



Vavuniya: Best in poverty at 2.3 percent

by Rohantha Athukorala

It's true that there are many ways in which poverty can be calculated and each one has its own merits and disadvantages. However, going by the last Department of Census and Statistics Household Income and Expenditure survey report released on August 3, 2011 on poverty, the best performing district is Vavuniya at 2.3% on head count and 2.0% on the attribute poor households.

The data amazed me as it beat Colombo which is reporting a headcount of 3.6 percent and Gampaha at 3.9 percent

Sri Lanka

Panning out on Sri Lanka's performance last year, the economy closing on \$60 billion and the Brand Sri Lanka being valued by Brand Finance at \$23 billion was interesting, especially when the country is registering an eight percent plus GDP growth. Incidentally this is the fourth best performing economy globally on growth.

national brand marketing background, my bosses always warned me not to paint a pretty picture as people love attacking a perfect situation but I guess when facts are being highlighted, it's time that we as a nation must be proud of our performance.

We must not forget that over seventy-five percent of our economy is led by the private sector and these same sentiments must be mirrored in their P&L. If not, the script can be under attack.

Vavuniya even though the best in poverty levels, the average income is only Rs.33,063 as against Colombo at 51,070.

Vavuniya

If one carefully analyses the performance of Vavuniya, we can see that even though the poverty figure is at 2.3 percent, the mean income is at a low ebb of Rs.33,063, which means that the money spent in Vavuniya on the basket of goods for food and non food items are very different to the high income districts such as Colombo and Gampaha. But a point to note is that

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try, many get some form of food from their own gardens.

As a matter of interest I spoke to the Minister in charge of Vavuniya with this information and his insight made me think.

Apparently be it then or now Vavuniya played a central role for trade between the North and the South. In fact even during the past 30 years the hub of action for logistics and

ya which explains the low poverty number. This took me back to the time that I was heading Economic Affairs of the Government Peace Secretariat as I remember most of the issues of transport during those times was reported from Vavuniya.

The most frequent complaint being the unloading and reloading of goods due to security issues that was done on the government and the LTTE side, that resulted in items such as potatoes and tomatoes getting spoilt.

Normally during those times, the bazaar closes for business after noon, but I remember Vavuniya being a hype of activity even at 4pm which justifies this number.

Education

There are two pick-ups on the education front.



Top five districts

Household income			
District	Mean Income (Rs.)	District	%
Colombo	51,070	Vavuniya	2.30 %
Gampaha	48,870	Colombo	3.60 %
Ratnapura	35,780	Gampaha	3.90 %
Vavuniya	33,063	Anuradhapura	5.70 %
Country Average	36,451		8.90 %

Source: Department of Census 2011

been to school reports a 2.9 percent which is below the national average and incidentally close to the urban trend. May be the quality of education is what needs further research.

The low performance at the O/Level and A/Level examinations needs attention and correction which

quality of education that was pointed out before. Education Attainment: 9.2 percent.

Vehicle ownership

It is interesting to note the ownership of Motorcycles being very high, at 32.2 percent which may reflect the lifestyle in Vavuniya given the type of work and

country. A stronger drive for setting up business in the Industrial Zone of Vavuniya will have to be the priority, if we are to move up on the motor car ownership which is at a low ebb of 2 percent which is below the national average of 5.6 percent.

It's also important that the movement from agriculture and trading to setting up of industrial takes place more strongly if we are to increase the income levels from the current thirty-thousand range that exists today.

Ownership of HH Items

The ownership of Household Items are mainly sewing machines which is interesting given that the penetration is as high as 84.3 percent as against the national average of 42.7 percent. Maybe the introduction of the Handloom industry or a related business will be useful so that overall income can be increased. But a point to note is that for this to happen the overall value chain needs to be developed ideally under the Divi Neguma

in place. The beauty about the handloom industry is that from a demand end, the system is developed from Sri Lanka Design Festival right up to shelves in the retail chains in the US and UK.

Ownership of household items

1) A similar analysis must be done in all 24 districts so that ground realities can be understood.

2) A master plan must be drawn up so that a 3-5 year developmental program can be done just like what we see in Gampaha and Hambantota Districts.

3) The overall developmental agenda must be done with a clear mission.

4) This bottom up game plan must be linked to the national budget.

5) GDP growth must be tracked at the district level if possible so that national level planning can be made targeted.

The author is actively involved in the growth agenda of the country in the Public and Private sector and has a double degree in Marketing, MB and a doctoral candidate in business administration.