

ASSESSING THE CURRENT STATUS OF WELFARE INITIATIVES IN THE ESTATE SECTOR OF KEGALLE DISTRICT, SRI LANKA

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Welfare programs in the Sri Lankan estate sector aim to address critical community issues and enhance workers' well-being and productivity. Despite these efforts, workers' living conditions often remain inadequate, adversely affecting both workers and planters. This study examined the extent to which welfare programs have been implemented over the past five years and evaluated their effectiveness in achieving intended objectives. The research was conducted across six estates in the *Kegalle* district, managed by three plantation companies, covering a total land area of approximately 22,912 hectares. The target population comprised estate planters and workers. A proportionate random sampling method was used to select estates. Data were collected through focus group discussions, key informant interviews with structured questionnaires, and direct observations. The questionnaire focused on implemented welfare programs and currently available welfare facilities. Data were analyzed using narrative analysis. Results indicated that each estate implemented at least one welfare program annually, addressing six main objectives: health improvement (23.5%), nutritional support (23.5%), educational support (20.6%), infrastructure development (11.8%), skill development (11.8%), financial support (5.9%), and community security (3%). These initiatives align with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the highest alignment observed for SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) at 48.5%, followed by SDG 1 (No Poverty) at 30.3%. Other relevant SDGs included SDGs 3, 4, 8, 9, and 11. While planters expressed satisfaction with the current welfare facilities provided to estate workers, the workers reported dissatisfaction, except in areas such as healthcare, childcare and daycare services, and community development initiatives. The primary reasons for their dissatisfaction included poor-quality housing, inadequate living conditions, and insufficient financial support. This study recommends addressing the identified gaps between planters' and workers' perceptions by prioritizing improvements in lacking welfare categories while ensuring alignment with Sustainable Development Goals to maximize community impact.

Keywords: Narrative analysis, Social welfare, Sustainable Development Goals