

SRI LANKA

COUNTRY PROFILE

Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon, is an island nation in the Indian Ocean, separated from India by a narrow strait. Most of the population live in the southwest and centre of the island. Sinhala and Tamil are the two national languages, while English is widely used in urban areas.

History

Between 1505 and 1948, the island was invaded in turn by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British: they were interested first in spices and later in plantation crops such as tea and rubber. Independence from the British was gained peacefully in 1948, and the name “Sri Lanka” meaning “resplendent island” was adopted formally in 1972. Sadly, there has been considerable conflict in recent years involving militant groups of Sinhalese and Tamils. Each side has grievances about educational and job opportunities and other forms of discrimination. Efforts to achieve lasting peace have so far failed, and violence continues to destroy lives and property, particularly in the north.

Background information

Since 1983, the sporadic violence between the Sinhala and Tamil (LTTE) secessionists have affected 400,000 families and 487,000 children were victims of war. The unemployment rate of labour force is 9.7% while the inflation rate is 15.9%. Though the GNP per capita is US\$823, however a sizeable population is living under the poverty line (family income of less than US\$300 per year)

Most children are immunised against killer diseases (measles, polio, TB, etc) and survive past the age of five, but many still suffer from malnutrition and from illnesses linked to contaminated water or poor sanitation. A national programme provided many households with safe drinking water, but by 1991 more than one-third of rural families still had not been reached. Current statistics also reveal that there are about 10,000 street children.

Many rural families live in wattle and daub homes thatched with coconut grass. In spite of government housing programme, there is still a shortage of satisfactory housing for the poor: entire families may live in

a single room, or several in a subdivided run-down house.

More than one-quarter of the population did not complete elementary education, and half of the population have primary education. Children often drop out or miss school because their help is needed at home or in the fields. Schools in isolated or low-income areas tend to be under-staffed and ill-equipped, and schools and universities have been closed from time to time due to conflict. Sadly, even those students who complete their education have difficulty finding jobs.

Economy

The policies adopted by the government during the first three decades after independence did not serve them well. The restrictive impact that the policies had on domestic capital accumulation retarded economic growth, leading not only to soaring unemployment but also to the persistence of low incomes. Industry, starved of imported inputs and foreign investment and often mismanaged under state control, failed to achieve acceptable standards of product quality or remain commercially viable. The policy focus on import-substitution also meant the relative neglect of plantation agriculture even though the economy was hardly equipped with the infrastructure to undertake the production of more complex products.

Sri Lanka is one of the 39 low income countries of the world and it is also one of the 45 countries considered by the UN to be “Most Seriously Affected” by recent adverse conditions. The economy is agriculture-based. Sri Lanka also promotes tourism which brings in much needed revenue. However during the past few years, tourism was adversely affected because of unsettled conditions in the country.



SUMMER ISLAND

COMMUNITY PROFILE
Project 175163

The child that you are sponsoring lives in **Moneragala** which is located in the Uva Province, some 205 km from Colombo, the capital of Sri Lanka.

The community was formed a few decades ago when the villagers living nearby encroached on the land for cultivation. Today, the Sinhalese families living there still depend on the land for living. They tilled the land using the “slash and burn” method which is detrimental to the environment. The yield from the harvest is low due to insufficient rainfall since the village lies in the “Dry Zone” area. To make ends meet, the villagers work as manual labourers at the surrounding sugar cane fields.

In **2000**, World Vision partnered with the local village and authority to form the **Summer Island Area Development Project**. The project focused on the development of child, family and community through education, health and income generation activities. By year **2010**, the project aims to ensure that there is at least a steady wage earner in every family and the community will be **self-reliant** without depending on outside help.

The following goals are set by the project with the aim of achieving self-reliance by year 2010 :

Education

Although education is free up to university level, the children are unable to benefit from this scheme due to the high cost of books and uniforms which they cannot afford. At the same time, both parents are working and they would prefer the older children to stay at home to look after the younger siblings.

The project seeks to provide the children with the opportunity to go to school by providing educational subsidies like uniforms and books, and implementing pre-school programmes for the children. The project also seeks to provide literacy programs for the adults.

Health & Sanitation

The lack of water in this area is a great concern. The project seeks to implement several ‘water pumping stations’, construct an irrigation system and restore existing small reservoirs and build wells to improve the accessibility to water. Health education and intervention programs will be carried out, to reduce the occurrence of malaria and diseases. The project plans to improve the health infrastructure and build sanitary latrines.

Income Generating Activities

Over 76% of the population in Summer Island, earn an income of less than US\$40 per month. As part of the project’s goal to ensure that each family has a steady wage earner by year 2010, the farmers are given access to a low interest revolving loan. They can make use of the loan to start a small business or participate in animal husbandry/agriculture trainings. Once the loan is repaid, it is lent to another farmer.

A Ray of Hope

W.M Ariyasena is a farmer whose vegetable cultivation has been badly affected by the severe heat and water shortage that has persisted for the past 9 months. Being a father of 3 children, his greatest worry is the ability to meet their schooling needs. He works as a labourer on days when he is needed. There are days that Ariyasena and his wife have to forego their meals in order to feed their children. Ariyasena and his family who are residing in Summer Island, will benefit from the Area Development Project.

There are many other families that are going through the same plight. You can choose to make a difference in their lives.



Ariyasena and family in front of their mud and wattle house