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WOMEN AS FOOD SELLERS IN THE INFORMAL
SECTOR OF THE CITY OF COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

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One should perhaps open this study with a formal definition of the 'informal sector' in the context of the global restructuring of production. The 'informal sector' in the production system is that which is neither the waged sector, statutorily regulated by national governments in regard to conditions of employment and remuneration on one hand, nor the household sector on the other. Unlike the household sector which is concerned with the sustenance of the households of waged employees, the informal sector is a direct component of the production network. The role of the informal sector is to enable employers to circumvent labour legislation, keep labour costs low by-passing the statutory wage floors, minimise competitive risks and avoid the threat of unionisation (Portes and Sassen Koob, 1987).

The context of global restructuring, which refers to the emergence of the global production system in which research and management are controlled by the core or developed countries while assembly line work is relegated to the semi-peripheral and peripheral nations that occupy less privileged positions in the global economy (Ward, 1990), becomes relevant to this study because it is also characterised by 'increasing use of female industrial workers in the informal sector' (Ward 1990) and also because in this context one of the activities in which women in the informal sector engage in is 'petty food production and other services catering to urban workers and domestic services' (Sen and Grown, 1987). Petty food production caters to urban workers, white-collar as well as blue-collar, and is thus an important link in the production network. It also releases women in the low middle class white collar households for employment, relieving them of at least part of their cooking chores. As now redefined, work includes housework and informal sector work; petty food production thus has a definite place and role in the productive system.

A word on the rationale for this study is in order. Studies on sexual differentiation in the informal sector, the world over, have revealed female participation rates in informal sector economic activities to be higher than male participation rates (Arizpe, 1977). In many countries, however, labour participation statistics pertaining to the informal sector, particularly those regarding to female participation, are not readily available. Consequently the activities of women in the informal sector have largely remained 'invisible'. In-depth studies on these women and their economic activities in the informal sector are required to obtain any meaningful idea of the activities of women in the informal sector and their role in the production system. This study purports to be one such. It is an in-depth micro analysis of the position of women in small food enterprises in the city of Colombo. The study therefore, needs no apology, the theme being one in which little research has hitherto been done. The only major study available, to date, on the informal sector of Colombo City is largely a survey analysis of the sector at the macro-level with passing reference to women's participation (Marga, 1979). Micro-level analyses of women in selected activities in the informal sector of Colombo City are almost non-existent. This study which illustrates the significance of providing direct assistance to poor women engaged in the informal sector (McKee, 1989), therefore, besides filling this lacuna, should prove useful to planners and policy makers at a time when the Sri Lankan Government has begun to recognize women's affairs and issues as a matter of highest priority.

Women constitute approximately fifty percent of the adult population in the informal sector of Colombo. These women, as others in the informal sector of Colombo, reside largely in concentrations of low income communities, referred to as 'slums' and 'shanties' that dot the peripheral areas of the Colombo Metropolitan region. A significant number of them are engaged in some form of economic activity, either as the sole or primary breadwinners or as supplementary breadwinners along with their spouses/chief householders. Among the different occupations of women discernible within the informal sector of Colombo city, food processing enterprise seems a popular choice and a useful survival strategy adopted by women. Thus in focusing on food processing, this study is addressing a significant economic activity. The main objectives of this research paper are: to identify the factors which impel these women to initiate such ventures; to identify the sources of capital/credit for these activities; to assess the quality and quantity of labour involved; to identify the social and economic constraints encountered by these women; and to suggest different strategies to improve these ventures.

1.1 Methodology

The study is based on data obtained from 100 respondents vending cooked food from small/micro level food processing enterprises run by women in six selected low-income communities called slum/shanties (see table 1.1). The proportion of respondents from each sample area was determined by the size of the slums/shanty. The enterprises are small in scale with less than five workers (most with two or one) and with an initial capital investment of less than Rs.100/ (equivalent of U.S.\$ 2.50). Three different types of households involving women were identified in these localities: ventures run by female headed households, by women with unemployed husbands/males and by women supplementing men's income. Initially a pilot survey was undertaken to ascertain the areas within the low income communities wherein women were engaged in food processing as an economic activity. Six of these slum/shanty regions, namely Kirulapone, Shanthi Canal, Colombo North, Modera, Wanathamulla and Colombo 02 were selected for detailed study on the basis of there being larger concentrations of women involved in food processing. As indicated in fig. 1.1 and fig. 1.2 five of these areas are located in the northern, eastern, and south eastern peripheral regions of Colombo city with one located in the interior. The percentage of the samples used in each study area was determined by dividing the total sample of 100 proportionately on the basis of the size of the low income communities selected for study (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1 indicates that twenty three of the selected sample families have lived in their present dwellings continuously. Thirty four of the families however, have moved into these areas between 1970-80 and another forty three between 1980-90. This trend indirectly reflects the rapid expansion of the slums and shanties in and around Colombo during this period, an expansion which brought in its wake severe competition for survival activities/strategies among the poor and the disadvantaged. This growth had occurred apparently through transmigration of the low income population from other less convenient or isolated low income

communities within the city of Colombo and through the influx of people from outside the city limits. The heavy congestion in these areas is also brought out by the average floor spaces of these households(see table 1.2).

Information on these women and their ventures was obtained through questionnaires and field observations. Informal dialogues were also conducted to elicit more details from the three types of women food processors selected. Field observations on the conditions of their immediate environments were made to assess the health and sanitation constraints encountered by these women.

2.1 The Informal Sector of Colombo City

The growth and expansion of the city of Colombo occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century, although its beginnings can be traced to the period of Arab traders. During the last century the area of the city grew by 51.5 % while the population increased by more than 500 %. This disproportionate growth occurred with the development of the import-export trade related to plantation agriculture and the subsequent industrial development since the World War II period. Density of population increased rapidly. The core areas in the city became highly congested and the city elite migrated towards the suburbs. This process continued for a number of years with the inner commercial hub expanding rapidly. Besides the redistribution of the urban population, the influx of the rural people, though not as marked as in many other countries of the developing world, contributed to the congestion in the city. As a result, pockets of low income communities grew, some in the heart of Colombo city, while the others, larger in size, grew along the peripheral zones of the city.

The distribution of residential localities in the city of Colombo and the residential patterns in these localities reflects the social stratification of the urban community. Fig.1.2 indicates the residential patterns on the basis of the predominant type found in each of the municipal wards of the city of Colombo. Some of the wards with predominantly middle class residential types, however, have small concentrations of low income communities owing to certain physical factors that favour such settlements such as a canal.

The informal sector population of Colombo city is largely concentrated in the areas demarcated as slums/shanties and tenements. The tenement type of housing is found largely in the older quarters of the city where the older Dutch/Moor style large residential areas were located. These old buildings have been converted into small residential units, often with one room per family and with common water and toilet facilities. This mosaic of old dilapidated buildings that once housed the city elite, now converted into tenements of varied types, reflects the different stages of transformation which the city has undergone (Marga, 1979).

The shanty/slum type of residential units of the informal sector workers are a post World War II phenomenon. During the War when fire gaps were created in the city, some of the low income households were displaced. These displaced

occupants moved to the marshy, water-logged areas in the northern, eastern and south-eastern edges of the city (see figs 1.1 and 1.2) and built their temporary houses of cadjan, wood, tin and other materials that were available in the locality. As these swampy, low-lying marginal areas were not suitable for housing and other purposes of the government and the private sectors, these low-income communities were able to continue to remain and survive in these difficult environments.

They continue to live there without any legal entitlement to the land nor official recognition by the Colombo Municipal Council or the state. Therefore they do not have access to any basic amenities provided by the Colombo Municipality such as electricity, sewerage or, in some localities, even water. They depend on public water taps and latrines and in areas nearer the river, use the river for bathing and other purposes. Those who live near canal banks, use the canals as drainage and sewerage facilities.

The major categories of economic activities that the people in the informal sector of Colombo city are involved in include trade, commerce, processing of different types, services, transport and construction. Approximately 36,000 people (NHDA, 1988-89) from the low income communities are estimated to be employed in the informal sector, more than half of them women employed in categories such as garment making, as sales assistants in shops, as sellers of processed food and other handicrafts. Some of these women also earn by offering their services as domestic helpers in nearby middle class households. Women who do not possess any trade related skills or talents, and even those who have some skill or talent but do not have the resources to initiate such ventures, survive by being sellers/servants catering to the needs of the urban population, as in other developing countries (Bunster & Chaney, 1985).

As in many third world countries (Drakakis-Smith, 1987), women in the informal sector of Colombo city engage in activities within or near their homes and they tend to be closely associated with routine domestic activities such as the preparation of food & drink, cleaning, washing, serving, childcare or sexual service. This domestic location of much of the economic activities of women in the informal sector is considered to provide greater access to income generating activities as opposed to those in the formal sector. Although being tied to the home as mothers and housewives renders women far less flexible and mobile than men, in effect, this domestic location nevertheless enables them to tailor their reproductive labour load to a household-based activity more than activities otherwise located (Gilbert & Gugler, 1982).

Within the informal sector in Colombo city, however, there seems to be a manifestation of the sexual division of labour with women not only being confined to certain types of jobs, particularly those that are household based or associated with their traditional domestic skills, but also ones with lower status and lower income.

Informal sector women in Colombo, on the whole, have demonstrated considerable resilience and imagination in coping with urban poverty. They were found to utilize their available time and labour to the full to earn an income, though meagre, yet nevertheless one which helps to maintain their families at least at the subsistence level.

3.1 Food Processing as a Survival Strategy

With limited skills, few social contacts, and low educational levels the women selected for study continue to exist as 'invisibles' within the marginal population of Colombo city, with little or no hope of entering the formal occupational sector of the metropolitan region. Nearly all women interviewed stated that they chose food processing and selling as it was the only 'respectable' survival strategy that they could opt for because of their responsibilities for child care. None of them, however, belonged to the poorest of the poor because they had some basic resource to initiate such ventures. Yet a considerable number of them remain barely above the poverty/starvation line. Almost sixteen percent of these ventures run by the three groups of women were begun before 1970, forty four percent between 1970-80 and forty percent between 1980-90. The increase in the percentage of women involved in food processing in the informal sector from 1970 onwards could be attributed to two factors, namely the rising cost of living and the influx of more women with their families into the city during the '80 s (see table 3.1).

Analysis of statistics on the labour input in these food trades run by women, reveals that the number of households with less than three females participating in food vending was larger than those with higher numbers participating (see table 3.2). Almost the entire sample of the households headed by females working alone or assisted by daughters/mother/grandmother/female relative and some households from the other two types of households wherein the wives of the chief householder were working alone or assisted by their daughters/mother/female relative fell into this category. The hours of work per day spent by these women also varied among and within the different groups of households. The time spent varied from less than five hours to nearly ten to twelve hours (see table 3.2). The lack of proper and adequate number of cooking utensils and cooking spaces seemed to have added to the hours of labour input by these women.

A closer look at the factors that impelled these women to venture into the food processing enterprise revealed that they varied from the need to find strategies for basic survival to earning additional sums to meet the needs of the family. The incentive provided by the Janasaviya program also encouraged some to venture out into these enterprises (see table 3.3). This program is a people oriented effort initiated by the state to encourage self employment projects among the poor. A limited sum of money was disbursed as a loan to the poor who proved to be enterprising enough to initiate a self employment projects. Under this scheme each eligible family is given dry rations and other consumables such as school exercise books from the co-operatives to the value of Rs.1420/- per month. In addition Rs.1080/- per month is deposited in a savings account for the family. Since a family

will get this assistance for two years at the end of the period the total in the savings account is expected to be Rs.25,000/-. With this account as security the family could obtain loans up to Rs.25,000/- for productive enterprises.

3.1.1 Food Processing and Women-Headed Households

Of the selected total of thirty seven females heading households involved in cooking and selling food, six women lost their husbands while the rest, barring the two who had disabled men, have become female heads of their households as a result of being victims and casualties of male chauvinism. Battering of women, drunkenness, desertion, and dual relationships have been the main reasons. It is customary in these communities for men and women to live together without getting legally married. This custom and the 'machismo' attitude of the men have led to several social problems aggravating the situation of these women. Among these women only twenty one had completed education up to the primary level, two up to grade six and seven, while the rest were barely literate (see table 3.1.1). These women who have limited resources have ventured into the food business to survive. Except for those who obtained support under the Janasaviya scheme, the rest began their enterprises with help in cash and kind from relatives and neighbours/friends(see table 5.1). Thereafter they have depended on the credit facilities afforded by the small boutique keepers in the neighbourhood. These women bought the basic requirements for their trade from these boutiques on credit, to be returned either on a weekly basis or on the basis of an agreement reached between the boutique owner and the woman. Quite often an interest rate ranging from ten to fifteen percent was charged on the credit given.

Women who had grown up daughters, a total of twelve in number in the sample selected, were able to obtain their assistance in the actual preparation of the food items. Nearly all of them obtained the help of their younger children in fetching cooking material from nearby boutiques, water from the nearby public taps, wells or river, and fuelwood either from the neighbourhood or from the nearest timber stores.

3.1.2. Women entrepreneurs(with unemployed males)

Within the sample selected a total of forty seven women with unemployed husbands were found to be in charge of food processing units. With the unemployment levels increasing rapidly in the country, particularly in the Colombo metropolitan area, the males from the informal sector find employment opportunities hard to come by, particularly with their limited education and skills. Most of them manage to obtain only casual/temporary employment for short periods, otherwise staying unemployed. Some of these idling men have become addicted to liquor/drugs because of frustration and depression. The women are, therefore, impelled to work out their own strategies to survive. And one such popular strategy is cooking and selling food items (see table 3.1.2).

Women in this category were more educated than the females heading households, with twenty three of them educated beyond the primary level. These women too have depended on the assistance given by relatives and friends (see table 5.1). The survival of some women and their families in this group has been made difficult by the alcohol/drug addicted husbands/males. These men often fleece the women of their small earnings to buy their alcohol/drugs. Thirty of these forty seven women, however, appeared to be obtaining some assistance from the husbands/males in the households, though a considerable number of men indulged in the consumption of liquor in the evenings which frequently interfered with the food selling trade run by the women. Some men seemed to provide the physical help required in procuring the cooking material, while the water and fuel wood requirements were seen to be by the children and the woman herself. Some of these males also assisted the women in the sales of the cooked food, either by taking the food to nearby market locations or shops. The social network maintained by the men assisted the women in locating possible outlets for their cooked food. In this context, some women confessed to problems created by their men collecting the payments and cash advances from the buyers without their knowledge to spend on their liquor/drugs.

3.1.3 Women Entrepreneurs(supplementing male's income)

Sixteen of the women interviewed had earning male partners(see table 3.1.3). The men, however, brought in limited sums of money ranging from Rs.200/ - Rs.400/ per month, a sum woefully inadequate for a single person to survive a month. Unable to withstand the consequent deprivation and starvation, these females were quick enough to initiate the cooking and selling enterprise, as it was an extension of their domestic chores and also fed their family. Initially they encountered several constraints which were largely related to capital and market. According to these women respondents, several other women too had made such attempts, but to no avail. Some of them, according to them, had turned to other avenues like prostitution and drug peddling for survival.

The women selected for study were able to overcome the initial difficulties with assistance from relatives, neighbors and friends, as in the other groups. Unlike the women from the first two categories studied here, these women had the small income brought in by their male partners to rely on during difficult periods. Ten of the women interviewed had children in the age group of 10-18 and the female children in particular provided all types of assistance to the mother. Among the three groups of women, the food sellers in Kirulapone fared better.

4.1 Food Processing and Sales

The most popular item processed and sold by many of the women in all three groups was food parcels, mainly lunch packets. These contained rice and a few curries. The number of curries included in the packets varied among the parcels prepared by the different groups. The normal menu was rice with one non-vegetarian and two vegetarian curries. The poorer women within each group could

sell only vegetarian lunch packets, the reason being the lower cost of production per packet.

Women in all three categories began the day by collecting water from the nearby public water taps, wells or river. Thereafter, they purchased the vegetables, fish/dry fish and other requirements. A number of these women, however, collected the vegetables on the previous evening by making prior arrangement with the vegetable vendor nearby to collect the left over vegetables at the end of the day at cheaper rates. Some women in these communities, particularly in Colombo North and Modera areas, were enterprising enough to grow some of the vegetables required, though in limited quantities, in the marshy areas nearby. Most of these women food sellers used mainly the cheaper varieties of vegetables, namely, green leaves, brinjals (aubergines), ash plantains and pumpkins. Women whose husbands/males sold green leaves in the market place used the left over bundles of green leaves brought in by them. Rice, dry fish and other dry ingredients required for the cooking were normally purchased on credit by these women, daily by some and weekly by others, from the boutique keeper and owners of market stalls nearby. The fresh fish used, often small fish, is purchased the same day. Some women use eggs occasionally.

Practically all the women in the three categories parcelled their cooked food to be sold at different locations nearby. A few of the women took their parcels to places near offices, schools and market places to be sold to the large numbers of commuters who flow into the city daily. Forty percent of the total number of women food sellers have secured steady sales points in boutiques/small eating houses/hotels and offices. Until they had a firm grip of the clientele, they confessed, the sales were not at all encouraging. Some of them went through periods during which they ceased selling cooked food as they could not cope with the meagre income derived from very limited sales. Some of the women were forced to dispose of the few valuables they had, by selling or pawning, to tide over the difficult days. By comparison, those who had secured steady sales points were able to improve the quality of their food parcels over time, with cash advances received from the small boutiques/hotels and offices. A small percent of these women were also able to cater for special occasions in offices by providing additional meal packets occasionally.

Stringhoppers, which resemble rounds of steamed noodles prepared out of rice or wheat flour, was the next food item that was popular among these food vendors (see table 4.1). This is a very popular food among the working class and office workers, particularly in the mornings and less at noon. Some of them occasionally chose to have stringhoppers for lunch as they can pay less in contrast to the cost of food parcels, by adjusting the number of the stringhoppers purchased.

The small eating houses/hotels purchase these stringhoppers either to sell them straight away with curries to clients or to prepare a special menu such as the 'pillau' (stringhoppers mixed with vegetables and/or non-vegetable ingredients). These eating places and hotels reap a good profit by charging a much higher price

than they pay the poor women. These women, therefore, remain exploited and poor.

Field observations indicated that a number of the eating houses, boutiques, hotels and offices in the neighbourhood of these low-income communities had standing orders with the women for lunch packets, stringhoppers and other food items. Some ordered food like the hopper (thick, soft pancake-like main dish with a crispy edge) and pittu (a main dish made out of flour) to be sold in their eating places. Some women sold some of these food items at a lower price from their homes as well, to the poor clientele in the immediate neighbourhood. Even those who supplied the eating houses, hotels and offices occasionally sold food left over from their orders at a cheaper rate from their homes(see table 4.2). Most women in this trade agreed that they were able to feed their families at little or no cost which enables them to use their income for other needs.

On the basis of the clientele and the daily turnover, the expenditure incurred by these women varied from sums below Rs.200/ to sums over Rs.3,000/ per month (see table 4.3). Some of the women with unemployed males and some from the group supplementing the male member's income appeared to fare better with higher income/profit compared to those affected by the irresponsible behaviour of the liquor/drug addicted males and the female heading households.

5.1 Constraints and Issues

5.1.1 Access to Credit

Practically all the women selected for study had problems regarding credit. More than ninety percent of these women began their ventures with help from relatives, neighbours, or friends, while a small number started their enterprises with cash advances from the boutiques, or buyers and some with money from the Janasaviya program(see table 5.1). Borrowing on goodwill from neighbours, relatives and friends has led to many serious social problems. Most of these women (80 %) have not been able to return the borrowed cash within the agreed time period. This has led to serious feuds and temporary closures of the food business. In almost all instances, the lending party would expect the cash back with interest within a specified time frame and the women have found it very difficult to service the debts, let alone settle them. Only some of the women who had steady and regular contracts with eating houses, boutiques, hotels or offices managed to return the initial cash advances borrowed to continue with cash advances from the buyers themselves.

5.1.2 Working Environment

Field observations indicate that the working environment of over ninety nine percent of these women is appalling. They cooked inside their dwelling places, which are tiny temporary huts, right in the middle of the living space. The cooking was done on an open hearth. More than ninety percent of these women use

fuelwood, the cheapest energy source, for their cooking. The twigs and branches from the neighbourhood, very sparingly available, are often collected by the woman herself or her children to supplement the firewood she has to purchase from the nearby timber store. Women selling larger quantities of food cooked with kerosene oil and firewood bought from the timber store.

The water they use comes from the public water taps/wells or river nearby. Since more than twenty five to thirty households use each of these water taps in these low-income communities (see table 5.2) for all their purposes, these water taps become very potential sources of infections and diseases among the families in these neighbourhoods. Yet the women continue to use these sources of water supply in the absence of an alternative. The women in the northern low-income communities depend on the river (Kelani) for their water supply. This same water source is used for bathing, cooking, and all other purposes by the people living along the riverside. It is also used as a sewerage facility. Furthermore this river is heavily polluted by several industries located along the river. Here again the women are compelled to continue to use the only water source available to them.

Sanitation facilities in the immediate neighbourhood of all the six study areas were found to be very inadequate. The normal city sewerage services are not provided to these areas (see section 2.1). Recently, however, some of these areas, like Kirulapone and Wanathamulla, have been provided with a few public pit latrines. Otherwise most of them use the 'temporary open toilet system' and dispose of their waste into the canal or river nearby, thereby polluting the entire neighbourhood and the city as well (see table 5.3). It is this poor sanitary condition in these areas that raise questions about the cleanliness of the food that is prepared and sold by these poor women. Illnesses reported by their families also indicate the squalid conditions of their neighbourhoods (see table 5.4).

6.1 Conclusions and Strategies

The performance of domestic productive activities to earn a living in the informal sector of urban areas is one of the adaptations of low-income communities to the lack of adequate income generating opportunities. Women in desperate situations looking for avenues of employment, as well as the enterprising women in this sector, utilise their domestic skills for survival. These poor women, in reality, do not fill a demand within the urban economy, but actually create their own demand out of desperation since they have no other economic alternatives.

A large number of the informal sector activities in Colombo operate in contravention of existing regulations and by-laws, such as the Food and Drug Act. These laws apply without discrimination to both the formal and the informal sectors and their primary objective is the protection of the consumers. Quite often the law enforcement officers find it very difficult to control the illegal establishments functioning in the informal sector. Most of the economic activities that are conducted in this sector, including the ones carried out by women,

continue unabated despite the temporary suspensions imposed by the law enforcing authorities.

The environmental constraints encountered by these women food sellers is common to all inhabitants of these slums and shanties. Many of their problems would be solved by the provision of water, sewerage and good sanitary conditions along with better housing. The Common Amenities Board in Sri Lanka took measures to reduce the physical inconveniences and improve the sanitary conditions for these low-income communities by installing water taps and building latrines. Although some progress was made in this direction, several of these slums and shanties still remain inadequate in basic amenities. The state also attempted, through the National Housing Development Authority, to improve the living conditions of these poor people by building some high-rise apartments and rehousing some of the families like in the Maligawatte and Wanathamulla areas. These projects however, could not house all the needy because the allocation of the apartments was based on the ability of the allottees to repay the rent/purchase instalments. Many in these communities, therefore, continue to live in their unhygienic squalid environments. The Aided Self Help (ASH) approach in housing adopted by the National Housing Development Authority also met with little success, with large numbers remaining unqualified for the loan. Other programs such as the 'Sites and Services' planned to improve or rehabilitate these slums and shanties have not been implemented satisfactorily to date due to several constraints, including finances.

It is sad that these activities of these hapless women do nothing by way of contributing to their release from the patriarchal stranglehold of men or of significantly empowering them. Neither do they render them significantly any more independent. This is mainly because of the strong and entrenched male chauvinistic underpinnings of the society. These women still have to minister to whims and fancies of their husbands and have to bear the drudgery of domestic work all alone. Their economic activities are an addition to this drudgery.

The measures targeted at these women by the government and the non-governmental organisations are designed only to alleviate their misery and drudgery, not to eliminate them - far from it. However, these measures and strategies, woefully inadequate as they are to liberate these women, are welcome as a first step. It is in this perspective that the rehabilitation strategies are evaluated here.

6.1.1 Rehabilitation Strategies and the Non-Governmental Organisations

Several of the problems encountered by many of these women in the food processing ventures are found to be related to their level of existence. Poverty in various forms continues to be the biggest constraint to the progress of these women in their economic activities. Easy access to credit remains a crucial solution. Some non governmental organisations in Sri Lanka have taken steps towards this end.

The new directions taken by the Thrift and Credit Co-operative Societies (TCCS) movement in Sri Lanka seem very promising. These societies have recently initiated programs to rehabilitate the unorganised and marginalised urban poor in Sri Lanka living in slums and shanties. Their programs of rehabilitation have specifically mentioned the women and the youth in these areas as two of their important target groups. Their program organises the poor in the informal sector into primary Thrift and Credit Societies to qualify them for credit which they recognise as a sine qua non for income generating activities. Housing development and improvement is considered by these Thrift and Credit Societies as the final stage in their program of rehabilitation. These non-governmental organisations provide the initial credit for income generating activities with built in requirements making savings compulsory. The funds for these activities by the Thrift and Credit Societies are obtained from N.G.Os such as FORUT-SRI LANKA.

FORUT-SRI LANKA, a non-governmental organisation, is involved in community development projects. It provides credit facilities to local organisations, informal groups, and individuals for income generating activities. Credit is disbursed on the basis of families, individuals, groups and societies, like the TCCS. In the group system, informal conglomerates of persons based on trust and faith in each other but with no legal status are provided the necessary credit. This system is being experimented with in many areas in Colombo including the Shanthi Canal Animation Movement (SCAM) and the Kochcikade projects.

In the Shanthi Canal Animation Movement (SCAM) about one hundred and ten families have been organised into seven groups whose savings have so far reached Rs.6,419/. This movement, initiated by Reverend Father Catalano is an unofficial (unregistered) social service organisation formed to organise, train and rehabilitate the poor people in this shanty/slum. Its training program includes education, health, sanitation and various types of vocational training. Among the training programs several have been included such as sewing, flower making, and rug making that particularly suit women. According to a social worker involved in this movement, steps are being taken to provide credit to viable units of income generating activities including food processing.

6.1.2 Rehabilitation Strategies and the State

Until recently there has been no clearly conceived or consistent framework of state policies for the informal sector. There has been, however, some recognition of the significance of this sector for providing employment opportunities for the urban poor and also a tendency to regard it as a nuisance which has to be controlled in the context of orderly urban growth. This is often reflected in the efforts of law enforcement authorities who subject these activities to close supervision on the premise that they provide facilities for many illicit operations. Although there is some justification for this opinion, the state and the policy makers quite often tend to ignore the fact that the informal sector plays an important role and makes a significant contribution to the urban economy and, in so doing, generates employment and provides livelihood for a considerable number

in the low-income urban population.

The Colombo Municipal Council and the National Housing Development Authority have made some efforts towards improving the living conditions of the people in these communities. As mentioned in section 6.1 these efforts have not reached these women food vendors.

In 1987 when the government launched a program to alleviate poverty in the country, several policy guidelines were formulated to improve the standard of living of the poor, both urban and rural. Specific mention was made of the possible strategies that could be adopted to alleviate poverty among the urban poor, specifically in the informal sector. The Committee appointed to deliberate on the issue of 'Women and Poverty' emphasized the necessity to initially identify the target groups within the formal and informal sectors (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 1987). Target groups identified within the informal sector included the petty food producers and the female headed households.

The recommendations made by this committee included:

- 1) the recognition of the potential female workforce in the informal sector employment as a means of income generation was considered as a positive step.
- 2) access to credit as a primary requisite. To enable this the committee recommended that banking services should be taken to the target group.
- 3) the training of Bank personnel and review of existing loan eligibility criteria to improve the access to credit by the poor. The possibility of introducing group lending schemes to be considered.
- 4) the formation of informal groups among the poor to facilitate their credit receiving/repayment capabilities.

The Committee also emphasized that all poverty alleviation programs should initially ensure the need for improvement of the social status and quality of life of poor women and their families. It recommended the following institutions as possible working models to emulate.

- 1) The Grameen Bank of Bangladesh
- 2) The Self Employed Women's Association of Ahmedabad
- 3) The Working Women's Forum, Tamilnadu, India

The participatory approach adopted in these working models, if successfully emulated, should alleviate the poverty of poor women in Sri Lanka, particularly those in the informal sector of urban areas. Prior to the initiation of such programmes need assessment surveys within each of the target groups should be

conducted. Based on these surveys, other programs such as family health/hygiene awareness programs, environmental awareness programmes and skills development programmes have to be conducted in each of the regions consisting the target groups. These and other programs organised by the non-governmental organisations, if properly implemented, should remarkably improve the working/living conditions of the women food sellers in the informal sector of Colombo city.

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Table 1.1
Number of Households Selected

Study Area	Female Headed Households	Females with Unemployed Males	Females Supplementing Husband's Income
Kirulapone	09	10	08
Shanthi Canal	02	04	01
Colombo North	10	12	03
Moderā	08	10	02
Wanathamulla	04	05	02
Colombo 02	04	06	-
Total	37	47	16

Table 1.2
Length of residence and Area of dwelling place
 (No. of Households)

Study Area	Length of residence			Previous residence		Area of Dwelling		
	Since Birth	1970/80	1980/90	In Colombo	Out of Col.	<1/2	1/2-1	>1
(in perches)								
Kirulapone	05	13	09	20	07	08	18	01
Shanthi Canal	02	03	02	05	02	06	01	-
Colombo North	02	09	14	17	08	15	09	01
Moderā	07	03	10	12	08	05	13	02
Wanathamulla	04	03	04	04	07	05	04	02
Colombo 02	03	03	04	06	04	04	06	-

Table 3.1
Date of Commencement of Food Processing
 (reporting)

Study Area	Before 1970	1970-80	1980-90
Kirulapone	06	1	11
Shanthi Canal	01	04	02
Colombo North	03	12	10
Moderla	03	08	09
Wanathamulla	01	06	04
Colombo 02	02	04	04
Total	16	44	40

Table 3.2
 Female Labour Input and Hours of Work

Study Area	No. of Females/Household in food processing		Hours of work/household	
	1-3	>3	<5 hours/day	>5 hours/day
Kirulapone	25	02	10	17
Shanthi Canal	07	-	02	05
Colombo North	24	01	11	14
Moderla	20	-	06	14
Wanathamulla	11	-	04	07
Colombo 02	10	-	02	08

Table 3.3
Number of Janasaviya Recipient/Households in the Selected Sample

Study Area

Kirulapone	09
Shanthi Canal	02
Colombo North	13
Modera	05
Wanathamulla	03
Colombo 02	04
Total	37

Table 3.1.1
Female Headed Households

Low Income Communities	Size of Family (No. of Households)		Educational levels of Chief Householder (Grades)				Reasons for heading Household (No. reporting)		
	02-05 persons	>5 persons	No Education	1-5	5-10	>10	Died	Deserted	Divorced
Kirulapone	06	03	03	06	01	-	02	06	10
Shanthi Canal	02	-	-	-	01	-	01	01	-
Colombo North	07	03	02	08	-	-	02	08	-
Moderla	03	05	04	04	-	-	01	07	-
Wanathamulla	02	02	03	01	-	-	-	04	-
Colombo 02	01	03	03	01	-	-	-	04	-
Total	21	16	15	20	02	-	06	31	01

Table 3.1.2
Female with Unemployed Husband

Study Area	Size of Family (No. of Households)		Education Levels of female				Reasons for husband unemployed			
	02-05 persons	>05 persons	No. Educ.	Grades		Lost job	Liquor/ drug add.	111	Disabled	
				1-5	5-10>10					
Kirulapone	04	06	05	04	01	-	03	04	01	02
Shanthi Canal	01	03	02	02	01	01	01	02	01	-
Colombo North	05	07	06	05	01	-	03	06	-	01
Moderla	03	07	05	04	01	-	02	07	01	-
Wanathamulla	01	04	04	01	-	-	01	03	01	-
Colombo 02	02	04	04	02	-	-	02	04	-	-
Total	16	31	26	18	04	01	12	26	04	03

Table 3.1.3
Females Supplementing Husband's Income

Study Area	Size of Family (No. of Households)		Education Levels of female				Range of husband's Income (monthly)	
	02-05 persons	>05 persons	No. Educ.	Grades		Rs. 100-500	Rs. 500-1000	
				1-5	5-10>10			
Kirulapone	02	06	01	07	01	-	07	01
Shanthi Canal	-	01	-	01	-	-	01	-
Colombo North	-	03	01	02	-	-	02	01
Moderla	-	02	02	-	-	-	02	-
Wanathamulla	-	02	01	01	-	-	02	-
Total	02	14	05	11	01	-	14	02

Table 4.1
Type of Food Cooked per Household (for sale)
 Female Headed Households
 Quantities of Food Produced

Study Area	Food Parcels (Nos.)		Stringhoppers (Nos.)		Hoppers (Nos.) 50-75	Pittu >50(servings)
	<100	>100	<500	>500		
Kirulapone	08	01	-	03	-	-
Shanthi Canal	02	-	-	-	-	-
Colombo North	06	03	04	-	02	02
Modera	06	-	03	-	02	03
Wanathamulla	-	-	-	04	02	-
Colombo 02	02	01	-	02	-	-
Total	25	05	07	09	06	05
<u>Females with Unemployed Husbands</u>						
Kirulapone	01	07	01	01	-	-
Shanthi Canal	-	03	01	-	-	-
Colombo North	01	09	02	02	01	01
Modera	01	08	03	01	01	-
Wanathamulla	01	04	-	03	01	-
Colombo 02	-	05	-	01	02	-
Total	04	06	07	08	05	01
<u>Females supplementing Husband's Income</u>						
Kirulapone	02	06	04	04	01	-
Shanthi Canal	-	01	-	-	-	-
Colombo North	-	03	-	-	01	-
Modera	-	02	-	01	-	-
Wanathamulla	-	02	-	-	01	-
Total	02	14	04	05	03	-

Table 4.2
Number of Households Selling Food at Different Locations

Female Headed Households

Study Area	Office	Hotels/Boutiques	Street	Home
Kirulapone	-	06	01	02
Shanthi Canal	-	-	-	02
Colombo North	01	08	-	01
Moderā	03	02	01	02
Wanathamulla	02	01	-	01
Colombo 02	02	02	-	-
Total	08	19	02	08

Females with Unemployed Husbands

Study Area

Kirulapone	03	04	-	02
Shanthi Canal	-	03	-	01
Colombo North	03	07	01	01
Modera	02	08	-	-
Wanathamulla	01	04	-	-
Colombo 02	02	04	-	-
Total	11	30	01	04

Females Supplementing Husband's Income

Study Area

Kirulapone	02	06	-	-
Shanthi Canal	-	01	-	-
Colombo North	01	02	-	-
Modera	01	03	-	01
Wanathamulla	02	02	03	-
Total	06	14	03	01

Table 5.1
Sources of Credit (No. of Households)

Female Headed Households

Study Area	Relatives	Neighbours	Hotels/Boutiques
Kirulapone	01	04	04
Shanthi Canal	01	01	-
Colombo North	02	03	05
Modera	02	04	02
Wanathamulla	01	02	01
Colombo 02	-	02	02
Total	07	16	14

Females with Unemployed Husband

Kirulapone	02	03	05
Shanthi Canal	01	03	-
Colombo North	02	04	04
Moderla	01	04	05
Wanathamulla	-	02	03
Colombo 02	01	03	02
Total	07	19	29

Female supplementing Husband's Income

Kirulapone	01	04	03
Shanthi Canal	-	01	-
Colombo North	-	01	02
Moderla	-	02	-
Wanathamulla	-	01	01
Total	01	09	06

Table 4.3
Monthly Income of Food Processors (No. of Households)

Study Area	<Rs.1000/	Rs.1001-2000/	Rs.2001-3000	>Rs.3001/
Kirulapone	09	03	05	08
Shanthi Canal	01	05	01	--
Colombo North	04	07	08	06
Modera	02	05	08	07
Wanathamulla	--	04	01	06
Colombo 02	01	02	04	03
Total	17	26	27	20

Table 5.2
Sources of Water (No. of Households)

Study Area	Water for Drinking & Cooking			Bathing & Washing		
	Common Pipe	Common Well	River	Common Pipe	Common Well	Other
Kirulapone	26	01	-	14	13	-
Shanthi Canal	07	-	-	07	-	-
Colombo North	20	-	05	08	07	10
Modera	15	05	-	08	12	-
Wanathamulla	11	-	-	06	05	-
Colombo 02	10	-	-	10	-	-
Total	89	06	05	53	37	10

Table 5.3
Types of Toilets (No. of Households reporting)

Study Area	Public/Permanent	Private		Distance to Toilet	
		Perm- anent	Tempo- rary	<25 yards	>25 yards
Kirulapone	18	06	03	12	15
Shanthi Canal	04	01	02	03	04
Colombo North	04	04	17	21	04
Modera	11	-	09	08	12
Wanathamulla	05	02	04	08	03
Colombo 02	10	-	-	01	09
Total	52	13	35	53	47

Table 5.4
Illnesses reported (January-July 1990)

Study Area	(No. of Households)				
	Skin Diseases	Asthma	Bowel Diseases	Eye Diseases	Other
Kirulapone	06	03	08	01	03
Shanthi Canal	03	01	04	-	01
Colombo North	05	04	09	02	05
Modera	04	02	05	-	03
Wanathamulla	04	01	04	-	02
Colombo 02	01	-	02	-	04
Total	23	11	32	03	18