Economic Barriers to Secondary Education Access for the Tea Plantation Community of Sri Lanka
A 2013 Study Trek and Capstone Project
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Executive Summary

Overview

The Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka have faced significant political and economic discrimination since arriving to work on plantations in the 19th century. Although this minority group has recently made progress, including Sri Lankan citizenship grants in 1986 and 1988, many Indian Tamils continue to struggle to access quality education, especially after primary school.

This qualitative research study examines economic barriers, which are often the primary obstacles for Indian Tamil families, to their secondary education access and provides concrete recommendations for policymakers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). It has been written for the Educate Lanka Foundation, which provides financial scholarships to promising students, and the Upcountry Education Development Society, which subsidizes school-related fees for upcountry children.

The Population

The report discusses the challenges to secondary education access for Tamils of Indian descent who work on tea plantations. While Tamils of Indian descent participate in various roles in the Sri Lankan tea industry, this report focuses on tea pluckers in the Nuwara Eliya district specifically. This population will be referred to as Indian Tamils in the report in accordance with commonly-accepted terminology.

Methodology

Following a detailed literature review and months of preparatory research, a team of Harvard Graduate School of Education Master’s students in the International Education Policy program traveled to Sri Lanka in January 2013 to gather additional data. With the support of translators, we conducted semi-structured interviews with local educators and the families of students from the plantations, as well as government officials and NGO and agency leaders. These interviews took place in Colombo, Kandy, and Nuwara Eliya, the district with the largest population of Indian Tamils. Notes from the interviews were subsequently coded and analyzed.

Findings

Based on these analyses, this report examines the influence of several key factors on education access and provides relevant recommendations. We begin by outlining the importance of effective English language instruction, which is limited in plantation areas, and suggest ways to increase investment in relevant human and financial resources. We then focus on the Grade 5 Scholarship Exam, which constitutes one of the only means by which low-income students can enter good secondary schools, and methods to both improve performance on this exam and provide other academic opportunities. We consider the reasons for and consequences of low-quality teaching in plantation areas, then undertake an analysis of household characteristics and argue for financial management training to make education expenses more feasible for Indian Tamil families. We propose solutions to the geographic disadvantages that limit the education opportunities for many children, such as increased transportation options, strategic selection of school sites, and subsidizing costs for students who travel great distances. Finally, we examine partnership and financial aid opportunities to alleviate the impact of financial constraints on school infrastructure.
Introduction to Study

In Sri Lankan tea plantation communities, known as estates, workers and their families face numerous economic and geographic constraints, including inadequate access to markets and growth centers, lack of electric and transportation infrastructure, poor-quality schools, and high poverty rates.\(^1\) These challenges stem from a combination of historical disadvantages and recent events like civil conflict and natural disasters.

The education sector is no exception; although some improvements have been made in the estates, Indian Tamil communities continue to lag well behind the rest of the country. 18% of students who enter school in Sri Lanka fail to complete compulsory formal education. Most students in recent years who drop out of school come from a) families living off the street, b) economically-disadvantaged areas, c) conflict-affected areas, d) the estate sector, or e) are disabled.\(^2\)

Education is critical to a country’s development. It enables communities to break the poverty cycle and build human capital, in addition to providing children with greater returns and economic opportunities. Analyzing barriers to education for the tea plantation community is a necessary step toward improving access to education for all Sri Lankans.

This report examines economic, physical, and cultural barriers to education for the tea plantation community. It gives particular consideration to economic barriers, as school-related fees and the opportunity costs associated with sending a child to school are often the main blocking factors to secondary education.

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Districts of Study

Field research was completed in the Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, and Colombo districts.
Historical Overview of the Indian Tamil Tea Plantation Workers

The Tamils of Indian origin, commonly referred to as Indian Tamils, were brought to Sri Lanka by the British as labor for tea and rubber plantations. Their descendants make up a large part of plantation labor forces today. These plantations were created as self-sufficient enclaves with hardly any integration into the national social and economic structures.\(^3\) Even though Indian Tamils and Sri Lankan Tamils share the same religion and a similar language, they should not be regarded as a single entity.\(^4\) Unlike Sri Lankan Tamils, Indian Tamils live primarily in the southern and central part of the country among Sinhalese,\(^5\) and they are disproportionately from low-caste groups.\(^6\) Despite playing a crucial role in the economy and having participated in politics in the late pre-independence period, even electing representatives to the first independent legislature, the Indian Tamils were excluded from the post-independence polity, losing their citizenship as a result of the Ceylon Citizenship Act of 1948. The subsequent Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act No. 48, which allowed only citizens to vote, effectively disenfranchised the Indian Tamils who made up 12% of Sri Lanka’s population. It was alleged that they were an unassimilated alien population with short-term interests in Sri Lanka and strong ties to India. Thus they were effectively stateless.\(^7\) It wasn’t until the citizenship grants in 1986 and 1988, that many Indian Tamils were given Sri Lankan citizenship, despite being present in Sri Lanka for the last two hundred years.\(^8\)

Education for All in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has long had a strong commitment to providing universal education. Even before independence, Sri Lanka recognized the universal right of education for all children.\(^9\) Its constitution states that “[t]he state is pledged to establish in Sri Lanka a democratic Socialist Society, the objective of which include the complete eradication of illiteracy and the assurance to all persons of the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels.”\(^10\) Sri Lanka has signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, acknowledging the importance of education as a human right. The 1997 Compulsory Education Regulation made education for children between the ages of five and fourteen compulsory. Since then, Sri Lanka has made huge strides. The country had a 98% youth literacy rate in 2008.\(^11\) The gross intake rate in grade one was 100% in 2007 and 94% in 2010. In 2007, the primary net enrollment rate was 97.1% for boys and 95.6% for girls.\(^12\)

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3 Hollup, 1992.
6 Little, 2007.
The State of Education for Indian Tamils

From 1840 to 1869 there was a push by missionaries, labor recruiters and supervisors, and a few planters to educate their laborers, but overall education remained fragmented and paltry. Education was often perceived as a threat to labor by plantation owners. From 1869 to 1900 there was a move from coffee production to tea. Tea, unlike coffee, required year-round labor, and women and children were encouraged to migrate by the colonial authorities to augment the labor force. Education was increasingly provided to children of the plantation workers during this period. Missionaries and colonial authorities increased education expansion in general, which also affected the plantation communities.

From 1900 to 1948, the establishment of schools in plantations became widespread. This period saw a marked improvement in education for Indian Tamils. During this period the first trade unions were established, and most Indian Tamil were enfranchised. From 1948 to 1977, many Indian Tamils were repatriated to India through an agreement between the Indian government and the Ceylon government. The Indian Tamil population declined from around 12% to 6% by 1981, and many were disenfranchised during this period. During this period there was a decline in estate schooling.

With the takeover of plantation schools by the state, Indian Tamils’ access to education began to improve by 1977. The plantation economy had declined, and children were no longer needed for labor. Supervisors preferred that children be in school, rather than roaming the estate. As a result of the state takeover, planters were no longer responsible for the cost of schooling and thus they were more willing to let laborers’ children go to school. Foreign aid also helped. The ethnic crisis between the Sri Lankan Tamils and Sri Lankan Sinhalese also helped the Indian Tamils’ cause, as they became an important voting block and were able to promote the interests of their community, including the resolution of the citizenship issue.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite major improvements, however, the Indian Tamil population still lags behind in education today. The districts with the largest Indian Tamil populations, Nuwara Eliya, Ampara, Badulla, Moneragala, and Ratnapura, have the lowest female and male literacy rates, and gender differences are widest in the plantation districts of Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. In 2001 in Nuwara Eliya, the district with the highest population of Indian Tamils, the literacy rate of males was 87.1%, while the female literacy rate was 76.6%. In Badulla, which has the second-highest population of Indian Tamils, the literacy rate of males was 88.1% while the literacy rate of females was 80.2%. In contrast, Sri Lanka as a whole had a female literacy rate of 89.2% and a male literacy rate of 92.3% in 2001.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{13}\) Little, 2007.

\(^{14}\) Swarna Jayaweera et al., Gender Dimensions of the Millennium Development Goals in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Centre for Women’s Research, 2007).
English as a Language of Opportunity

Language of Instruction in Sri Lanka

Even before its independence from Britain in 1948, Sri Lanka began to use Sinhala and Tamil as languages of instruction.15 These languages started to be taken up as media of instruction in primary schools in 1945, in secondary schools in 1953, and at the university level in 1960.16 There was a great barrier between the privileged English-educated class and the non-English-educated deprived classes before Sri Lanka introduced its national languages as the medium of instruction.17 Hope spread that the transition from English to the national languages would help eliminate the barrier.18 In 2001, however, the Sri Lankan educational authorities reintroduced English as a medium of instruction for science classes at the collegiate level (grades 12 and 13), which is the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (A Level), in selected government schools.19

Currently, according to our research in the field, a barrier still appears to exist between the English-educated class in elite schools and the non-English-educated classes in the poor schools.20

English Education in Wealthy Schools

In the wealthy schools, English is recognized as an important job skill and a powerful language. One of the reasons for this recognition is that the private sector in Sri Lanka requires people with a good knowledge of English.21 The elite primary and secondary schools offer English classes for the student’s entire school trajectory.22

Funding for language programs is inherently expensive everywhere,23 but the wealthy schools can afford the cost. As for human resources, the teachers at some private elite schools must have A-level training and speak English.24

Access to English Language Courses

In both the wealthy private and government schools, emphasis on learning English is strong and it is taught in addition to Sinhala and Tamil as their three language medium curricula.25 Some wealthy schools also offer French, Japanese, Chinese, and German courses. The wealthier schools are able to offer English classes from an early grade through secondary school. For some wealthy government schools, English is the second language for grades 1 to 5. English at those schools is more rigorous, as there is a special exam to allow students to choose their language medium depending on their scores, and the English medium classes require a high score.26

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16 Brock-Utne, “Language Policy and Science.”
17 Brock-Utne, “Language Policy and Science.”
19 Brock-Utne, “Language Policy and Science.”
20 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
21 Brock-Utne, “Language Policy and Science.”
22 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
24 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
25 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
26 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
27 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
In addition to frequent instruction opportunities, the students at some of the wealthy schools have free club activities that involve English such as conversational and English drama clubs.\(^{28}\) Parents who speak English well can help with their children’s homework.

**Post-Graduation Plans for Students in Wealthy Schools**

Students in the elite schools go on to universities (local, private, or overseas) to study medicine, engineering, law, or management or to pursue work in the private sector and the government. Since there is more competition to enter state universities from private elite schools, many chose to study abroad in countries such as the UK, Australia, US, China, Japan, Korea, and India, or work in the private sector as an alternative to education. Many of these opportunities are only available to students who have already received quality English education. As one teacher from an elite school said, “If you speak English, you get better jobs.”\(^{29}\)

It is worth noting that, in Sri Lanka, although funding for education is substantial in the wealthy schools, most parents still send their children to afterhours tuition for extra English education.\(^{30}\) Baldauf et al. report that foreign organizations such as the British Council sponsor some of those programs in Asia.\(^{31}\) However, this disparity between people who can afford private tuition and those who cannot is creating social divisions, as many scholars point out.\(^{32}\) Furthermore, the pressures toward globalization are also putting pressure on minority languages and the limited resources available to teach them,\(^{33}\) and striking a balance between globalization and maintaining minority languages may be key in the future if English education is further expanded outside of wealthy schools.

**English in Tea Plantation Schools**

Being able to speak English is an important asset for all students in Sri Lanka, including those from tea plantation backgrounds. According to a principal in a tea plantation school, English is one key skill that determines whether a student will find a decent job or work on plantations.\(^{34}\) Therefore, English is a powerful factor in students’ future career trajectories for students in tea plantation areas. However, in contrast to wealthy schools where there are ample resources to learn English, plantation schools offer limited opportunities for students to develop their English skills.

In most tea plantation schools, Tamil is the primary language of instruction.\(^{35}\) Even in schools that do offer English classes, such classes are only available to secondary school students. With no prior training in or exposure to English, students often reach secondary school with a poor foundation in spoken and written English. Not only does students’ limited English ability pose challenges for English instruction, but schools in tea plantation areas also face a shortage of secondary school English teachers.\(^{36}\) The difficulty of finding teachers who are capable of teaching English influences the quantity and quality of English classes students are able to receive. In addition to the lack of opportunities to learn English at school, students in plantation areas also rarely have the chance to practice English at home, since they mostly communicate with their parents, friends and neighbors in Tamil.\(^{37}\) Furthermore, Indian Tamil parents often do not speak English themselves, and thus cannot help their children with homework.

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\(^{28}\) Interview participant, interview, January 2013.

\(^{29}\) Interview participant, interview, January 2013.

\(^{30}\) Interview participants, interview, January 2013; Baldauf, et al., “Success or failure of primary second/foreign language programmes in Asia.”

\(^{31}\) Baldauf, et al., “Success or failure of primary second/foreign language programmes in Asia.”

\(^{32}\) Chen and Hamid and Hamid & Baldauf as cited in Baldauf, et al., “Success or failure of primary second/foreign language programmes in Asia.”

\(^{33}\) Baldauf, et al., “Success or failure of primary second/foreign language programmes in Asia.”

\(^{34}\) Interview participant, interview, January 2013.

\(^{35}\) Interview participant, interviews, January 2013.

\(^{36}\) Interview participant, interview, January 2013.

\(^{37}\) Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
Failing the Grade 5 Scholarship Exam

The Scholarship Examination (also widely known as the Grade 5 exam) is a highly competitive national examination held yearly in August by the Department of Examinations of the Ministry of Education. Every year, over 300,000 nine and ten-year-olds who are in their final year of primary school (Grade 5) sit for the exam.\(^{38}\)

**Purpose of the Grade 5 Exam**

The examinations were first started in 1947 by Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara, who headed the Ministry of Education at the time, as part of an ambitious education campaign designed to give students from poor families better educational opportunities.\(^{39}\) Kannangara took the initiative to establish free education in the country, and spearheaded the Grade 5 exam.\(^{40}\)

The purposes of the exam are twofold: to provide bursaries (scholarships) to students from poor families for secondary education, and to select gifted students from all around the country to enter high-quality, popular secondary schools in major cities.\(^{41}\) One of our interviewees stated that students could either choose to accept the bursary to supplement their costs of attending school or to transfer to a better school. However, a Sri Lankan newspaper suggests the opposite, that students who qualify receive both – reflecting the original spirit of the exam to help talented rural students enter prominent national schools with government scholarships.\(^{42}\)

Passing the exam requires a minimum score of 70 points out of 200; however, only “economically disadvantaged” students who score more than 150 have been able to qualify for bursaries in recent years.\(^{43}\)

Entrance to popular schools is even harder. Based on each year’s availability of spots in the popular national schools, the Ministry of Education decides annually on the cut-off marks for entrance into these highly selective schools. Cut-off marks are different for Sinhalese and Tamil medium test-takers, and only students that score higher than these cut-off marks can enter Grade 6 in popular national schools. For prominent schools whose spots are highly sought-after, such as Royal College in Colombo, cut-off marks have been set as high as 183 in recent years.\(^{44}\)

**Insufficient Scholarships**

Despite the importance of the Grade 5 exam, students from plantations are not benefiting enough from it for a number of reasons. First, the bursary amount is Rs. 500 per month, and is awarded to only 15,000 students.\(^{45}\)

This amount may not be sufficient, since families in our research reported spending more than Rs. 5,000 per year on their children’s education (as specified in the financial constraints section).


\(^{42}\) Fernando, L. 2001.

\(^{43}\) Idem.


In addition, families considered ‘economically disadvantaged’ are defined as having family incomes less than Rs. 2,400 per month,\textsuperscript{46} which is below the national poverty line of Rs. 3,656 set by the Sri Lanka Department of Census and Statistics.\textsuperscript{47} Due to this restriction, many children from plantation families who earn more than Rs. 2,400 per month but fall below the poverty threshold are actually unable to qualify for bursaries.\textsuperscript{48} In addition, these restrictions do not account for the fact that earnings fluctuate in many plantation families because of seasonal changes in employment rates. Therefore during months when plantations workers are under or unemployed, costs associated with education can take up a huge proportion of a family’s total monthly earnings. While plantation workers are paid on average a daily wage of about Rs. 380 if they work more than 17-20 days per month (this wage amount varies across different plantations), because there are so many items deducted from their income (i.e. the cost for their tea-picking bags), their final monthly income reflects an amount much less than an average daily wage of Rs. 380. Moreover, when situations arise when plantation workers are unable to meet their minimum required 17-20 working days per month, such as injuries at work or children’s illness, they can only earn an income total for that month that amounts to half of an average daily wage of Rs. 380. One respondent in our interviews reported that due to her husband’s injury, her family was only able to earn Rs. 600 for the month, despite their usual total average monthly earnings being higher than Rs. 2,400.

**Plantation Student Performance**

Second, although our respondents understood that the only way to gain admission into prominent national schools without having inside connections is to score above the cut-off marks on the Grade 5 Scholarship exam, most of the plantation students fail to score high enough. Among all the plantation schools we interviewed, many reported fewer than 5 students who “passed” the exam last year. This number only reflects the number of total students who had scored above the minimum score of 70 to pass and not necessarily the number of students who scored high enough to qualify for bursaries or entrance into prominent national schools. In another school, which tracked the students’ results on the Grade 5 exam from 2003 to 2010, students were only able to pass the exam in two of the years. For these two years, the pass rates were 1 out of 6 students, and 1 out of 22 students respectively. In addition, the highest exam scores were only about 10 points above the cut-off marks for both years, meaning these students would only be eligible to enter the lower ranking national schools. The average Grade 5 exam passing rate for students from Central Province where the majority of plantations are located has been increasing; from 2005 to 2007, the passing rate was 17.4%, and from 2008 to 2010, it increased to 21.5% (male 20.4%, female 22.6%). This is still low compared to the national average, however.\textsuperscript{49} A UNESCO report showed that the national Grade 5 exam passing rates in 2003 were 48.06% for Sinhalese medium students and 58.85% for Tamil medium students, which are significantly higher than passing rates for students from plantation schools.\textsuperscript{50}

From our findings, we start to see a clear pattern emerge in which students from plantation areas, who are most often the ones burdened by the high costs of education, are also most often the students who have a difficult time qualifying for government bursaries. While the number of students from plantation schools sitting for the Grade 5 exam has been rising, due to the low-quality primary education many receive, they often fail to pass or score high enough on the exam to qualify for admissions to prominent national schools.

\textsuperscript{46} Peiris, 2004.
\textsuperscript{49} Education for the plantation, 2013.
\textsuperscript{50} Peiris, 2004.
External Scholarship Opportunities

During our interviews, we noticed that aside from the Grade 5 exam scholarship, there was little mention of other types of scholarship opportunities currently available to low-income students. We suspect this is because scholarships opportunities that explicitly target low-income students, whether funded from government or private sources, are still rare in Sri Lanka. When asked about scholarships currently available for helping low-income students with secondary education, most of the respondents could only identify the Grade 5 exam scholarship. It is worth noting that the Grade 5 exam was never designed to ensure that all poor students would eventually have access to a quality secondary education. Since entry into Grade 1 classes for primary school students is largely based on factors other than academic merit, such as location, many plantation students are at a disadvantage as they live in rural areas without good primary schools. Furthermore, many of the prominent national schools in Sri Lanka often include both Grades 1-13 and A-level classes, which is not always the case for plantation schools. Students who live near these prominent national schools and enter in Grade 1 have an additional advantage as they can automatically continue onto Grade 6 at these schools without needing to score well on the Grade 5 exam. For many plantation students, the competition for the highly-coveted spots in these prominent national schools was not fair from the beginning.

Exams and Student Attitudes

Researchers have also recognized that with its emphasis on cut-off marks, the Grade 5 exam has become a cutthroat merit-based competition that pits young students against each other and can foster unhealthy attitudes in students towards learning. The original purpose of the Grade 5 exam to select talented poor students to enter quality post-primary schools has largely been unrealized. Instead, the exam has shifted toward awarding places in Grade 6 from prominent national schools to students who already were attending good schools. Most of these students are not from poor families and would not qualify for the government bursaries. In addition, the pressure for schools to attract the best students creates a competitive environment among schools for scarce resources and funding from the government. Over time, there has been a trend in which ‘good’ schools grow into extremely large institutions that divert a disproportionate amount of both public and private resources for an increasingly narrow section of the population, usually to students from well-off families, further widening the educational disparity between the rich and poor. 

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51 King, 2012.
52 Little, 2000.
Teacher Quality

Teacher quality in Sri Lanka varies based on the financial resources and geographic location of each school. Teacher quality in plantation areas is linked to a lack of proper training and poorly-paid teachers, which perpetuates the low value placed on the teaching profession in these communities.

Teaching Staff Requirements and Qualifications

Interviews with teachers, principals, and the government reveal a deficiency in the number of teachers available, especially in rural plantation communities. On many tea plantation schools, almost double the teaching staff is needed, but schools are unable to attract qualified professionals. This leads to teachers in those areas having lower qualifications than their elite school counterparts. Teachers in plantation schools commonly have a maximum education level of the O-level or A-level exams, and lack a university degree. The low requirements to become a teacher at plantation schools leads to decreased teacher quality in low-income, high-need areas. The disparities continue due to a system that places new teachers in the most difficult and under-resourced schools, while more experienced teachers have earned their way to higher quality schools where there is more institutional support and resources.55

While teacher qualifications are a widespread issue, elite schools are making progress towards higher teacher qualification and training. Some principals are now only accepting teachers who have graduated from college; in certain schools, all teachers are all highly qualified, with degrees ranging from teaching training certificates to doctoral degrees.56

In both the plantation and elite schools, there is also an issue of professional development. Typically in the past, once a teacher was hired, there was little opportunity for further teacher training, regardless of initial qualifications. The country was lacking in facilities and programming that allowed teachers to keep their curriculum and materials current and prepare students with necessary skills.57 Currently, some principals have begun to take over professional development responsibilities and hold programming at the actual schools, allowing easy access for teachers. However, while teacher training is now available at many schools, it is difficult to convince teachers to commit their time to continuing education.

Teacher Quality and Student Achievement

The impact of teacher quality on student achievement is affected by a number of current and past factors, and is therefore a complicated relationship to isolate. For students, such factors as family income and past academic performance may play a large role in mediating the effects of class size and teacher education and experience on current student achievement.58 Despite this seemingly amorphous relationship, most studies point toward an existing, positive relationship between teacher preparation and student advancement: teachers who have adequate training, as well as classroom experience, produce higher gains in academic achievement than those who do not.

For the Sri Lankan context, in which stark disparities exist between teachers in elite, urban schools and those in the plantation area, plantation teachers are often unable to produce the gains in achievement that will allow their students to pass the Grade 5 examination and progress to higher levels of education.

55 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
56 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
57 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
Estimated differences in teacher quality do, in fact, lead to impressive differences in student achievement.59 The best teachers were able to induce more than a year’s worth more of learning than teachers ranked as the worst. More specifically, a ‘good’ teacher will produce a gain of 1.5 grade level equivalents per year, while a ‘bad’ teacher produces 0.5—less than one entire academic year’s learning.60 Therefore, for students located in the plantation area, access to lower-quality teachers is a major contributing factor to the achievement gap between such students and their elite, urban counterparts.

Teacher Experience

Of the numerous characteristics that supposedly underlie teacher quality, teacher experience is often assumed to lead in predicting teacher effectiveness. The majority of studies focusing on teacher experience have indeed found that, in general, greater experience in the classroom produces greater student gains.61 The relationship between experience and quality of instruction is also significant; teachers during their first and second years of teaching tend to perform worse in the classroom. This trend is especially important for Sri Lanka’s plantation schools, where teachers may choose to transfer, leaving students either with inexperienced teachers, or with a shortage of teachers overall. Teacher shortages, resulting in larger class sizes and disproportionately affecting math and science departments, further reduced the quality of teaching available to plantation students.62

A second characteristic, teacher salary, may also play an important role in dictating teacher performance and impact. In the plantation area, teachers are often underpaid compared to teachers in urban regions. As many studies examining the effect of teacher salary on student performance relate higher salary levels to higher student achievement,63 lack of appropriate salary may have a deleterious effect on the students of the plantation region. Although this is complicated by the relationship between myriad prior factors and attributes that a teacher may possess (i.e. experience, education, living conditions), lack of benefits and government-provided living quarters, travel expenses, money contributed to families and school out-of-pocket, and other additional costs contribute to overall economic hardship.

59 1992, as cited in Hanushek & Rivkin, “Teacher Quality.”
60 Hanushek & Rivkin, "Teacher Quality," 18.
61 Hanushek & Rivkin, "Teacher Quality," 11.
62 Interview participant 25, interview, January 2013.
63 Hanushek & Rivkin, "Teacher Quality," 12.
Household Characteristics

This section addresses components of educational access and achievement as related to the household. We will draw on the perspectives of the parents and teachers that we interviewed to present challenges and opportunities related to parental motivation and commitment to their children’s education, financial literacy and financial constraints, and health and nutrition as related to school readiness.

Parent Motivation and Commitment to Education

Parents in Sri Lanka, including tea plantation workers, are incredibly dedicated to the education of their children. In a personal conversation, a long-time NGO worker in Sri Lanka said that the commitment to education in the country was the highest she had ever seen in any country in which she has worked. Interviews with parents living on the tea plantations confirmed this strong commitment to promoting their children’s education, showing that lack of will or dedication to education is not, in fact, the root of the problem. All the parents we interviewed listed their children’s education as a top priority. Some noted the increased importance of education for their children compared to their own childhoods. One parent explained, “At that time [when we were young], my family was too poor to afford schooling. At that time school was not important, and students studied on the floor. The government did not provide books. Nowadays, the government encourages people. There are chairs and tables. Now all people like to study and they study longer. [Our daughter] is happy.” Parents also recognize that a lack of education limited their own options, and want to provide more opportunity for their children. The same parent said, “We didn’t study, therefore it is important for our children to study. They want a good life, good opportunities, good job.” Parents see education as the key to future success. Another parent told us, “If [our children] are educated, they could do everything. They have a good future, a good job, and can be doctors or lawyers.” Other parents echoed similar themes related to acquiring education, including “a good life, good opportunities, good jobs, and good homes.” In particular, it was pointed out that secondary school education is vital to achieving these aims.

Rather than a lack of commitment to education, many parents’ own lack of education, financial constraints, and lack of understanding about what is needed for high quality education (like study space, for example) form the greatest barriers to education from the household perspective. Parents described how family instability, due to loss of one or both parents, forced them to stop school to be able to earn and care for younger siblings, thus limiting their educational attainment. Many families cannot afford to educate all their children. Some can’t even educate some of their children “We can’t educate the children properly because we don’t have enough money. The expenses are too high. A pair of shoes costs around Rs.550. We can’t send them to school after grade 5.”

The majority of families we spoke with turned immediately to education as a way out of generational poverty. In one case, parents in one town were able to exert enough influence and lobby their local government and education ministry to retain a talented principal that was receiving a transfer to a more desirable school. This required visits to the ministry and collective effort on the part of parents on that plantation, with able leadership by parent workers.

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64 Private Conversation, January 20, 2013.
65 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
66 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
67 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
68 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
69 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
70 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
71 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
72 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
This story was the exception rather than the rule. Even so, the strong commitment parents expressed opens opportunities for effective interventions through parents and households in addition to (or instead of) school interventions. Parents’ positive attitudes toward promoting their children’s education is important for successful interventions and because they indicate that alleviating some of the barriers they reported is likely to have a real impact on their children’s education.

**Lack of Financial Resources is a Significant Challenge**

Despite a strong desire for education amongst the Hill Tamils, educational opportunity remains limited by steep, multidimensional financial barriers. Our qualitative findings mirror the assertion of the World Bank that the majority of estate households rely solely on estate wages for earned income. Most interviewees quoted total income from each employed family member that comprised earnings from the estates ranging from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 12,000 monthly for over 18 days of work, and Rs. 6000 to Rs. 9000 monthly for less than 18 days of work. As such, earnings remain particularly sensitive to the number of family members employed on the estate, and to their daily output. This illuminated the severe impact the working conditions of the estate have on the likelihood of education financing – with a complex grievance system, most workers receive a drastic pay cut for incidences such as illnesses and accidents. For example, a woman in one tea plantation town explained that presenting a doctor’s letter did not result in wage compensation, and her pay was decreased from Rs. 500 a day to Rs. 300. Furthermore, as the estates do not compensate for accidents to workers outside the plantations, her husband suffered wage losses due to an injury from falling building debris. Together, their wage deductions led to increasingly insurmountable difficulties in financing education for their children.

These income challenges as a barrier to education are further contextualized by the sheer number of educational expenses families are forced to bear, including practice book fees, school fees, exam fees, school development society fees for school infrastructure, transportation, tutoring fees, entrance fees, and for school supplies - although basic education is characterized as free by the government. One family of three explained the school-related fees for their three children added up to Rs. 10,000 per month and that they were unable to afford new shoes for the children that year. Education costs alone can plunge families into a monthly deficit of up to Rs. 2000, or could leave families with a meager Rs. 4000 in the best-case scenario, with which to fund every other aspect of living. In particularly dire instances, such as those in which families repay advanced loans to the Estate alongside other compulsory administrative fees including name and pay cards and tea and union fees, pay may be drastically reduced with the result that undertaking education can sink a family into Rs. 7000 in deficit per month. Several parents who lamented the expenses demanded by schools aptly captured this extreme difficulty with education financing, and their inability to afford these monthly education related costs.

Clearly, the long-term access to education for the Indian Tamils is closely linked to income and financial stability, and efforts to address the financial barriers must address multiple dimensions simultaneously. Improving income and earning potential will be particularly important. Some families achieve this through external migration for employment, which has led to greater instability for these families and negative impacts on children’s development and education.

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74 Interview Participants, interview, January 2013 (Daily wages quoted as Rs. 500 for over 18 days of work per month, and between Rs. 300 and Rs. 350 for less than 18 days of work)
75 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
76 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
77 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
78 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
79 For more details, please see Section 8.
80 A plantation worker who worked 9 days earned Rs. 3691, but after deductions, was left with Rs. 750 as pay
81 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
The World Bank suggests that diversifying income to outside wages and enterprise incomes may also alleviate the difficulty.\textsuperscript{82} Thus, families may earn additional income through skilled work in other sectors and geographical regions, and through trade. However, as structural changes like these can only occur in the medium to long-term, more immediate gains can come from addressing financial management as a critical driver of financial stability. A better understanding of how to multiply income quickly in the short term, as well as how to secure a higher net present value through strategic investments may enable families to effectively earn more, and have assets that can be liquidated to fund education as required. Evidence of such practices on the estate is especially thin, with only two families from the research sample reporting similar initiatives. The first purchased gold with money saved before child bearing and currently pawn it to meet education financing to not incur monthly debt.\textsuperscript{83} The second purchased a cow from which milk is sold to the community as an income multiplier. These examples, though rare, are an indicator that the Indian Tamils can implement and benefit from better financial management skills, and open a window for intervention by NGOs through financial management training.

**Financial Constraints: Impact on Nutrition and School Readiness**

The financial constraints faced by plantation worker families have deeper nutritional consequences, which threatens not only their readiness to begin school, but also their long-term educational outcomes. Teachers shared their experiences of students arriving to school hungry and tired. “Some students faint upon their arrival to school and must be given some first aid, food, and rest before they can begin learning.”\textsuperscript{84} This phenomenon increases near the end of the month when household wages run dry and the next payment is anticipated.\textsuperscript{85} The amount and uncertainty of household income levels is the major contributor to young children’s poor nutrition with tea plantation families suffering from the highest rates of stunting or chronic malnutrition in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{86} According to UNICEF, over 40% of children in this region are stunted.\textsuperscript{87} Stunting has significant associations with lowered academic achievement and increased rates of later dropouts. Academic success can be impeded by the consequences of chronic under nutrition, including problems with attention, behavior and cognitive development.\textsuperscript{88} In contexts of poverty, children’s under-nutrition often begins prenatally, resulting in low weight at birth, and continues through generations as undernourished girls become future mothers.\textsuperscript{89} In the Sri Lankan tea estates, nearly 40% of newborns have low birth weight.\textsuperscript{90} Children under 5 with low birth weight score lower on cognitive tests, with longitudinal studies showing these children’s greater likelihood of low achievement and consequent dropout.\textsuperscript{91} The exceptionally high rates of low birth weight and stunting in the Tea Plantation regions are a key impediment to children’s development and academic development, requiring immediate attention.

Thus far, limited efforts to alleviate under nutrition and increase children’s well-being to actively participate in school in the tea plantations have focused on providing school lunches. Government programs provide school lunches for children in standards 1 through 5, but this effort is insufficient.\textsuperscript{92} Secondary school students, beginning in standard 6, often have to travel further since there is less access to secondary schools. Secondary school students often live in boarding homes to access a secondary school education in the tea plantation region and beyond.

\textsuperscript{82} World Bank. *Sri Lanka Poverty Assessment: Engendering growth with equity.*

\textsuperscript{83} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.

\textsuperscript{84} Interview participants, interview, January 2013.

\textsuperscript{85} Interview participants, interview, January 2013.


\textsuperscript{89} S.P. Walker et al., “Effects of early childhood psychosocial stimulation and nutritional supplementation.”

\textsuperscript{90} Mervyn Fletcher, “UNICEF-supported programme tackles malnutrition on tea estates in Sri Lanka.”

\textsuperscript{91} S.P. Walker et al., “Effects of early childhood psychosocial stimulation and nutritional supplementation.”

\textsuperscript{92} Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
These secondary school students are dependent on their hosts to provide nutritious and adequate meals. According to interviewees, host families themselves struggle and need the rent fees paid by hosted students. These host families do not provide adequate nutrition for the secondary school students living with them, impeding their alertness, ability to perform in school, and continued development.\textsuperscript{93} There is currently no government program to provide secondary school students with school meals from standards 6 to 10.\textsuperscript{94}

The multiple risks associated with financial instability, including low birth weight, under-nutrition and stunting, as well as family instability due to growing numbers of at least one parent migrating to find work, increases the developmental risk factors faced by children in the tea plantation sector. Such multiple early risk factors are associated with compromised physical, cognitive, and psychological development, which impede school readiness and achievement, increasing the likelihood of poor academic performance and dropout in adolescence.\textsuperscript{95} Addressing the developmental and academic needs of children through their parents’ financial stability can begin to alleviate the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

\textsuperscript{93} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{94} Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{95} S.P. Walker et al., “Effects of early childhood psychosocial stimulation and nutritional supplementation.”
Geographic Isolation

Geographic isolation, a wet climate, and mountainous terrain make mobility, transportation, and infrastructure construction problematic in the Nuwara Eliya district, especially during the May-December rainy season. The long distances to schools, road safety concerns, and elevation create barriers for many secondary students in physically accessing the education that is available to them. Distance and terrain greatly affect access to secondary school, especially for girls. Boarding is an option, but it remains cost-prohibitive for many students in the Hill Country.

Distance & Transportation

The challenge of distance and the transportation required to overcome this obstacle create extra costs for many families who cannot afford such expenses. These costs come in the form of fees for drivers and chaperones, as well as taxi and bus fares. In the Nuwara Eliya district, there are more primary schools than secondary schools, forcing secondary students to either travel long distances or to seek out boarding nearby their school. One parent reported that the local primary school was approximately 7 kilometers away from home and that her child had to walk every day to access education.96 The parent further explained that children in the area begin walking to school at age 3.97 At this point, an adult is hired to accompany them to and from school. Due to the additional vulnerability of girls, parents of female students often insisted on sending their children by bus over long distances.98 As a result of the infrequent bus schedule, one student’s time commuting and sitting in a classroom is more than 12 hours a day. Teachers said that students travel around 10 kilometers total, spending a minimum of 1 – 1.5 hours on the commute.99

Educators in the plantation areas regularly reported children being exhausted by the time they arrive at school, particularly when they do not have access to proper nutrition.100 This makes it difficult for children to focus on their studies for an extended period and contributes to absenteeism. The high elevation and steep terrain adds further challenges to mobility. One administrator said that the students from the school matriculated to a secondary school in another village that was only accessible by a poor road seen as dangerous for girls.101 Some schools simply cannot be accessed by vehicle given their location within the plantation.

Boarding for Secondary School

The highest quality secondary schools in Sri Lanka offer boarding options for students who do not live in the immediate vicinity. A principal noted that although schools use geographic proximity to determine student admissions,102 many poor students still commute longer than their wealthier peers, especially to access quality secondary schools. In other words, elite public secondary schools tend to recruit and attract students who live nearby the school and have access to transportation (typically less than 4 kilometers away). Students in elite public schools may have access to hostels on campus. However, many secondary students in the hill country must leave their hometown and stay in a boarding house in a larger city, closer to a secondary school.103 Given the high cost of boarding, as one principal noted, some students opt to move to larger cities and enter the work force instead of furthering their education.

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96 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
97 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
98 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
99 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
100 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
101 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
102 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
103 Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
Financial Constraints

Since the Free Education Act of 1949, education in Sri Lanka has been free until Grade 9. The Ministry of Education is responsible for financing publicly-provided education through expenditure on school buildings and teacher and staff salaries, in addition to providing school uniforms, meals and textbooks, and other related administrative expenditures. The Ministry of Education allocates financial resources in schools based on the number of students and the degree of need, giving favorable treatment to disadvantaged schools in underprivileged regions.\textsuperscript{104}

Nevertheless, the education sector in Sri Lanka suffers from severe funding limitations and is consequently unable to provide meet financial and capital needs of the schools. Moreover, the limited resources and budget of the Ministry of Education make it difficult to allocate sufficient resources to meet the education needs in schools, and this is a particular challenge for schools in remote, disadvantaged areas.

School Fees

The funding limitations and challenges at the national level leads to high out-of-pocket expenditures on other aspects of education. Several principals interviewed stated that although their schools do not charge official school fees, they receive annual contributions from parents via the School Development Society as “admission fees.” The interviews suggested that all the parents pay these annual contributions. Furthermore, principals noted that parents pay for school supplies, shoes, and additional uniforms, as the students receive only one uniform from the government. This reveals that both direct and indirect school costs of school can be substantial for parents.

School fees, often collected in the form of contributions by the School Development Society, make school attendance more difficult for many families in the tea plantation communities. The interviews revealed that tea plantation public primary schools frequently required admission fees, ranging from 36 to 500 rupees annually. Secondary school entrance fees were higher, further increasing the financial burden of continuing education. For example, it cost Rs. 1,300 a year in some cases to attend secondary school.

In addition to annual costs and admissions fees, families must pay for exams, report cards, exercise books, sports, boarding and even religious festival contributions. For example, one interview participant noted that students had to pay 50 rupees for Christian and Hindu religious festivals at school, regardless of their family’s religious affiliation. Additional financial costs include food and bags. Families reported paying between Rs. 100 and Rs. 2000 for birth certificates required for schooling,\textsuperscript{105} Rs. 300 for school development fees,\textsuperscript{106} up to Rs. 3000 for stationery per child,\textsuperscript{107} up to Rs. 2000 for transportation,\textsuperscript{108} Rs. 100 as exam fees, Rs. 100 for sports fees, Rs. 180 for facility fees,\textsuperscript{109} and fees for after-school lessons.

As a result of parents’ interest in education, many interviewed parents wanted or paid for private individual or group lessons for their children outside of the regular school day. Private instruction, in fact, seemed to be almost necessary in the Sri Lankan education system, as curriculum content required to take national examinations such as the Grade 5 exam was often not covered in its entirety in schools. The resulting need for private lessons add to the financial burden of education for parents.

\textsuperscript{105} Interview participants, interview, January 2013: birth certificate copy – Rs. 100; Interview participant, interview, January 2013: birth certificate through Estate Management – Rs. 150; Interview participant, interview, January 2013: stamp and other costs – Rs. 600; Interview participant, interview, January 2013: Rs. 2000 for children over 5 years old, if processing undertaken independent of Estate Management.
\textsuperscript{106} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{107} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{108} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
\textsuperscript{109} Interview participant, interview, January 2013.
Household financial constraints often play a considerable role in the educational decision-making processes of Indian Tamil families. In recent years, plantation sector wages have failed to match the rising cost of living, which has prevented upward mobility, perpetuated economic stagnation, and kept overall schooling levels low among Indian Tamil communities. While real household incomes in Sri Lanka increased by 10% between 1997 and 2004, in the plantation sector the increase was only 5%. For many plantation worker families, economic pressures drive down private investment in education:

> We know some people who do not send their children to school. Because of poverty, they send their children to Colombo to work. This usually happens after Grade 9, at which time they have to shift to the school in Mocha. Most students will not shift to secondary school but will go to work instead. This is because the school is too far and the parents are too poor.

**Overseas Employment**

Overseas employment, typically in the form of manual or household labor undertaken in the Middle East, offers a lucrative source of external income for many plantation families and can help to offset burdensome household educational expenditures. Migration for employment within Sri Lanka, most often to Colombo, has a similar alleviatory impact on Indian Tamil economic circumstances. Plantation worker families that lack access to external work opportunities often experience real difficulties in affording their children’s education, most notably private tuition.

As mentioned in the Grade 5 Scholarship Exam section, provision of Grade 5 scholarships by the Ministry of Education seems to provide an avenue for more disadvantaged students to gain access to secondary education, but few students score high enough to earn a scholarship, and the money can be insufficient.

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111 Interview participants, interview, January 2013.
Methodology

Participants for this report were selected using purposive sampling based on the research goal of understanding economic barriers to accessing secondary education for Indian Tamils. A literature review informed the creation of the survey questionnaires. The sample consisted of 10 parents, 10 teachers, 8 principals, and 7 NGOs for a total of 35 interviews. All parents belonged to the Indian Tamil ethnic group, while the key informants, including teachers, principals, education administrators, and NGO staff, worked in predominantly Indian Tamil areas or with issues related to the Indian Tamils’ access to education. All participants were over 18 and were recruited through in-country contacts who work with the Indian Tamil population.

Data collection was conducted primarily through semi-structured interviews with parents and key informants. In addition, we noted observational data on school infrastructure and location. Interviews were conducted in Tamil, through translators, or in English in the presence of at least 2 note takers. Notes from each note-taker were compared for inaccuracies and then combined. The analysis presented here is based on the combined notes from interviews as well as observational data.

Analysis employed thematic coding, with themes based on economic barriers, in combination with a grounded theory approach to allow for the analysis of additional codes to follow unexpected findings in the data. Parents’ information formed the primary source of data for the analysis, and data from key informants were used to both validate responses from parents and to provide additional data for the development of themes. A sub-sample of the interviews was used to create codebooks. The codebooks were then used to code all of the interviews. Multiple coders reviewed the application of the codebook throughout to ensure reliability.
NGO Recommendations

To Support Students

• **Provide free or low-cost private tuition** for primary school students in the plantations in short term.

• **Deliver scholarships** to students from low-income families who fail to pass the Grade 5 exam to increase the number of ways students can obtain financial assistance to reach their educational goals. Currently, the Grade 5 exam is the primary source of help for needy students looking to obtain a better education.

• **Provide families with basic English textbooks** that are suitable for students' English levels.

To Support Families

• **Increase financial literacy** through a two-pronged approach capturing interventions for management of current earnings and expansion of income sources beyond plantation wages. NGOs may provide training and information on short-term investments and prioritization of key household expenses, including education. In addition, financial stability in the long-term may be facilitated through information sharing on opportunities for income from alternative sources. These include opportunities for skilled work in other sectors, as well as income through trade.

• **Give workshops to parents on tea plantations** to help them understand the importance of English education and ways they could encourage their children to learn English.

• **Provide community-level school transportation** since stakeholders at every level could make a relatively inexpensive and positive impact on children’s ability to access education by making transportation available. Some teachers said that providing vehicular transportation for students would improve access to education. Vehicle ownership is very low among the tea plantation community and represents a financial barrier to most. As a result, a community van or bus could open up access to many children.
Policy Recommendations

To Support Students

• **Provide more institutional and financial support to students** who do not qualify for government bursaries or entrance into better schools due to their scores on the Grade 5 exam. The Grade 5 exam is designed to help only those who were considered gifted by the standards of the exam. Students who are not able to meet the stringent performance requirements to transfer into better schools still deserve the opportunity to receive a high-quality education.

• **Reduce boarder costs for secondary school.** A housing subsidy for students from the hill country could improve access to secondary school by lowering or eliminating boarding costs.

• **Collaborate with local NGOs** such as Tea Leaf Vision or organizations such as the British Council, which may provide supplementary English Classes to help bridge the gap between students in poor schools and those in elite schools.

• **Implement programs that will prepare primary students** in poor schools for early English learning.

To Support Schools

• **Identify primary schools with students who are underperforming on the Grade 5 exam,** and designate more money and resources to these schools and track whether there are improvements in students’ academic performance over time.

• **Optimize school site selection processes using geographic information systems.** Spatial data can be utilized at the ministry level to identify locations, which serve the most students, and delineate potential transportation and walking pathways to access the school. Improved planning to identify sites with the greatest catchment area for students at the ministry level could further improve access.

• **Partner with local NGOs in the community to help schools to cover the largest expenses not covered by the Ministry of Education** especially construction and renovation of facilities, high-cost school supplies such as chairs and desks, and educational materials to help reduce parent contributions via School Development Society and mandatory admissions fees.

• **Increase investment into human, financial, and physical resources for English education** in poor primary and secondary schools (bilingual/multilingual teachers, adequate pre-service and in-service teacher training and professional development, curriculum design, English textbooks).

To Support Families

• **Address nutrition challenges.** Following findings that a lack of nutrition negatively affects educational opportunity and quality, we suggest the provision of nutritional education for children and their parents, expanding the school-feeding program, particularly to secondary school students, and potentially providing food supplementation to families and/or implementing family farm programs. In addition, to address low birth weight, we suggest interventions targeting prenatal nutritional supplementation.

• **Provide targeted financial aid.** Evidence shows that the families working on the tea plantations earn too little to cover the costs of education, even if these were the sole costs the families faced. As such, it is our recommendation that families be provided with more targeted financial support by the government, manifesting perhaps in scholarships specifically tailored for education for the children of the Indian Tamils.
• Provide financial aid to parents/families of promising students before and after the Grade 5 Exam to help finance education expenses such as school supplies, admissions fees, and private instruction.

**To Support Teachers**

• Create incentives to attract teachers who are capable of teaching English to tea plantation areas.

• Increase institutional and financial investment in teacher training and professional development throughout the year for teachers at each level of qualification.

• Increase financial investment in teacher salaries in the tea plantation communities.

• Create incentives to attract teachers who are qualified to tea plantation schools.

• Provide transportation to the tea plantation communities or offer teacher housing in order to bring in qualified teachers from other communities.

• Place new teachers alongside experienced teachers for the first two years.

• Create assessments to monitor teacher knowledge and progress.

**NGO and Government Recommendations**

• Continue monitoring students’ achievements on the Grade 5 exam to identify and address areas in educational policy that need further reform. A government study in 2003 was able to identify important differences between students from low-income families who took the Grade 5 exam in the Sinhala Medium compared to the Tamil Medium.\(^{112}\) They found that the increase of Tamil medium test-takers was only 0.29% while the increase of Sinhalese medium test-takers were over 10% over the same amount of time.

• Provide additional help to primary school students in the plantations in the short term, such as subsidizing free or low-cost private tuition classes. The government/NGOs should also work closely with local school administrators on identifying educational priorities and improving the overall quality of plantation schools in the long-term, such as hiring better-trained teachers and reducing class size so that students receive more individualized attention.

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\(^{112}\) Peiris, 200
References


Visiting Serendipity

The Initiative for Sri Lankan Education (ISLE) is a student study group. Composed of 16 Ed.M. candidates in the International Education Policy (IEP) program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the group completed a qualitative study on the economic barriers to secondary education access for the tea plantation worker community of central Sri Lanka.

The group planned the trip since August 2012, under the guidance of faculty adviser Assistant Professor Sarah Dryden-Peterson at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and visited Sri Lanka in January 2013, challenging their skills in collaboration, teamwork, research, and intercultural understanding. Highlights of the trip include meeting with the Honorable Minister of Education of Sri Lanka Mr. Bandula Gunawardana, visiting with tea plantation workers and their local schools, and discussing findings with leaders of the Sri Lankan Commissions for UNESCO and UNICEF and local NGOs.

Study trek participants also completed a service project in Kalutara, distributing school supplies at a local primary school and participating in traditional welcome ceremonies.

**Study Trek Participants**

Tyler Arnot*
Kasey Boston
Ann Chang*
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Kevin Kalra*
Susan Kippels*
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Lauren Nelson*
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**NGO and Government Coordinators**

World Vision Sri Lanka
Upcountry Education Development Society
Educate Lanka Foundation
Sri Lanka Ministry of Foreign Affairs

**Beneficiary Organizations**

Upcountry Education Development Society
Educate Lanka Foundation
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Sharing our Findings

Our findings were presented to the Harvard Community on April 22, 2013.

The event also featured a photo exhibit and fundraiser, raising more than $1000 for the Educate Lanka Foundation.

*Photography by Mr. Fuadi Pitsuwan, MPP Candidate, Harvard Kennedy School*