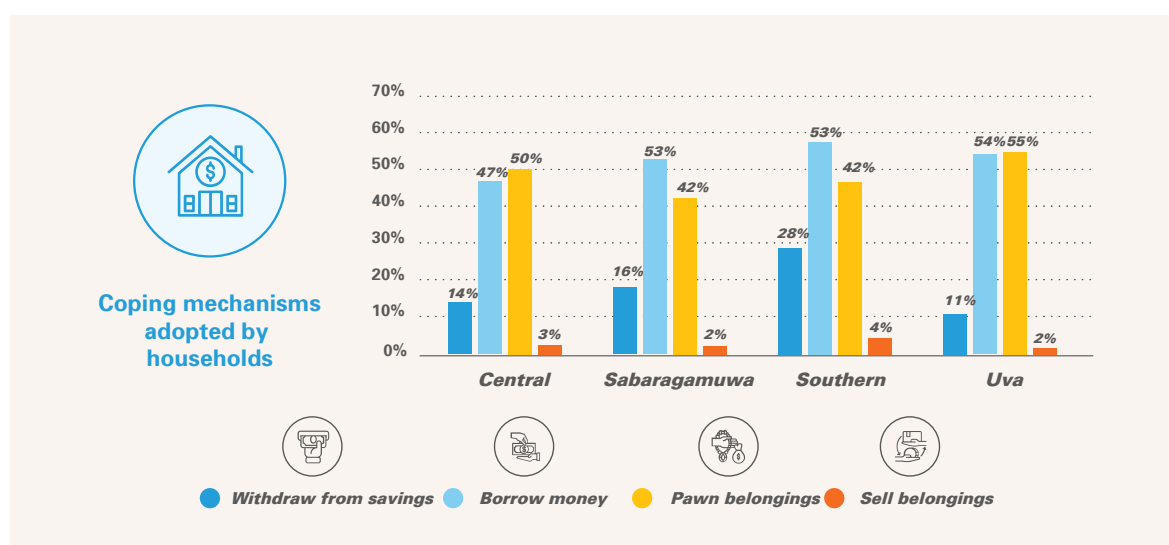
Healthcare-related expenses and clothing were the next-largest categories of expenditure across the provinces. Only 13% reported they could always afford healthcare-related expenses, and 10% reported always being able to afford clothing-related expenses. This indicates a high risk that nearly 90% of respondents are uncertain about their ability to afford basic necessities such as healthcare and clothing.

Rent was also a major expense category but applied only to 11% of the respondents as the other respondents were offered free housing on their estates.

In addition to these expenses, 14% of respondents reported alcohol as a recurring cost, spending an average of LKR 3,000 – 4,000 monthly across provinces. According to the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC), alcohol consumption is a significant issue among men in the tea estate communities, which has a direct impact on children. ADIC cited examples where men whose rehabilitation efforts they supported had stated that when they reduced spending on alcohol that their families were able to provide for an improved nutritional diet for their children.

With the rising prices of food and other essential items, current household incomes are not enough to cover the monthly expenditures of these families, with 83% of total respondents reporting that they adopted one or more coping mechanisms to supplement their income since March 2022. Borrowing money (63%) is the primary coping mechanism for most respondents, followed by the pawning of belongings (51%).

Figure 22 | Type of coping mechanisms adopted by households

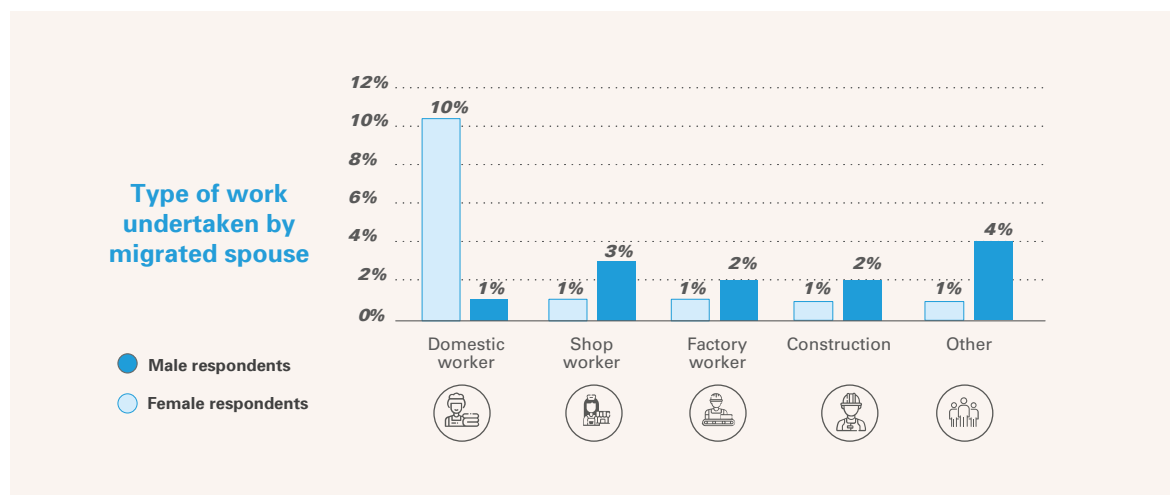


Of the 1,346 respondents who stated that they had raised money to cope with household expenditure during the last month, 89% stated that they raised the money primarily from banks, with 26% stating that they borrowed from family and relatives. 19% stated that they raised the money required from informal money lenders and 6% from their employers. 65% of those who had adopted one of the above coping mechanisms said they had borrowed or raised over LKR 50,000 to cover household expenditure.

3.1.10. Migration and the informal economy

The rising household expenditure has led many workers to resort to migration as a coping mechanism.

Figure 23 | Type of work undertaken by migrated spouse



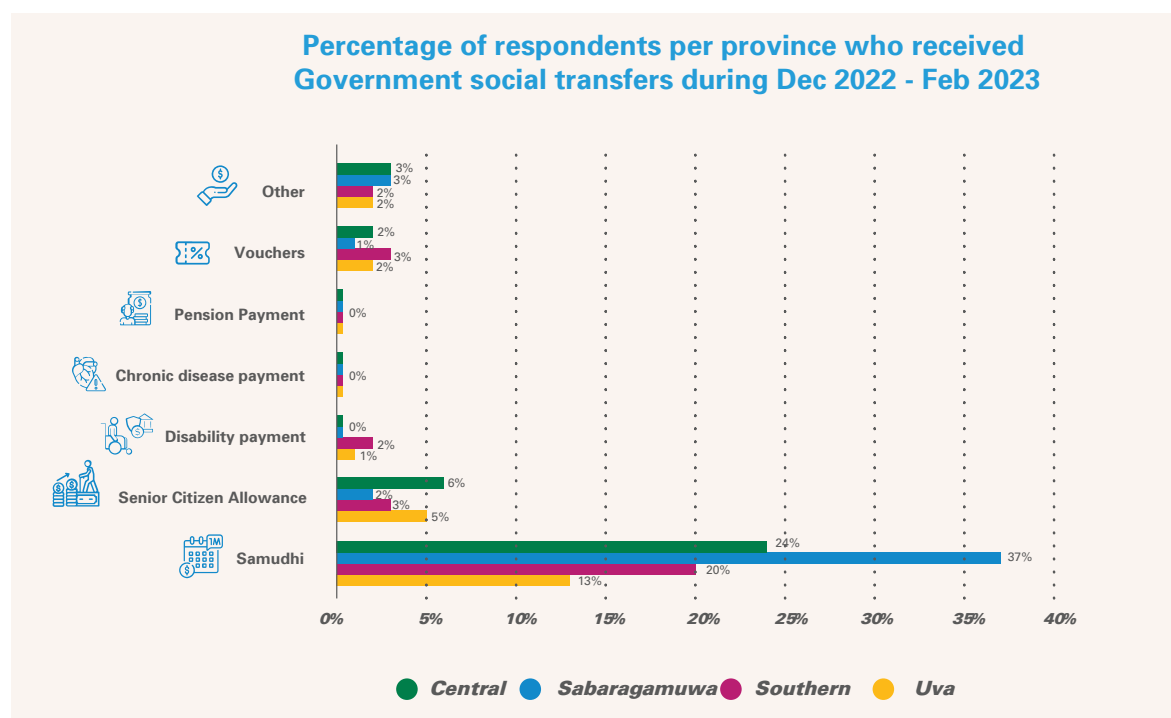
According to the survey, 15% of respondents reported that their spouses had migrated either to other provinces or countries for work. Of these migrants, 75% were Tamils and less than 20% were Sinhalese. The majority of internal country migration (63%) was to the Western Province, while 66% of external migration was to Middle East countries. Most migrants from the Central and Uva provinces were employed in the informal economy, working in domestic or retail shop-related jobs without employment contracts, which makes them more vulnerable to labour violations. Women’s trade unions are currently collaborating with the Employers Federation to develop a domestic workers act that could reduce some of the vulnerabilities experienced by domestic workers.

3.2. KEY FINDINGS: SOCIAL PROTECTION

The household survey mapped out the types of social protection assistance that respondents had received during the last three months. The survey found that 39% had received one or more forms of social protection transfers and benefits during the last three months.

The survey identified Samurdhi as the predominant form of social protection assistance that respondents had received from the government.

Figure 24 | Percentage of respondents per province who received Government social transfers during Dec 2022 – Feb 2023

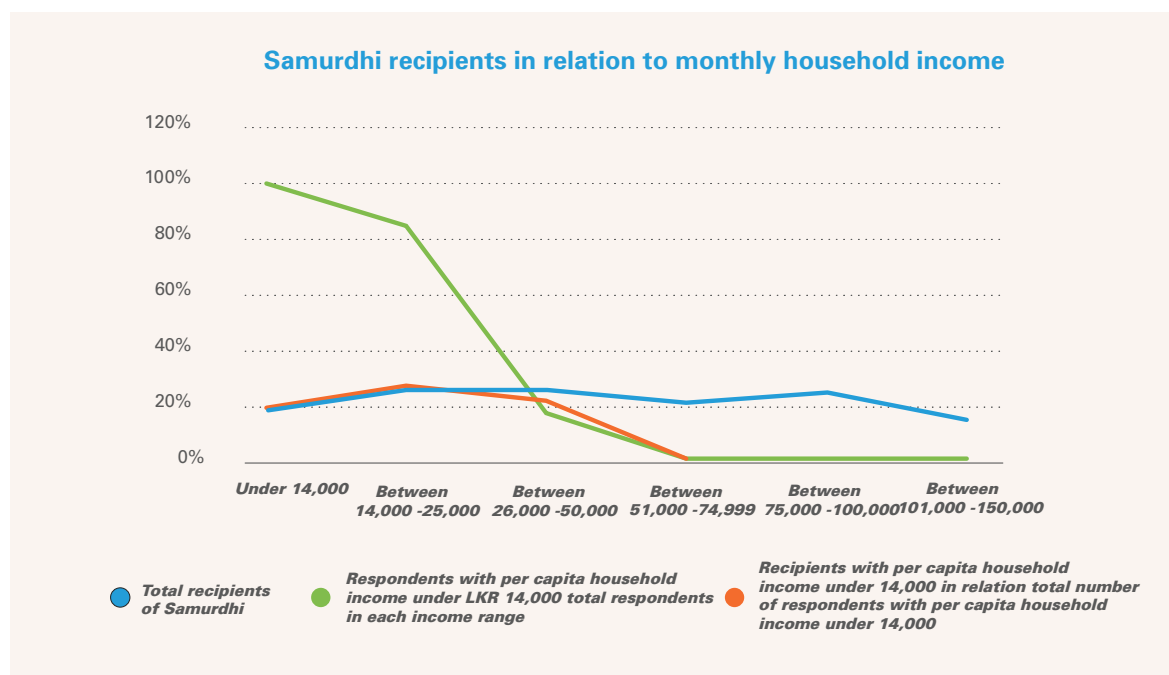


The largest social protection assistance programme in Sri Lanka, at the time of this study, is the Samurdhi programme. In addition to cash transfers, eligible households are provided with food stamps and access to savings and credit programmes through Samurdhi banks, which offer entrepreneurial and business loans. Additionally, the programme provides access to social development programmes that focus on rehabilitating and developing community infrastructure.

The following criteria need to be fulfilled for eligibility:

1. Monthly Household income is less than the product of the number of household members multiplied by LKR 6,000 (for example, a household with four members – a mother, father and two children would have a threshold of LKR 24,000)
2. Not listed on a payroll

Figure 25 | Samurdhi recipients in relation to monthly household income



The red line refers to the percentage of all respondents of the survey who have a monthly household per capita income under LKR 14,000. The green line refers to the Samurdhi recipients who have a per capita income under LKR 14,000. The blue line refers to the Samurdhi recipients in relation to the monthly household income range they reported (not per capita income)

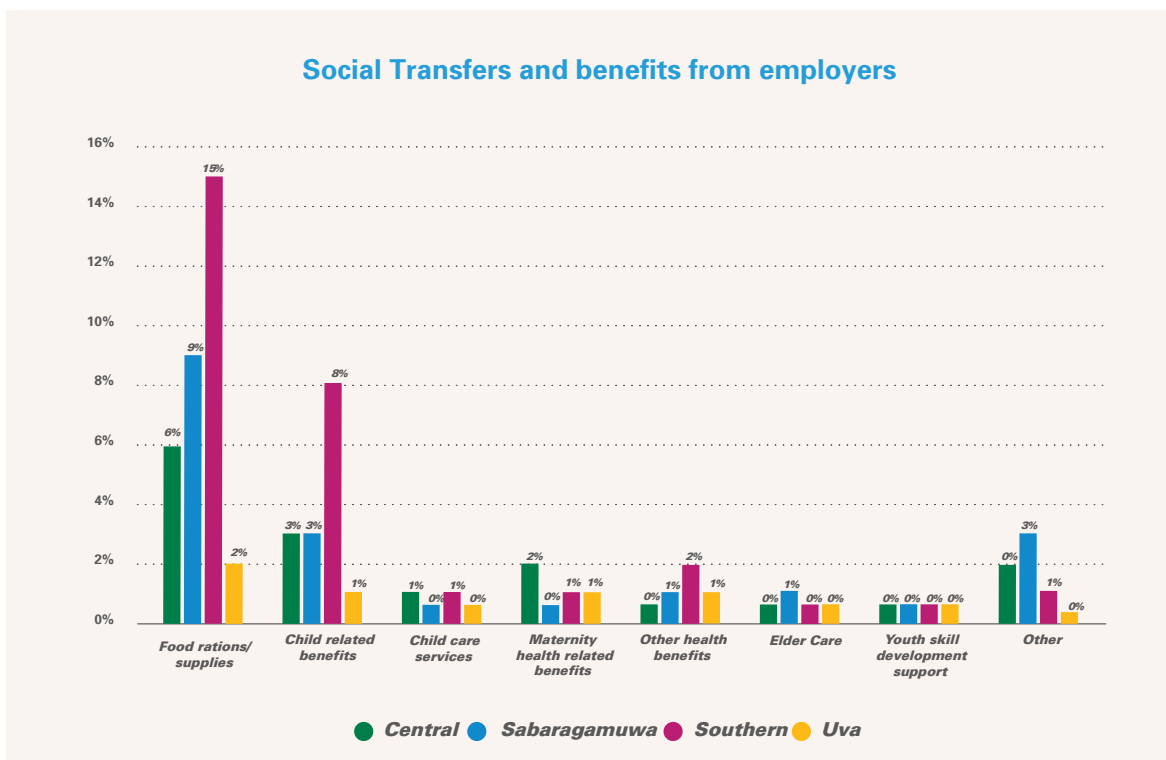
While 46% of the respondents have a per capita household income under LKR 14,000, only 24% of respondents with a monthly per capita household income of less than LKR 14,000 receive Samurdhi benefit. Further, the graph illustrates that many of those who are receiving a monthly per capita income over the official poverty line are also receiving Samurdhi benefits. This is in line with the finding of the UNICEF study¹⁴ that 59% of households with children who should be eligible for the programme are excluded.

Among 23% of the respondents benefiting from Samurdhi, almost 50% live in state-owned tea estates, 31% are smallholders and 16% live on RPC estates, suggesting that the Samurdhi services are not reaching workers on RPC estates adequately. Therefore, the Samurdhi criteria of eligibility of not being on a payroll is seemingly not strictly followed.

A well-designed social protection system should provide adequate income security for all throughout the life cycle, including for children, people with disabilities and older persons. This reduces and prevents poverty, supports better health and education outcomes, and hence increases productivity. In a more comprehensive system, more targeted schemes, such as Samurdhi or the newly introduced Aswesuma scheme, would only play a residual role.

¹⁴ Kidd, S., Daniels, L. M., Athias, B., & Cretney, M. Investing in the future: A universal benefit for Sri Lanka's children, 2020. <<https://www.unicef.org/srilanka/media/1276/file/Investing%20in%20the%20future:%20A%20universal%20benefit%20for%20Sri%20Lanka's%20children.pdf>>, accessed July 23, 2023

Figure 26 | Percentage of respondents who reported receiving social transfers from their employers



In relation to types of social protection transfers and benefits received from employers during the last three months prior to March 2023, 8% of the respondents reported receiving food rations and supplies and 4% reported receiving child related benefits.

Comparatively, the respondents stated that they have received less support from other organizations and development agencies.

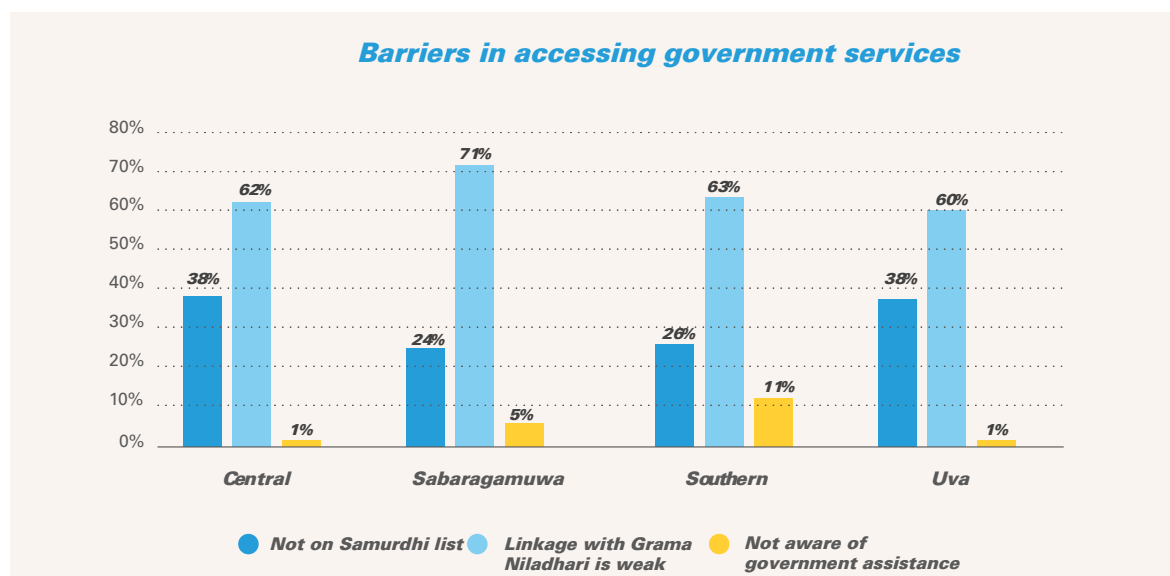
In addition to the regular forms of social protection transfers and benefits received by respondents from either the government or their employer, the survey also sought to find whether respondents received additional support in response to the economic crisis. 66% of the respondents stated that they had received additional support during the last three months.

Dry rations and cash transfers were the main forms of assistance provided to the respondents as a response to the economic crisis.

The predominant source of assistance in response to the economic crisis was from the government (82% of the respondents were recipients) and the balance was from employers (8%) and other organizations, including development agencies (7%).

With regard to key barriers that the respondents perceived for not being able to access government services and benefits, 64% cited that the weak linkage with the Grama Niladhari was the predominant reason.

Figure 27 | Barriers perceived by respondents, in accessing government services



Case study: Elpitiya Plantations (EPL)

Vegetable cultivation within estates

EPL has identified safe and arable land on all 13 of its estates and has prepared the land at the company's expense prior to inviting workers and estate communities to cultivate vegetables. The project is a partnership between EPL and the estate communities, with EPL providing seeds and input materials free of charge, while the communities contribute labour. The cultivated crops are given to the communities free of charge, ensuring a continued food supply, which has become even more critical due to the surge in vegetable prices in recent months.

Additionally, the group has established a tissue culture lab in the New Peacock estate to propagate indigenous herbal and fruit plants, which is expected to further support vegetable cultivation within the estates.

EPL has also begun intercropping pineapple and other fruit plants in rubber and coconut land. Within one year, 35,500 pineapple plants were cultivated at a cost of Rs 2.84 million, with plans to cultivate an additional 50,000 in the coming year.

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, EPL has taken additional measures to support food security within its estates. These measures include:

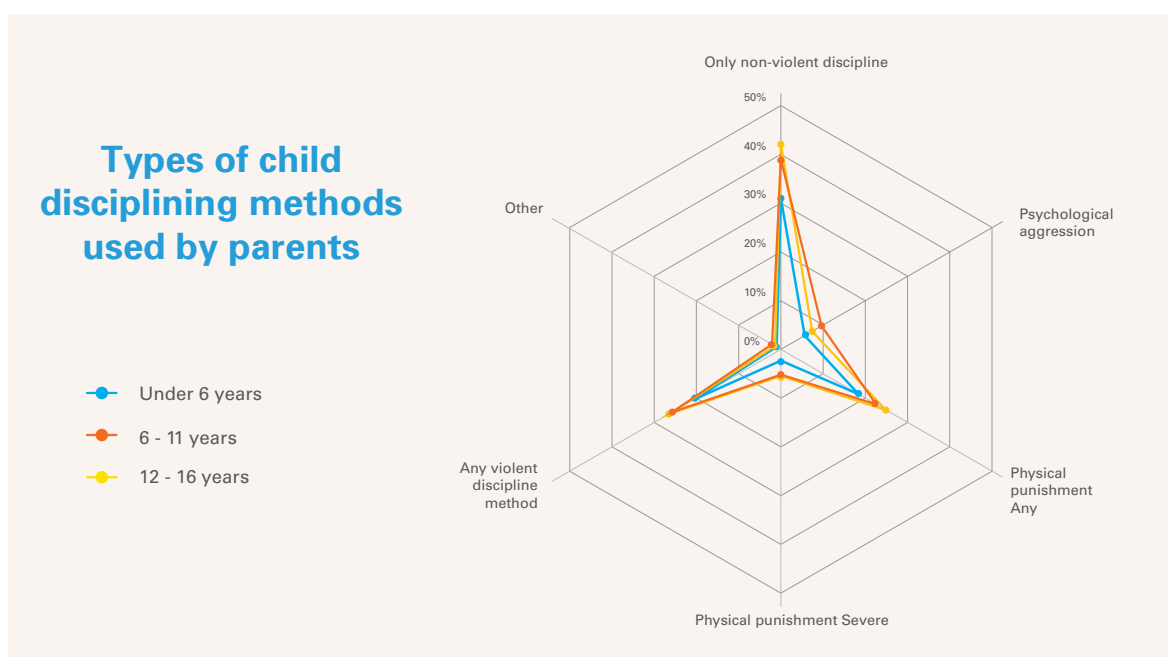
- Purchasing vegetables from out-growers in the vicinity of their estates and offering them to communities at farmgate prices through the estate co-operatives:
- Increasing the inventory of vegetables and dry rations in the co-operatives and passing on the cost-benefit obtained from bulk purchasing.
- Ensuring crop security of jackfruit, breadfruit, and other crops in their estates; and
- Encouraging home gardening within their estate communities and launching a competition to reward the best cultivation.

3.3. KEY FINDINGS: PROTECTION

3.3.1. Corporal punishment

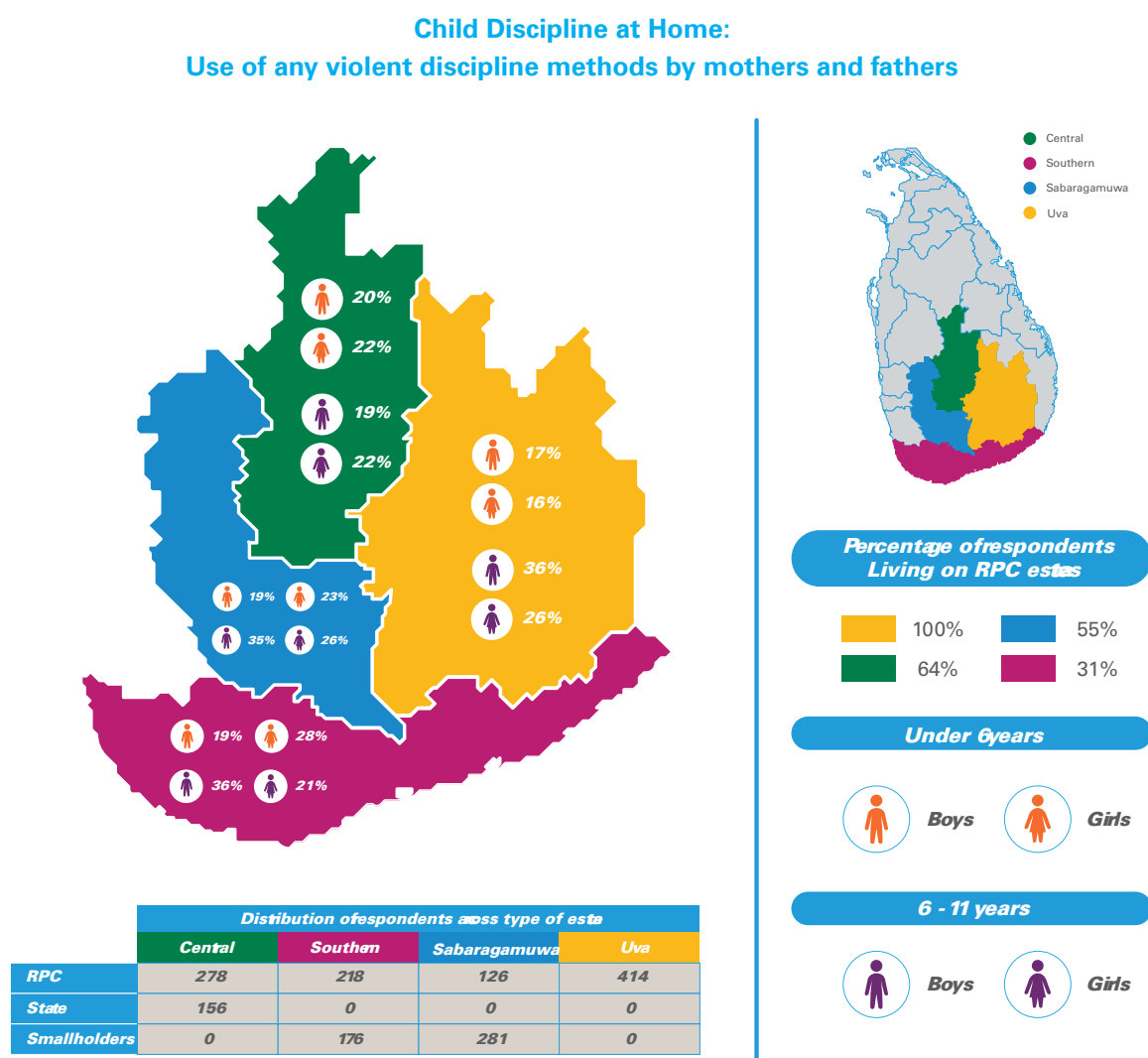
In this household survey, the module on child discipline identified that parents used non-violent disciplining methods as the primary form of child discipline at home, with 36% of parents with children under 6 years, 41% with children 6 – 11 years and 38% with children 12 – 17 years using this method. Physical punishment was the second most popular disciplining method, with 21% of parents with children under six years and 25% with children between 6 and 11 years using it. 3% of parents with children under 6 years and 5% of parents with children between 6 and 17 years used severe physical punishment as a disciplining method. Parents who used psychological aggression as a disciplining method were between 6% (under 6 years) and 9% (12 – 17 years).

Figure 28 | Types of disciplining methods used by parents at homes



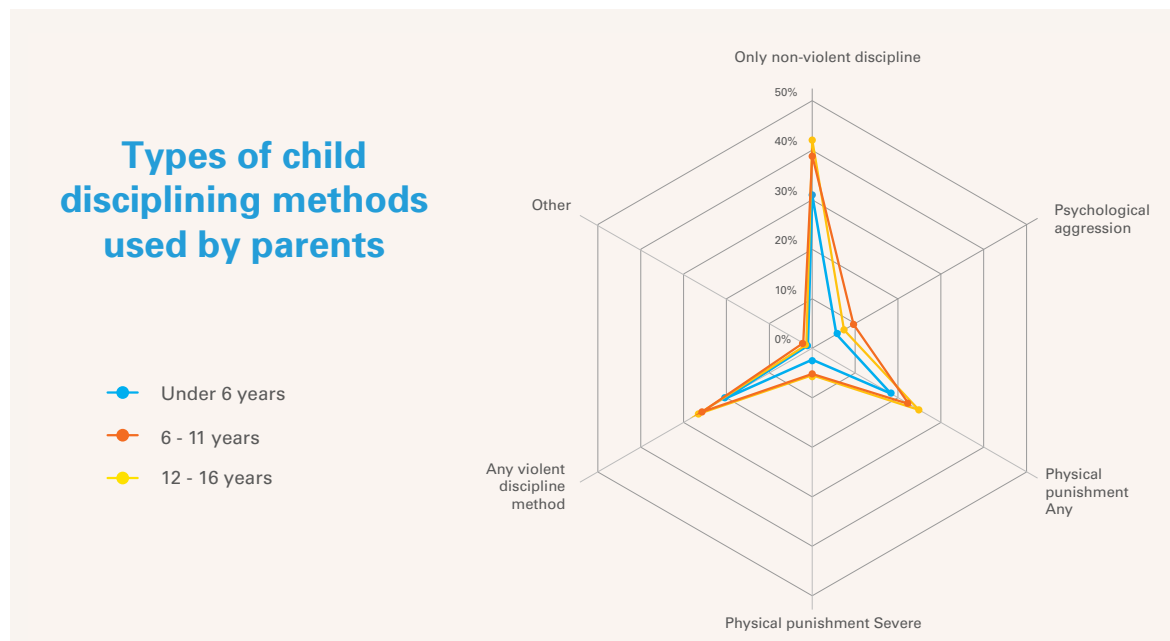
3.3.2. Gender differences impact disciplining methods

In this household survey, the module on child discipline identified that parents used non-violent disciplining, including taking away privileges, and forbidding something his/her child could do, explaining to the child why the behavior was wrong, or giving the child something else to do, as the primary form of child discipline at home.



For children aged between 12 – 16 years, it appears that more boys than girls are subjected to violent disciplining methods across all four provinces. The highest rates were observed in the Southern province, with 36% of boys and 23% of girls being subjected to violent discipline, while the lowest rates were in the Sabaragamuwa Province, with 26% of boys and 25% of girls being subjected to violent discipline. In the Southern Province, severe physical punishment was also the highest, with 11% of boys and 5% of girls in this age group experiencing this during the past month.

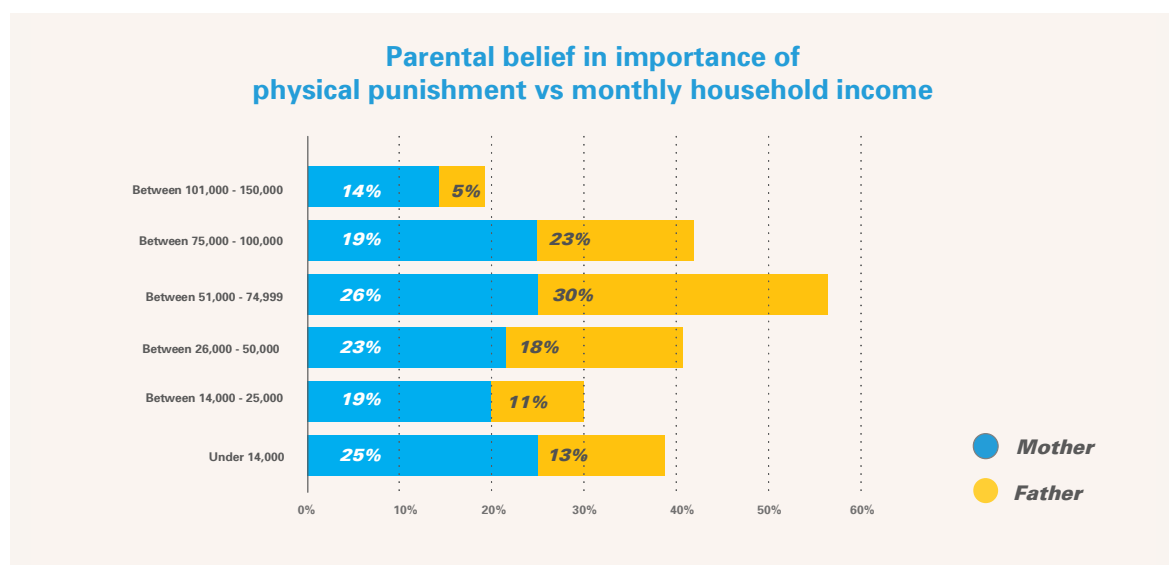
Figure 29 | Violent disciplining methods used at home by parents



Looking at the gender differences from the parents’ perspective, more mothers than fathers used violent disciplining methods for their children, with 26% of mothers and 15% of fathers being the disciplinarians for children under 6 years. However, the gap between mothers and fathers using violent disciplining methods is reduced as the child grows older, with 26% of mothers and 21% of fathers using violent disciplining methods for their children between 12 and 16 years.

On attitudes towards physical punishment, 22% of mothers and 16% of fathers who responded to the survey stated they believed physical punishment was important to raise or educate a child properly. Sabaragamuwa Province had the highest rate of parents (26% mothers and 19% fathers), followed by the Southern Province (25% mothers and 14% fathers) who believed in physical punishment.

Figure 30 | Parental belief in importance of physical punishment vs monthly household income



The income group with the highest percentage of parents who believe in physical punishment is the LKR 51,000 – 74,999 one, with 26% of mothers and 30% of fathers holding this belief. This is followed by the LKR 26,000 – 50,000 income group. On the other hand, only 19% of mothers and 11% of fathers in the LKR 14,000 – 25,000 income group believed in physical punishment as a necessary child disciplining method. We can therefore conclude that among the estate worker community, an increase in income does not necessarily lead to improved child disciplining methods.

The use of violent disciplining methods in school settings increases with the age of the child. For instance, 11% of children at CDCs and pre-schools experience violent disciplining, which increases to 23% in secondary schools. The Central Province has the highest prevalence of violent disciplining methods in CDCs and pre-schools, with 13% of boys and 17% of girls under six years experiencing violent disciplining at their early learning centres. At the primary and secondary school levels, the Southern Province has the highest prevalence of violent disciplining methods in schools, with 27% of boys and 26% of girls between the ages of 6 and 11 years and 33% of boys and 38% of girls between the ages of 12 and 16 years experiencing violent disciplining during the past month.

3.3.3. Living conditions creating risks to child protection

Living conditions for labourers in mid-sized private tea estates are poor and offer little to no privacy, which creates significant risks to child protection. This risk is exacerbated by a lack of community-based daycare options and safe spaces for children to play.

A survey conducted by the National Child Protection Authority found that 35% of participating children reported witnessing a domestic violent fight at least once, with 22% reporting frequent exposure to such incidents. Of those frequent incidents, 14% took place at children's homes. The survey also revealed that 36% of children had experienced physical punishment in the six months prior to the survey.

These high numbers were consistent with the increase in complaints received by the 1929 child helpline¹⁵ in 2021, particularly in districts where the estate sector is concentrated. These figures were notably higher than the numbers recorded in 2019.

Table 2 | Number of calls received by the 1929 child helpline in each district

District	2019	2020	2021
N' Eliya	177	16	160
Kandy	390	363	461
Kegalle	288	254	388
Ratnapura	471	454	693
Galle	537	454	624
Matara	301	301	416
Badulla	224	243	250

¹⁵ National Child Protection Authority, 'Statistical Data', 2021, < <https://childprotection.gov.lk/resource-centre/statistics-3>>, accessed 30 January 2023.

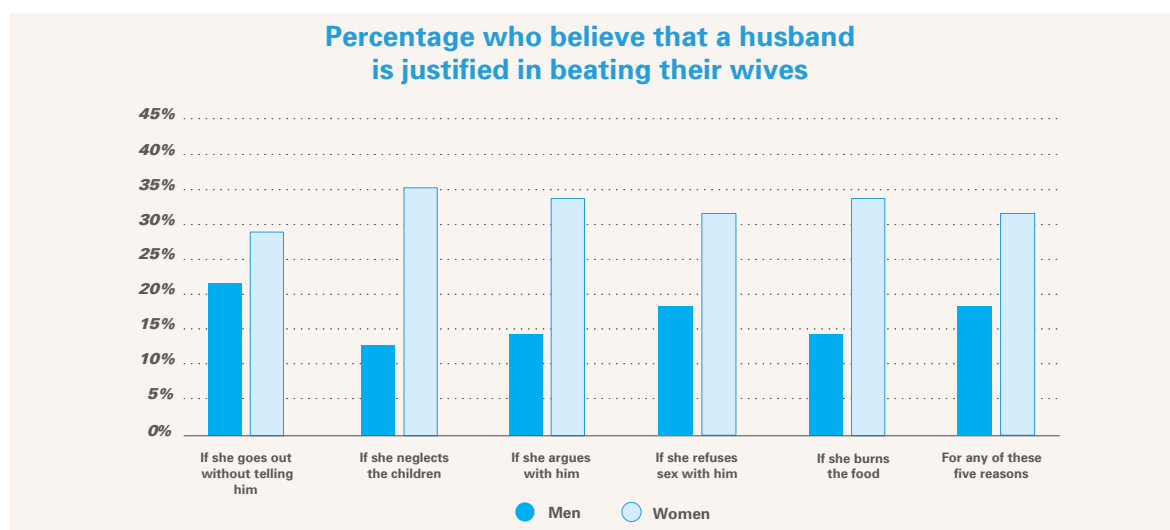
Case Study: Horana Plantations PLC (HPL)

HPL partnered with Save the Children in 2018 to adopt a child protection policy, making it one of the first five RPCs in Sri Lanka to do so. Save the Children had worked with five Regional Plantation Companies in 2017-2018 to facilitate the development and adoption of a child protection policy. This policy marks an important step in HPL's commitment to safeguarding all children residing on their estates from all forms of harm, violence, abuse, and exploitation. Since the policy's adoption, HPL has developed several initiatives and strategies to ensure the policy's effective implementation, including the appointment of Child Protection Focal Points (CPFP) at each tea estate, on a sub-office, and head office level to coordinate and monitor policy implementation. The company has also established and strengthened Village Child Development Committees (VCDCs) and Children's Clubs. These committees, along with the CPFPs and children's clubs, have conducted child protection risk mapping and developed care plans with government officials to address the vulnerabilities of identified children. HPL has also encouraged and supported child-led and community-led initiatives to address child rights.

3.3.4. Intimate partner violence

In the plantation sector, a staggering 88% of women who participated in the 2009 study¹⁶ reported experiencing intimate partner violence at home, including beatings, shoving and pushing. This high prevalence is primarily attributed to a process of socialisation, which instills a belief that violence is a part of life. Such normalization of violence perpetuates an intergenerational cycle of violence, where children grow up to accept violence as a norm and continue the cycle.

Figure 31 | Percentage who believe that a husband is justified in beating their wives



¹⁶ A.G.F Shifani and P. Seelagama, 'A study of domestic violence in the plantation sector', 2021.

¹⁷ S. Goonesekere and H. Amarasuriya, '14 Emerging concerns and case studies on child marriage in Sri Lanka', 2013.

Moreover, early marriage¹⁷ or cohabitation is common and has resulted in a range of grave issues, including statutory rape, child sexual abuse and teenage pregnancies. These practices stem from social values that prioritise the chastity and respectability of girls over their rights and well-being. Additionally, women in the plantation sector are at risk of sexual harassment, given the power imbalance between male supervisors, managers, owners, and female workers.

According to our household survey, a higher percentage of women (42%) than men (32%) believed that husbands are justified in physically assaulting their wives under certain circumstances (burning food, going out of the house without informing their husband etc). In comparison, only 32% of men held the same belief. The household survey found the highest proportion of individuals, who believed that husbands are justified in physically assaulting their wives under certain circumstances, in Central and Uva provinces. In the Central Province, 45% of female and 37% of male respondents held this belief, while in the Uva Province, 46% of female and 32% of male respondents held this belief.

3.3.5. Child labour

Findings from our household survey, which involved interviews with parents of children aged 5 – 17 years, revealed that 8% of these children are engaged in work. Among them, the vast majority (7% of all children) are involved in work that is not classified as child labour, as it falls within the admissible age and time limits and is considered light and non-hazardous work. However, 1% of the children whose parents participated in the survey are engaged in work that would be classified as child labour.

Regarding children's involvement in household work, our survey found that 21% of children aged 5-11 years and 40% of children aged 12-17 years help out with housework for less than 21 hours per week. In terms of child labour in household work, 1% of children between the ages of 12 and 17 years are involved in housework which can be classified as child labour, and this is only seen in the Central Province (2%) and Uva Province (1%).

While the survey findings provide valuable insights, it is important to note that they do not give a definitive picture of the child labour situation on the ground. This is due to the fact that the children themselves were not consulted as part of the study, and some parents may be hesitant to disclose information about their children's work because they are aware of the legal restrictions on child labor. Moreover, the last child activity survey⁶ conducted by the Department of Census and Statistics in 2016 estimated that approximately 2.3% of children aged between 5 and 17 years of age were involved in economic activities. During our key informant interviews for this study, stakeholders indicated that there has been an increase in the number of children involved in economic activities and a corresponding decline in regular school attendance. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct follow-up consultations with the children themselves to ascertain whether those engaged in economic activities are working within the hours defined as child work, or if the situation is being inaccurately portrayed by their parents.

Definition of child labour used in the study

The methodology of the UNICEF MICS indicator of Child Labour uses three age-specific thresholds for the number of hours a child can perform economic activity without it being classified as child labour. A child that performed economic activities during the last week for more than the age-specific number of hours is classified as being child labour:

- i. Age 5 -11: 1 hour or more
- ii. Age 12 -14: 14 hours or more
- iii. Age 15 -17: 43 hours or more

A child that performed household chores during the last week for more than the age-specific number of hours is classified as in child labour:

- i. Age 5-11 and age 12-14: 21 hour or more
- ii. Age 15-17: No threshold – not classified as child labour.

3.4. KEY FINDINGS: EDUCATION

865 government schools¹⁸ fall under the category of plantation schools, attended by children living in tea estates. Of these, 799 are located within the estate areas and 66 outside. The total teacher population in these schools is 13,712, consisting of 4,065 male and 9,647 female teachers. The student population is 211,287, with 105,773 boys and 105,514 girls. This represents 5% of all students attending government schools in Sri Lanka. The student- teacher ratio (STR) in plantation schools located within estate areas is 14.7, which is lower than the national average of 16.3. However, plantation schools located outside estate areas have a higher STR of 19.

The Central Province has the highest number of plantation schools, with 461 schools. The Nuwara Eliya District has the largest concentration of plantation companies, with 123 schools located there. Within the Central Province schools, 51% (236) are Type 3 schools, which provide classes for Grades 1 – 5 or Grades 1 – 8, while 29% (134) are Type 2 schools, which offer classes for Grades 1 – 11 or Grades 6 – 11.

Out of the 461 plantation schools in Central Province, only 4% (17 schools) provide Advance Level classes for the Science stream. Across 864 plantation schools, 20% (170) offer classes for Advance Level and only 3% (26) offer the science stream.

Children sometimes miss school because they are required to help during the harvest season, particularly in smallholder farms where labour shortages and rising costs of labour and production are real problems. A study by the NCPA showed that 73% of children⁹ started to help out on farms before their 12th birthday.

Only 3.8%⁴ of the households in the estate sector own a laptop or computer, and just 12.7% of the estate population are computer literate. This has had a significant negative impact on learning outcomes for children in the estate sector, especially during school closures for COVID-19 when the Ministry of Education adopted online learning platforms to continue teaching.

More households in Monaragala (72%), Badulla (69%), and Nuwara Eliya (68%) districts reported that educational materials became expensive compared to the other districts. This resulted in at least one child being pulled out of school in 1.4% of households⁴, while 2% of households reported that children are engaged in paid work, and 1.6% that children are engaged in unpaid/household work.

The results of the household survey suggest that although most parents reported that their children were attending school, there appears to be some variation in the regularity of attendance, with increasing irregularity as the education level increases.

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, 'School Census 2021', 2022, pp. 18

3.4.1. Regular and Irregular attendance

Child Development Centres and Pre-schools (ages 3 – 5 years)

For preschool-aged children, there are currently two centre-based learning options available - Child Development Centres (CDCs) run by RPC estate management and privately-run preschools. CDCs are primarily for children of tea estate workers and are free of charge for children under six years. They are staffed by estate management who are trained in early childhood care and education by the PHDT. While some CDCs do enroll children of non-estate workers for a fee, based on space availability, the prevalent option for non-estate worker children is privately-run preschools that charge fees.

According to the survey responses from parents, 96% of children between the ages of 3 and 5 years were attending one of these centre-based learning options. Out of the 388 children (192 boys and 196 girls) attending centre-based education, only parents of 77% of the children (298 children) chose to respond to the frequency of attendance question. The responses indicate that regular attendance at CDCs and preschools is around 80%, while the other 20% attend 3 – 4 days per week. On average, the distance between the home of the respondents and the CDCs/preschools is 0.8km. However, in the Uva Province, CDCs located on large plantation estates are closer to the respondents, with an average distance of 0.4km.

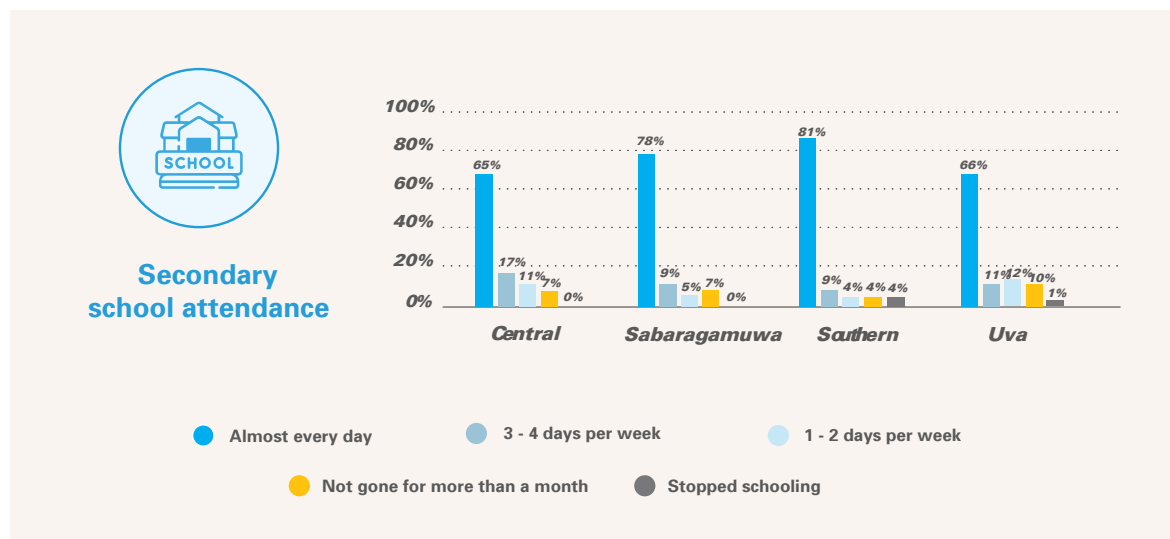
Primary school (ages 6 – 10 years)

Based on the parents' information, 96% of children (807 children – 412 boys and 395 girls) are attending schools located an average of 2.2km from their homes. The parents of 33 children (17 boys and 16 girls) reported that their children were not attending school. Parents of 90% of the children attending primary school responded to the frequency of attendance question. The regular attendance rate across the four provinces has an overall average of 74%. However, it is important to note that regular attendance varies among provinces. The Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces have a higher regular attendance rate of 80%, while the Central and Uva provinces have a regular attendance rate of 73% and 65%, respectively.

Secondary school (ages 11 – 16 years)

Parents who participated in the household survey reported that out of the total 1,076 children in the 11-16 years age group, 1,028 children (531 boys and 505 girls) were attending a secondary school. On average, these schools were located 2.7km away from the children's homes. The regular attendance of students across the four provinces is 72% on average. However, the Central and Uva provinces have the lowest regular attendance rates at 65% and 66%, respectively. While the rest of the children attend school irregularly, 4% of children in the Southern Province and 1% in the Uva Province have dropped out of school, according to their parents' reports.

Figure 32 | Secondary school attendance

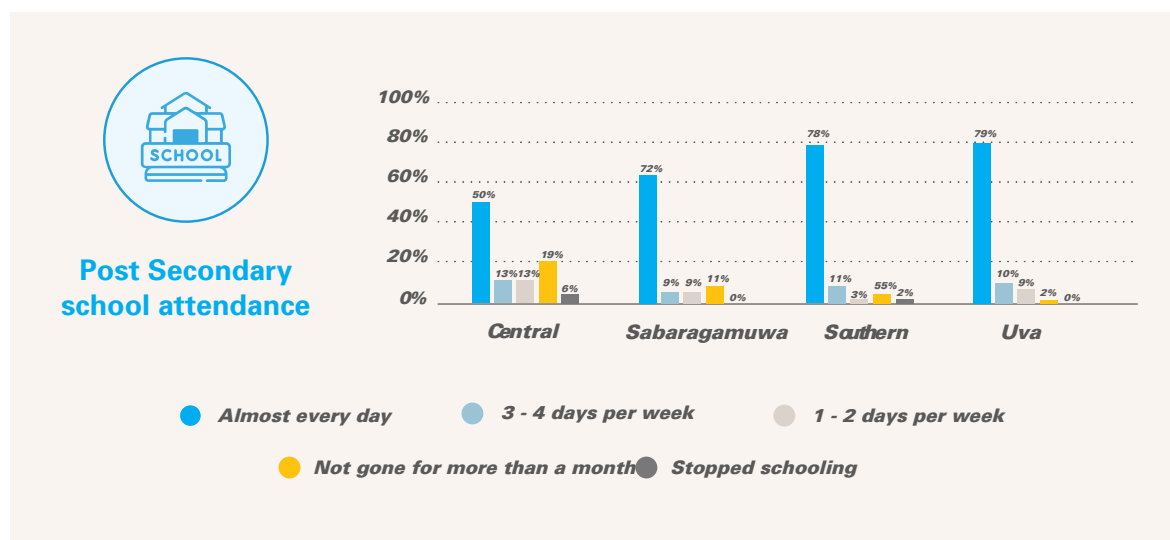


When analysing the performance of students in the Ordinary Level (O/L) exams, shared by their parents, it was found that of the total 393 children who completed their O/Ls, 82% were eligible to continue on to their Advanced Level (A/L) studies. However, there was a difference in performance across provinces, with the Uva Province showing the highest result: 90% of students who had sat for their O/Ls were eligible for their A/Ls. The Central province had the lowest level of 76% eligibility. When considering the type of housing these 393 children lived in, it was found that 40% lived in line rooms, while the remaining 60% lived in separate houses. However, the correlation analysis between type of housing and education performance (as defined by eligibility to continue onto A/Ls) did not show any significant correlation.

Post-secondary school (ages 17 – 18 years)

Out of the total 332 children in the age group of 17 – 18 years, only 76% (251 children – 124 boys and 127 girls) were attending post-secondary school, according to the household survey. Of those who were attending school, only 72% were regularly attending school across the four provinces. However, the attendance rates varied between provinces. The Uva Province had the highest attendance rate of 79%, while the Central Province had the lowest attendance rate of 50%. In terms of distance from home to school, the Central Province had the shortest average distance of around 3km, while the other three provinces had an average distance of around 10km.

Figure 33 | Frequency of attendance at the post-secondary level across provinces



Out of the 166 children who completed their A/Ls, 34% were eligible for university entrance. When considering their housing type, 36% of the children lived in line rooms.

When analysing the effect of monthly household income on school attendance, the survey findings did not find a significant correlation between monthly household income and school attendance. However, an interesting finding was that there was a positive correlation between the number of children in the household and irregular attendance. There was a likelihood of children not attending school regularly if there were multiple children in the household and especially, if one of the children was in secondary school. This finding supports the observation by education officials at the Ministry of Education and Zonal offices, that there was an increase in irregular attendance due to the economic crisis and there were examples of parents sending children to school on a rotation basis, as they could not afford cost of transport and other education expenses for all children.

Vocational education

Across all four provinces, only 28 children out of 1073 the 11-16 age category were enrolled in vocational education. Out of these 28, 3 in the Central Province and 4 in the Uva Province had discontinued their vocational education at the time of the survey.

In contrast, 77% of children in the Southern Province (10 children) and 50% in the Sabaragamuwa Province (2 children) are regularly attending their vocational education training. The vocational education centres are located at an average distance of 1.5km and 4km from homes in the Uva and Central provinces, respectively. In contrast, in the Southern Province, the centres are situated at a much further distance of 33km from homes.

Kelani Valley Plantations PLC (KVPL) facilitation of education

KVPL has granted scholarships to children of its employees to pursue higher education, resulting in many qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, accountants, teachers, and others. The company collaborates with other stakeholders to support children in pursuing their higher education based on their academic performance through the scholarship programmes and engages with buyers and brokers for support. For children who are not eligible for higher education, KVPL works with NAITA and Tertiary Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) to identify and enhance their talents and competencies. The company invites resource persons to facilitate programmes for children and youth and provides transport facilities to reach exam centres on time during fuel crises. KVPL also offers mentoring support and guidance to prepare children for exams. During the COVID-19 pandemic, KVPL converted its CDCs to online training centres and enabled children to learn through the DP education app.

3.4.2. Parental engagement in children's education

When asked if the respondents had attended their child's schools for a school celebration or sports event, or to discuss their child's progress with his or her teachers, or attended a school development committee or parent teacher meeting during the past year, 87% of the respondents stated that they had participated in at least one of the three examples mentioned. When looking at each of the examples separately, more parents had attended a school development committee or parent teacher meeting (69%) during the last year than they had attended a school celebration or discussed progress of their child with teachers (55%). Improving parent participation in discussing the progress of their child with teachers is important to strengthen parental engagement in their child's education.

When exploring whether the respondents who had children under the age of 6 years old, had engaged in any of the positive early learning practices at home, it was noted that 80% of the parents told stories to their child with the highest number of fathers (98%) in Central province and highest number of mothers (86%) in Uva province and the lowest in Southern province (69% of mothers). 70% of the parents reported that they played with their child at home and 69% stated that they read books or looked at picture books with their child. The percentage of parents who sang songs to or with their child, including lullabies, was at 60% and those who took their child outside their home was at 57%. The lowest engagement of parents with their child's early learning was in naming, counting or drawing things for or with their child at 34%. These findings indicate that awareness among parents on the importance of creating an early learning environment at home and undertaking all these different activities, especially in improving their engagement in activities involving naming and counting, is critical.

3.4.3. Impact of crisis on education

According to the parents, the biggest challenges in ensuring the attendance of their child(ren) at school during December 2022 – February 2023 were the availability of essential education materials (52%), affordability of education materials (51%) followed by cost of transportation (40%) and lack of or limited transportation (27%). 6% of the parents mentioned the lack of school meals as a challenging factor.

On alternative options for learning outside of online learning or school-based learning, that their child used to catch up with their education, 52% of parents mentioned tuition classes, followed by the use of study packs (30%) and after-school catch-up classes (27%). Only 5% mentioned that their children accessed organized learning centres by estate/ other organization.

3.5. KEY FINDINGS: CLIMATE CHANGE

Tea crops are versatile and can be grown in various climatic conditions. However, specific factors, such as solar radiation, rainfall, temperature, wind, vapour pressure and soil conditions, can affect tea growth. The ideal annual rainfall is between 2500mm and 3000mm, and the optimum temperature range is between 18° and 25°C. Conversely, factors such as poor soil nutrition, high light intensity, soil moisture stress, high vapour pressure and high ambient temperature can decrease the quality and quantity of tea yield.

3.5.1. Climate change effects in tea growing areas of Sri Lanka



Tea plantations in Sri Lanka primarily rely on rainwater for irrigation. Thus, any changes in rainfall or temperature significantly affect tea cultivation. A study¹⁹ in 2008 analysed 140 years of temperature and rainfall data from Ratnapura, Badulla, and Nuwara Eliya, where tea cultivation is prevalent in Sri Lanka. The study found that the rainfall patterns and average and maximum temperature values in these areas have undergone notable changes in recent years. Da Costa's 2008 study highlights the fact that Nuwara Eliya has experienced the most substantial decrease in rainfall, which is 52mm per degree. This region is renowned for growing high-quality tea, and there is extensive tea cultivation in the area.

Currently, the tea-growing districts of Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Kandy, Ratnapura, Galle, Matara, Matale and Kegalle have optimal to moderately suitable conditions for tea cultivation. However, it is predicted that by 2050, there will be a marginal loss of tea cultivation areas in low-altitude areas such as Galle and Matara, while the optimal tea cultivation area will expand in the Central Highlands' Nuwara Eliya and Kandy districts. What this means is that previously identified optimal tea cultivation areas are becoming inoperable and due to changing climatic conditions, previously unsuitable land surface is becoming better for tea cultivation. Therefore the geographic coverage of tea land will shrink in some parts of the country and widen in other parts.

¹⁹ De Costa, W. A. J. M., 'Climate change and tea production: Impacts of climatic variability on tea production and strategies for adaptation', PhD thesis, University of Colombo, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 2008.

3.5.2. Climate change effects on growth and yield of tea



Rainfall levels resulting in flooding and soil erosion, seasonal changes causing droughts or extreme cold weather are all contributing factors to the decline in tea yields globally. According to a study²⁰ in 2020, an increase in ambient CO₂ concentration from the current level of 370ppm to 435ppm is predicted to result in a 16.5% increase in tea yield based on altitude by 2050. It has also been estimated that a decrease of 100mm of monthly rainfall could lead to a 30kg - 80kg reduction in tea productivity per hectare. Projections for 2050 suggest that, due to rising temperatures, tea yields will decrease in the upland intermediate, midland wet, and lowland wet zones, but will increase in the upland wet region. A study²¹ on climate change and tea indicated that one degree increase in average temperature will cause a 4.6% reduction in yields.

3.5.3. Climate change effects on pest disease and proliferation affecting tea



The growth of insect pests and damage to tea leaves is associated with increased rainfall, humidity and temperature. Han's 2018 review¹⁹ reported that tea canker, trips, green leaf beetle and leaf blight in India and China have been increasing due to rising temperatures.

Research²⁰ conducted by Walgama and Zalucki in 2007 found that the optimal environmental temperature for *xyloborus fornicatus*, a pest of tea plantations in Sri Lanka, is 30°C. Consequently, it can be inferred that fluctuations in environmental temperature could promote the growth of this pest.

From the household survey, it was identified that over the last decade, pests that have increased on tea estates include peacocks, and monkeys, while insects, crows, and wild boars have decreased. The prevalence of leeches as a pest has remained consistent over time.

3.5.4. Soil erosion and importance of soil conservation²²



Soil erosion is the movement of soil particles from one location to another location by the force of an external agent. There are three main factors affecting soil erosion, namely:

- 1) Biophysical factors, such as the ability of rain to cause soil erosion, soil's resistance to erosion and location of land.
- 2) Social and economic factors, such as planting in areas prone to soil erosion due to rapid population growth, and
- 3) Factors related to crop and land management, which include failure to follow essential agricultural practices

²⁰ Mohotti, A. J., & Mohotti, K. M. i., 'Impact of elevated CO₂ concentration on tea (*Camellia sinensis* L.) yield and quality: A review', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 2020, pp. 254, 109798.

²¹ Ethical Tea Partnership, 'Climate change and tea', 2021. <Climate_report_web.pdf (ethicalteapartnership.org) >, accessed July 28, 2023

²² Tea Research Institute. Key Informant Interview with Dr. Samantha Jayasinghe. March 2023

Addressing damaged soil or soil infertility requires additional fertilization and maintenance work, which increases the cost of production. What soil erosion basically does is the top layer of soil, which is the more fertile soil that helps plants grow. This reduces soil density and increases water infiltration and soil aeration. Normally, it takes 300 years to produce one inch of top soil. Degradation of this top soil results in reduced productivity and damages to the physical characteristics of the soil. In order to increase soil fertility, chemical properties (pH value, humus and colloids), physical properties (soil texture, soil structure, soil colour, porosity and permeability) and biological properties (soil organisms) should be increased.

3.5.5. Climate change effects on the quality of tea



Tea possesses a unique colour, aroma and taste, which can be impacted by climate change. Higher temperatures lead to a decline in tea quality. The pattern of rainfall also affects the quality of tea. Changes in precipitation result in fluctuations in the triple antioxidant capacity of tea, indicating a decrease in its health benefits as temperatures rise. The early onset of monsoons also contributes to a decrease in the quality of tea harvest due to climate change. However, there is insufficient research on the effects of climate change on the quality aspects of tea in Sri Lanka.

²³ H.W.Shyamalie, M.S.D.L. De Silva, N.Nadeeshani, *Costs and benefits of soil fertility management strategies in tea lands*, Tea Research Institute, 2015

3.5.6. Mitigation and adaptation of the effects on ecosystems

Several “no regret strategies”²⁴ have been implemented for the tea sector in Sri Lanka to adapt to the impact of climate change. These measures aim to reduce the negative effects of climate change on the tea industry.

- Selection of suitable agroecological zones and re-expansion of tea cultivation – the most productive zones, with the right temperature, soil conditions, rainfall etc, that had been previously identified are no longer suitable and other areas are becoming more suitable. Therefore, it would be meaningful to reassess agro-ecological zones, based on suitability in the current context.
- Crop diversification and soil conservation – soil conservation can be both an adaptive and mitigatory measure. Proper soil conservation techniques as opposed to frequent soil tilting would reduce conditions such as flooding.
- Breeding varieties resistant to drought, pests and diseases – promoting the adaptive measures being promoted by Tea Research Institute in breeding varieties that can withstand the changes due to climate change.
- Rainwater harvesting measures – Rainwater harvesting could mitigate the impact on the tea industry due to droughts, reduction of water catchments etc and can help the crop and the people.
- Development of infrastructure such as drainage, irrigation etc. – during floods and other climatic events, it is important to have a good drainage and irrigation system to adapt to the situation and mitigate the effects on the productivity of crops while conserving the soil.
- Streamlining the use of chemical fertilizers – Streamlining and optimizing fertilizer use is important to reduce contamination due to run-off of chemicals through waterways into low-lying areas.
- Establishing afforestation – a mitigatory measure that will improve micro-climate conditions.
- Climate change impact assessment – understanding where we are in terms of the crop and the entire plantation sector so that adaptive measures can be taken accordingly.
- Providing guidance and financing for adaptation to climate change.
- Nature conservation – a mitigatory measure that will contribute towards ensuring that the plantation sector does not contribute towards climate change.
- Establishing national and international networks on climate change – it is important to have platforms for sharing learnings and experiences across companies and countries

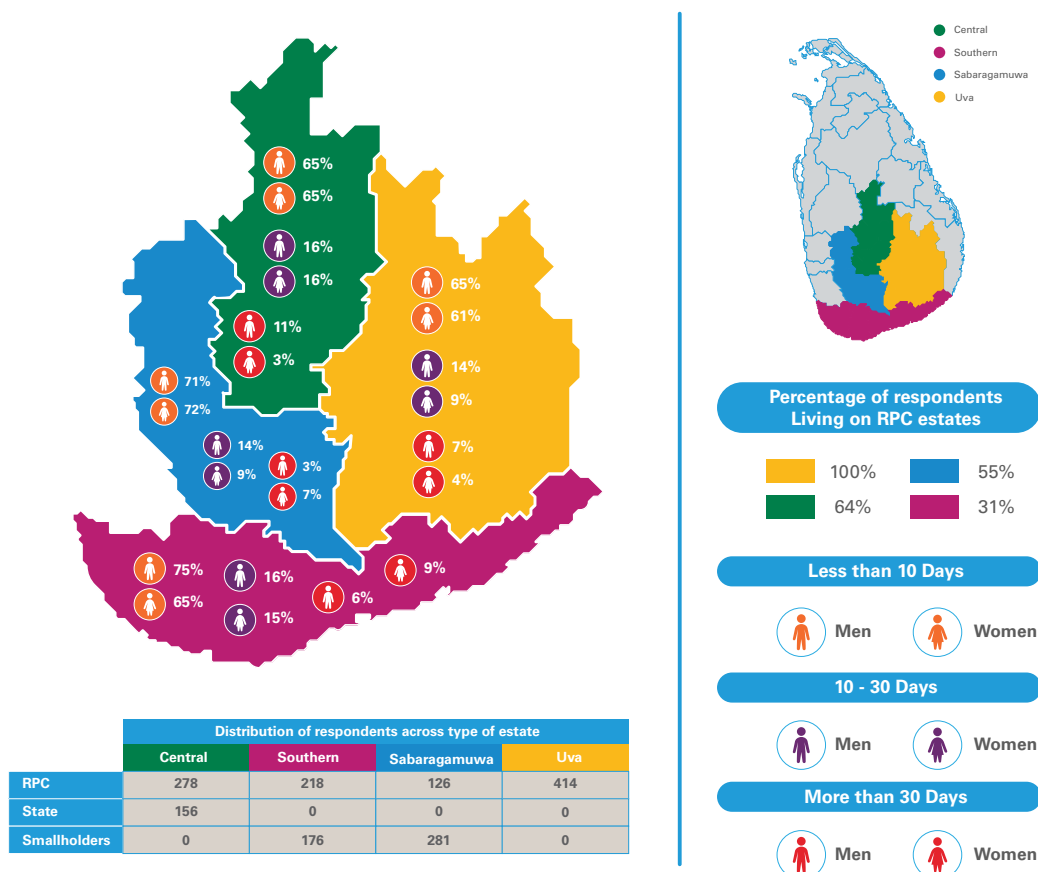
The implementation of both adaptation measures and climate change mitigation strategies is essential in the tea cultivation sector.

²⁴ IPS, *Climate Change Issues in Sri Lanka, 2012*, https://www.ips.lk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Climate-Change-Issues-in-Sri-Lanka-Volume-1_E_Book.pdf, accessed March 2023

3.5.7. Climate change and income

The household survey aimed to explore the impact of climate change on the workdays of respondents, given the adverse weather conditions and decreased yield. The findings revealed that 19% of the 331 respondents (99 men and 211 women) had missed more than 10 days of work in the last year due to adverse weather conditions such as heavy rains, drought or extreme cold weather. Of those affected, 28% (87 respondents – 37 men and 50 women) were compelled to migrate for work. Of this group, 36% migrated temporarily and chose seasonal work (18 men and 13 women), while 6% moved on a long-term basis (two men and three women). Regarding migration destinations, 10% (five men and four women) of those who migrated chose to move within the country, while 30% (14 men and 12 women) migrated outside the country. Additionally, 28% of the respondents who migrated (15 men and 9 women) left their children under the care of their spouses.

Impact of Climate change on Work days (works days missed in a year due to adverse weather conditions)



3.5.8. Climate change and education

Parents, were asked if their child missed school days during the last school year due to adverse weather conditions. 27% said this was not applicable and 60% stated that their child(ren) had missed less than 10 days. For the 13% of parents, whose child(ren) had missed a significant number of school days due to adverse weather conditions, 9% stated their child had missed 10 – 20 days of school, 2% that their child had missed 20 – 30 days of school and another 2% that their child had missed over 30 days of school.

3.5.9. Climate change and displacement

Approximately 1% of the respondents (35 individuals) from all four provinces were impacted by heavy rainfall in the previous year, and a similar number experienced displacement multiple times. The majority of those displaced were only forced to leave their homes for a brief period of one or two days and sought refuge at the homes of relatives until they could return. Only 2% of respondents believed that temporary shelters had sufficient safety measures in place for women and children.

3.5.10. Awareness of climate change adaptation measures of household survey respondents

As the household survey was focused on workers and non-workers on estates, the household survey attempted to identify the climate change adaptation measures undertaken on the estates, through the question on awareness of respondents on the most prevalent forms of adaptation measures undertaken by their estates on climate change issues that they remembered having experienced ten years ago versus the current measures and issues. A key finding from the responses was that most were not aware of the climate change adaptation measures that their respective companies undertook on their estates. Given that climate change does impact children and their families in various ways, this finding was relevant.

When it comes to soil conservation methods, the application of organic fertiliser was the most commonly mentioned technique, followed by the use of leaf manure. However, only 32% of respondents mentioned the use of organic fertiliser, and 13% mentioned leaf manure, indicating either inadequate implementation of soil conservation methods or a lack of awareness among respondents about estate management practices.

Protecting catchments is the main water security measure taken by estate management, according to the respondents. However, the percentage of respondents reporting this measure as being undertaken by the management currently versus a decade ago was 24% and 31%, indicating that either the community was not aware of the measures being undertaken or that such measures had actually reduced over the years. Only 5% of respondents mentioned measures taken to prevent the mixing of agrochemicals with water sources or to remove plastics from water sources.

Open burning of waste and factory smoke were identified as major contributors to air pollution by the respondents. When asked to indicate whether open burning was an issue ten years ago and currently, the number of respondents who cited open burning as a major factor for air pollution reduced from 23% to 18%. Conversely, the percentage of respondents who cited factory smoke contributing to air pollution increased from 15% ten years ago to 22% currently.

According to the respondents, drought (40%), cold weather (21%) and heavy rains (18%) are the top three climate conditions that affect tea production.

Case Study: Bogawantalawa Plantations PLC (BTE)

Bogawantalawa has achieved an 'Uncompensated Climate Positive' status, certification for both their products and facilities. They are the world's first tea company to offer traceable Uncompensated Climate Positive Teas, from the garden to shipping. In addition, the company has also achieved 'Net Zero Energy' status by harnessing renewable energy through solar and hydropower projects, making them the world's first tea growing, manufacturing, and marketing company to be certified for 100% renewables.

Bogawantalawa has made sustainable management of natural resources, ecosystems, and social well-being a core part of its operations, providing ultimate value to its customers and stakeholders.

Carbon Footprint and Climate Actions

In 2021/22, Bogawantalawa made significant efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase resilience to climate-induced impacts on all its estates. The weather conditions are also closely monitored, and internal weather forecasting is based on data collected through numerous digitalised weather stations located in Bogawantalawa Estates. GHG emissions are rigorously monitored and assessed every year to verify and certify their reduction.

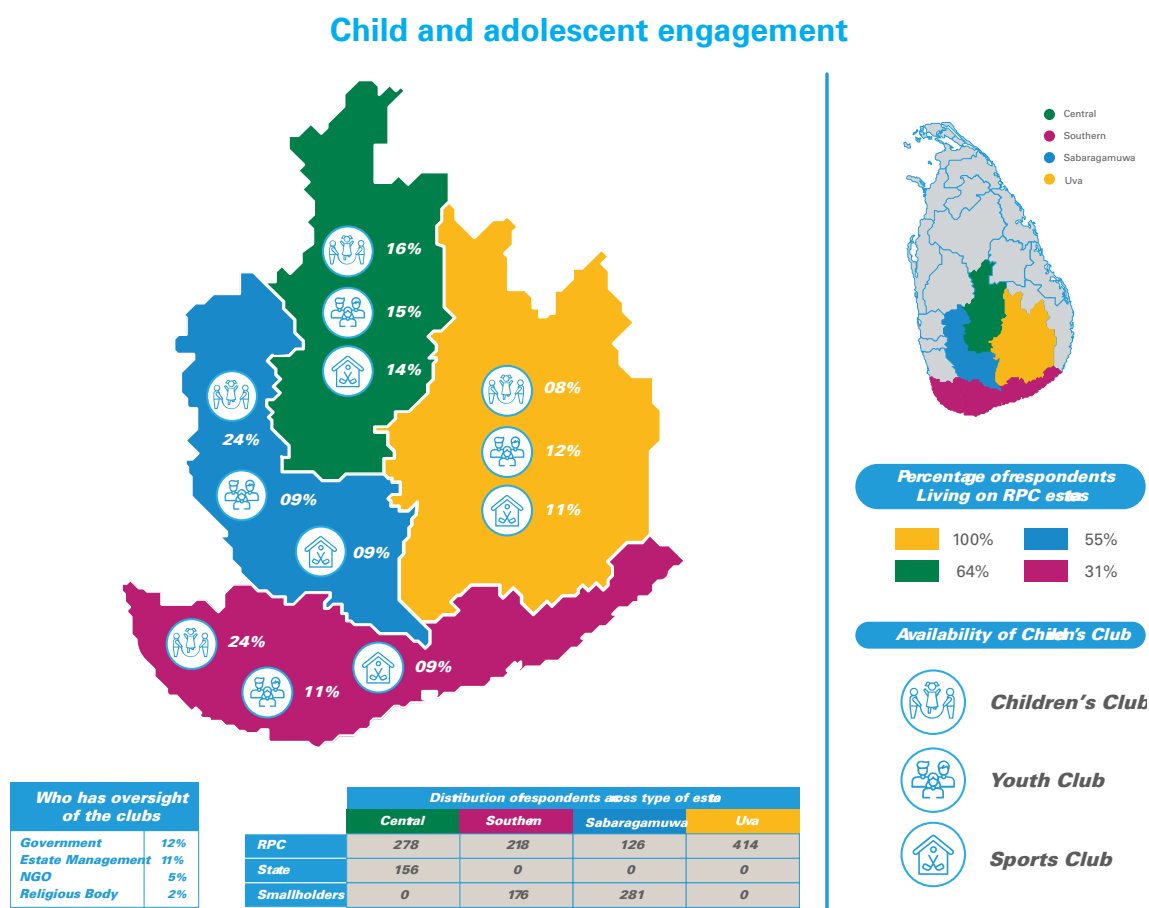
Climate Smart Agriculture

The Climate Smart Agriculture Centre was established to conduct research and development activities related to climate change under the slogan of "Climate Smart Agriculture." The centre monitors and analyses various factors such as weather parameters, solar radiations and intensity, soil parameters, groundwater table, air quality, biodiversity, farming and yields, animal husbandry, forestry, related factors, P&D outbreaks, and weed intensity. The centre conducts various research and development activities to identify methods and practices that can enhance the resiliency of plantations to successfully face the challenges of climate change.

3.6. KEY FINDINGS: COMMUNITY PLATFORMS

3.6.1. Child and adolescent engagement

The survey revealed that 31% of the respondents were aware of the availability of one or more forms of child engagement platforms in their community. Parents in the Southern province were more aware (44%) compared to parents in Uva province (19%) of the child engagement platforms available. This indicates a strong need for awareness raising for parents by relevant government officials on the different child engagement platforms available in estates and villages. The three platforms that the parents stated they were aware of were children’s clubs (18%), youth clubs (12%) and sports clubs (11%).



The participation rates of children in these engagement platforms varied across the provinces. Parents in the Central and Sabaragamuwa provinces (15%) and Southern provinces (16%) reported higher participation rates of their children in children’s clubs, whereas parents in Uva Province reported lower participation rates (5%). The engagement of children in Village Child Development Committees (VCDC) was highest in the Central Province (6%) and lowest in Sabaragamuwa Province (1%).

The Village Child Development Committee (VCDC) guidelines developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs and Social Empowerment require child participation in the committee, so that children are also part of the decision-making on areas that affect them. However, unless the adult members of the committee understand this and provide the space for children to participate, children are often left out of a critical mechanism to enable their voice and participation in decision-making. This is one of the reasons contributing to the low participation rates of children in VCDCs, identified in the survey findings. The VCDC guidelines clearly state that child representatives need to be part of the committee. However, this requirement is not mandatorily adhered to in all VCDCs around the country.

Engagement of children in youth clubs and sports clubs was highest in the Central Province, with 11% and 14% respectively, followed by Uva Province with 10% and 13% respectively. Engagement in youth clubs was less than 5% in the Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces.

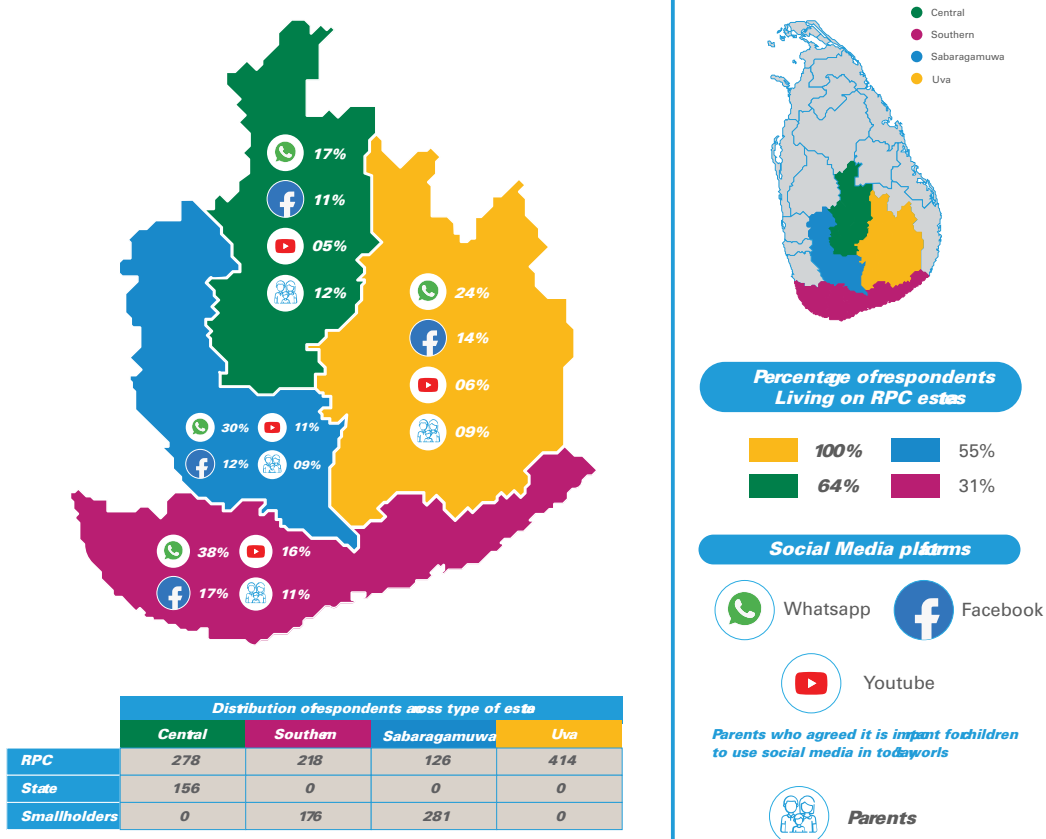
The Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment established 994 children's clubs in the Kandy and Nuwara Eliya districts. However, only 16% of parents in the Central Province reported the availability of a children's club in their estate or village, indicating that there is a need for creating and sustaining more such platforms; and improving awareness about the available platforms.

The responses from the survey also found that government departments (12%) and estate management (11%) were running some of these child engagement platforms, while 9% were informally functioning. Fewer than 5% of parents mentioned that NGOs and religious bodies ran some of these platforms. The remaining respondents were not aware of who had oversight of these platforms.

Out of the 25% of the parents who perceived child engagement platforms as moderately or very useful, 6% of parents stated that it was because child engagement platforms contributed towards their child's learning, 6% that it enabled their child to make a contribution to the society and another 6% that it was because their child was productively engaged during that time. Out of the 12% of the parents who perceived the child engagement platforms as of no use or slightly useful, 7% felt that it was because the child engagement platform did not significantly contribute towards their child's education.

According to the survey, only 29% of parents from all four provinces reported that their children regularly use social media. The highest percentage of parents were identified in the Southern Province at 42%, while the lowest was in the Central Province at 17%. Among the 474 parents who reported that their children use social media, the most popular platforms were WhatsApp (27%), Facebook (13%) and YouTube (10%). In terms of usage duration, 31% of these parents reported that their children spent around half an hour to one hour daily on social media, while 23% stated that their children spent one to two hours.

Top three Social media Platforms accessed by Children



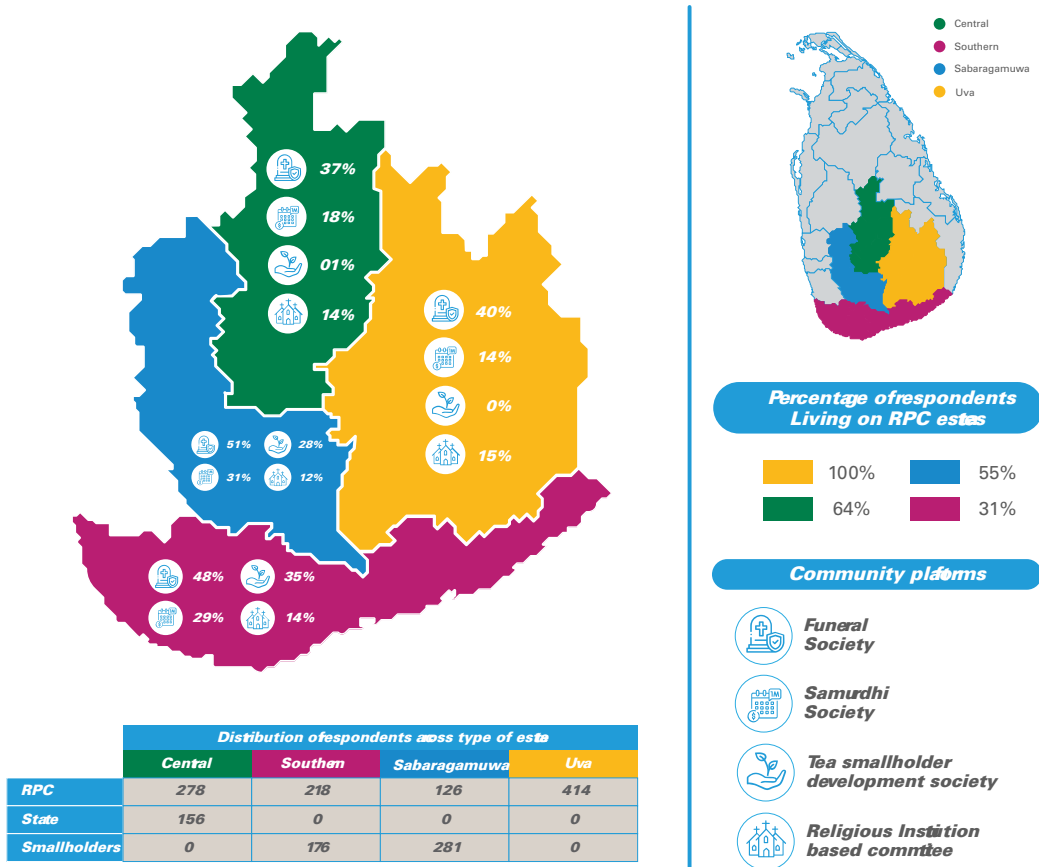
Of the 68% of parents (1,128 parents) across all four provinces who reported that their children do not regularly use social media, the primary reason given was that their children were too young (36%), followed by the lack of a device to access social media platforms (32%). Another significant factor contributing to the low use of social media by children was the perception among parents that it is not important for their children to use social media, with only 10% of parents from all four provinces agreeing that it is actually important.

3.6.2. Community engagement

59% (979) of respondents reported the presence of some type of community engagement platform on their estates or villages. The platforms that most respondents stated as available across all four provinces was the informal funeral society or the death donation society (44% of respondents), followed by the Samurdhi society (23% of respondents). In the Southern Province, the second most stated community engagement platform was the tea smallholder society (35%).

While 59% of respondents were aware about the availability of some form of community engagement platforms, few of them reported they were members of these platforms. 27% of respondents stated they were members of the funeral society followed by 14% who were members of the tea smallholder society and 12% of the Samurdhi society.

Availability of Community platforms



While 3% of the respondents mentioned they were members of the women’s society, no respondent stated they were members of the mother support groups, which is one of the key community health engagement platforms used by government health officials.

Of the respondents who stated that they were members of at least one type of community engagement platform, 17% stated that the platforms were of little or no use and 31% that the platforms were moderate or very useful. The respondents from the Southern province (42%) and Sabaragamuwa province (38%) found the platforms useful compared to respondents in Central province (19%) and Uva province (20%).

Respondents mentioned receiving materials and benefits (20%), joint action to address priority issues (13%), and gaining knowledge and skills (11%) as the top three reasons to engage community platforms.

The main reasons respondents cited as barriers to joining the various community engagement platforms were the membership fee (18%), fraud and misuse of resources (15%), and the lack of connection to government and systems (13%). Another 12% said they were unaware of the existence of such platforms.

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CONCLUSION

The socio-economic conditions affecting workers in tea estates are influenced by several core issues, including the need for a decent living wage, access to safe housing and land rights, safe drinking water, climate change adaptation and awareness, and non-violent child disciplining methods. Given that access to quality education, health and nutrition etc of children are closely linked to the parent's capacity to earn an income sufficient for decent living, it is relevant for companies to identify and analyse drivers of child rights risks and explore options that they can work with other stakeholders towards addressing them.

Based on the household survey, key areas that need to be addressed by companies in collaboration with government and other key stakeholders are the following:



(1) Minimum wages are not sufficient for decent living:

The findings highlight the need for companies (RPC and State) as well as global buyers and retailers to undertake a joint living wage analysis, that ensures that tea pricing enables workers and their families to have a monthly household per capita income that enables decent living.



(2) Social Protection:

During the last three months prior to the survey held in March 2023, 39% of respondents had received some kind of social transfer or benefit from the government and the analysis suggests that many respondents remain excluded.

Considering the respondents perceived their weak linkage with the Grama Niladhari as the key barrier in their inability to access government services and benefits, it is important to work with the Divisional Administrative offices in streamlining and increasing Grama Niladhari's visibility and interaction with the estate communities.

Tea communities, as all citizens, would benefit from the introduction of a national social protection floor that provides basic income security to all children, people with disabilities and older persons, as one building block of social protection system that provides comprehensive and adequate social protection to all.



(3) WASH:

Given that the household survey identified that 35% of households across the surveyed provinces consider straining through cloth to be an appropriate water treatment method, there is a need for hygiene promotion and general awareness around hygiene, for example hand hygiene, appropriate water treatment methods for drinking water etc.

Considering access to latrines in the workplace, the household survey found that this is a critical area that needs to be addressed by the companies as there is a significant gap in the availability and access of latrines in working conditions at the place of work. Not only is there a need to have guidelines for plantation companies on occupational safety and health standards, which include the minimum sanitation requirements, but there needs to be a mechanism to ensure compliance..

It is important that there is a process set up for defining industry-wide standards for the provision of adequate water and sanitation for workers in the fields. ILO is currently in the process of initiating this. It would be meaningful to have child focused organizations participate in this discussion.

(4) Education:



While parents reported that 96% of their children in the CDC/ pre-school, primary and secondary levels of education were in school, they did report that regular attendance was not at the same levels of enrollment.

Regarding early childhood education at learning centres (CDCs or pre-schools), 80% of the parents stated that 80% of their children were attending the centres regularly. Given that 23% of parents had chosen not to respond to the frequency of attendance question, it can be assumed that the percentage of regular attendance is much lower.

At the primary school education level, 90% of the parents who responded to the frequency of attendance stated that 74% of their children were attending school regularly. Across provinces, the attendance rates were reported as 80% in Sabaragamuwa and Southern provinces, while it was lower at 73% and 65% in Central and Uva provinces.

The regular attendance of students in secondary school across the four provinces is at 72% on average. However, the Central and Uva provinces have the lowest regular attendance rates at 65% and 66%, respectively. Irregular attendance in schools, especially at the secondary school level, has increased in the last few years.

A key finding from the survey data analysis is that while there is no significant correlation between monthly household income and school attendance, there is a positive correlation between number of children in the household and irregular attendance. This finding supports the observation by education officials at the Ministry of Education and Zonal offices, that there was an increase in irregular attendance due to the economic crisis and there were examples of parents sending children to school on a rotation basis, as they could not afford cost of transport and other education expenses for all children.

It is important to facilitate the private and public sectors to jointly work on addressing the causes of this irregular attendance, which mainly stems from poverty.

While 87% of parents stated that they had participated in some form of engagement with their child's school during the last school year, fewer parents had engaged with the teachers to discuss progress of their children or attend a school celebration or event (55%) than they had participated in a school development committee meeting or a parent committee meeting (69%). Increasing engagement of parents with their child's schools needs to be explored by the school officials.

When considering parental engagement with their child's early learning at home, while 80% of the parents mentioned that they told stories to their child, only 34% stated that they engaged in activities such as naming or counting for or with their child. Awareness on the criticality of parent's engagement in their child's early learning at home and the impact it has on their child's performance subsequently at school and later life needs to be raised among parents.



(5) Child Protection:

Physical punishment was the second most popular disciplining method at home, with 21% of parents with children under six years and 25% with children from 6 and 11 years using it. However, only 3% of parents with children under 6 years and 5% of parents with children from 6 and 17 years used severe physical punishment as a disciplining method. Parents who used psychological aggression as a disciplining method were between 6% (under 6 years) and 9% (12 – 17 years).

To improve direct child well-being in the four provinces, discouraging the use of corporal punishment and promoting non-violent disciplining for parents and school officials is crucial.



(6) Child and Community engagement:

According to the survey, the child engagement platforms identified by the parents were very limited. Children's clubs were the most available engagement platform (18%), followed by youth clubs (12%) and sports clubs (11%). Village child development committees were also mentioned by 4% of the parents.

While the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment states that there is sufficient number of children's clubs in the four provinces considered for this study, their monitoring mechanism to assess the functionality needs to be further strengthened. According to the KIs, this is an area that the Department of Probation and Child Care Services needs support with. Ensuring that the children's clubs are connected with the Divisional, District, Provincial and National Child Development Committees is important to ensure that children's voices are being heard and acted upon by the relevant government authorities.

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One of the main reason respondents stated they were not members of some of the community platforms was that they were not aware of their existence in their estates or villages. Finding a way to facilitate connection between community platforms across estates to share knowledge and practices is important.

(7) Climate Change



The negative impact of land degradation cannot be seen in the short term. As a result, there is little awareness among the cultivators about the economic damage caused. The environmental, economic and social damage caused by land degradation is immense but not enough data is available to give it a proper monetary value. There is also a lack of sufficient labour to adopt soil conservation strategies, due to labour shortage. Further, companies face an inability to invest in recommended soil conservation strategies due to financial constraints.

It is clear that the proper adoption of soil conservation methods in tea lands is very important for the sustainability of the tea industry. In addition, the benefits of adopting soil conservation strategies outweigh the costs.

Therefore, there is a need for collaborative action to prioritize target setting for climate change adaptation measures and work collectively towards them. There is particularly a need for an entity that can facilitate this by bringing together the Tea Research Institute (TRI), Climate Change Secretariat, Planters Association of Ceylon, Tea Smallholder Federation, Ministry of Plantation Industries and Ceylon Tea Roadmap Strategy group.

There is also a need for climate change education and resilience building among communities. Engaging youth clubs and children's clubs will help develop next generation readiness to adopt climate change adaptation measures.




In conclusion, despite some good initiatives taken by government departments and companies to improve the socio-economic conditions of women and children on tea estates, these initiatives are still limited and need to be scaled up through a collaborative process involving key stakeholders.

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