

An Evaluation of National Housing Policy Related to Plantation Housing in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka provides more than 50% share of the Tea as a beverage in the world market, but tea estate families are some of the poorest in the country. They live in line houses with deteriorated conditions. Providing adequate housing in the urban, rural and estate sectors is a major challenge. The National Housing Policy 2019 (NHP2019) has sought to address this issue based on principles of participatory planning and social inclusion, economic effectiveness, environmental protection, and cultural adequacy. Purpose of this research is to evaluate the NHP2019 in terms of the tea plantation sector and to assess whether the policy successfully addresses housing issues of this sector. The study is based on three case studies of Diagama estate, Thalangaha estate and Gee-Kiyana Kanda estate. Further it evaluates the NHP2019, in terms of appropriateness of the problem identification, developing the solution (policy formulation) and effectiveness on real ground application (policy implementation) using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. The data collection involved a questionnaire survey with a proportionate sample of 172 households selected from three estates, an expert opinion survey with eight experts, and eight focus group discussions. The qualitative analysis was based on a content analysis using NVivo 11 software, and correlations and descriptive statistics were used for the quantitative analysis. The findings revealed that the NHP has not given due attention to the concerns of tea producers at the problem identification and policy formulation stages. There are also limitations of implementation such as no action on previous line rooms, land tenure, limitation on small loan programmes, productive land use for housing construction, issues in fund allocation and infrastructure provision. This research highlights the importance of policy reviews and revisions, which is rare in the practice of Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Housing Policy, Plantation housing, Policy evaluation, Line houses, Labour quarters

Introduction

Housing has become a major concern globally with the rapid urbanization which has triggered both quality and adequacy issues. Because of that, the concept like sustainable human settlement development has become an agenda of governments and development aid agencies whole over the world. Accordingly, Government of Sri Lanka introduced the National Housing Policy in 2017 with the aim of well-functioning housing sector that takes care of the housing needs of all (Ministry of Housing and Construction 2017). NHP 2017 provides framework for housing in four sectors of urban, rural, estate, and resettlement and was revised in 2019(minor revision).

Out of the above four sectors, the estate housing, especially the tea plantation sector has become an important topic in the recent past. However the efforts to improve the housing conditions of them are not laudable (Joachim 1976) and around 56% of the estate workers are still living in line rooms constructed by the British in the early 19th century (Chandrabose 2017).

Although tea is a main foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka, the labourers do not seem to be able to fulfil their basic needs. In terms of the basic need of shelter, these people face issues like deteriorated low-quality housing structures, lack of access to basic facilities, environmental vulnerability, land ownership, and inadequacy with increasing family sizes. These issues require the government policy interventions.

Although it had been nine years after the NHP was first introduced in Sri Lanka, there are serious housing related issues that have been reported from estate sector. The discipline of policy studies suggests three (03) main areas of research in such a context:

- Issues in problem identification and framing.
- Issue in formulating appropriate policy measures.
- Issues in implementation of the policy.

Several local and international research studies can be located on low-income housing, housing affordability, and housing and welfare (Fallahi 2017; Iheme et al. 2015). However, housing policy evaluations, which holistically explore all three (03) above research areas, were not found. At the same time studies on the effectiveness of housing policy on plantation housing has not been explored in the Sri Lankan context yet. Therefore this research aims to evaluate the nation housing policy of Sri Lanka (NHP2019) with three (03) research questions of:

1. RQ1: What are the sector specific housing issues of plantation sector compared to urban and rural housing?
2. RQ2: How effective is the national housing policy in identifying and providing measures for sector specific housing issues of plantation sector?
3. RQ3: Whether the given housing policy measures have been implemented successfully in real ground situation?

Theoretical basis

Policies are formulated to deal with specific problems related to different sectors and it can be understood as political, management, financial and administrative mechanisms arranged to reach specific goals (Koontz H and O'Donnell C 1968). According to Anisur and Mizanur (2017) policy evaluations can be used as a tool to determine the value, performance and effectiveness of any policy throughout its management cycle (Figure 1). Further, they have elaborated that the policy process

starts with problem identification and moves through policy formulation, adoption, implementation, analysis or evaluation and change or improvement.



Fig. 1: The policy management cycle
Source: Anisure and Mizanur, 2017

Such policy evaluations are important to evaluate policies to ensure accountability and oversight for performance, inform policy for decision makers, and strengthen corporate learning to support individual learning (World Health Organization 2018). Housing is a critical infrastructure of people which people used to live as well as connected to all the components of their socio-economic functions (Kabir and Bustani, 2010). Accordingly housing policy has a major role in ensuring sustainable development in a society which has broader connections with many sector as shown in Fig. 2.

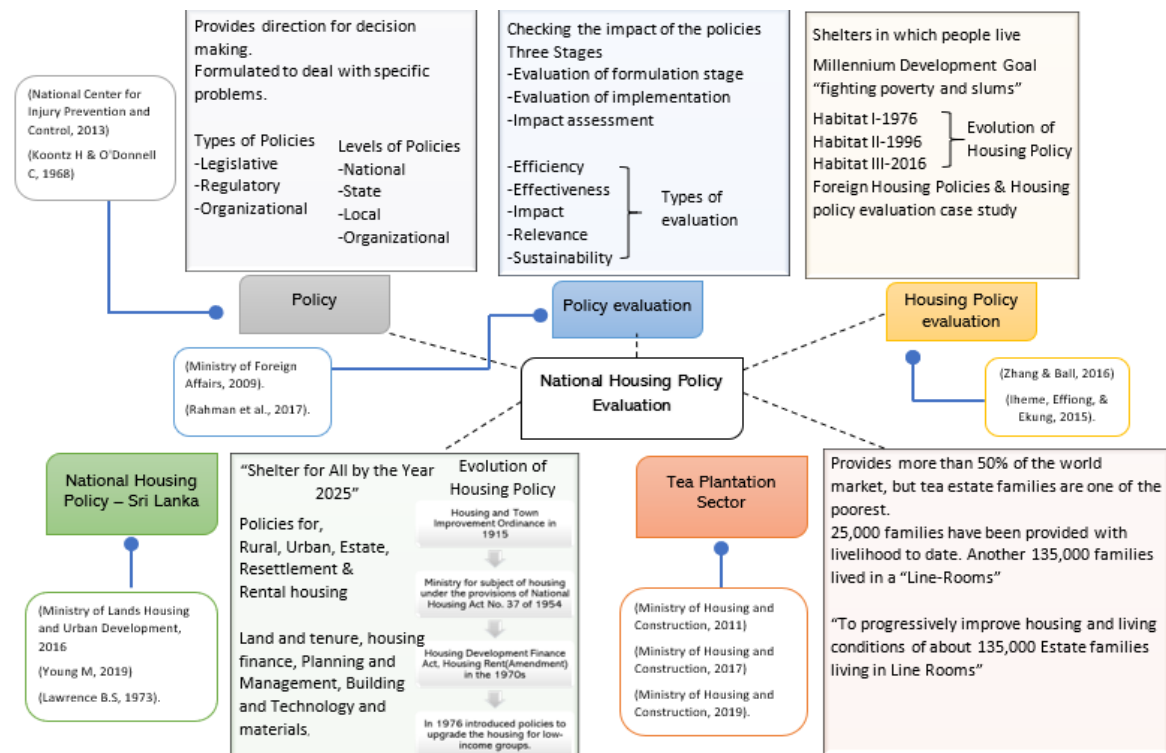


Fig. 2: National Housing Policy Evaluation
Source: Author

In terms of housing policy studies in Sri Lanka, Brun and Lund (2009) studied the have revealed the learning from post-war and post-tsunami resettlements for a National Housing Policy. They highlighted the issues like highly centralized processes, bureaucratic and technocratic approaches, and highly politicized nature. Similarly several other researches (Boano 2009; Blaikie 2009; Ruwanpura 2009) on housing policy in Sri Lanka had put more emphasis on post-disaster and post-war resettlements. Other than this there are few studies (Samaratunga and Daniel 2014; Joachim 1976; Pigott 1986) on general housing programmes and policies. However non of these have explored the issues of plantation sector housing.

Evolution of housing policy in Sri Lanka

The nature of housing in Sri Lanka has evolved due to the policies and regulations set by various governments and the assistance of international aid agencies. The first state intervention in housing sector was the introduction of Housing and Town Improvement Ordinance in 1915 by the colonial rulers in Sri Lanka. Later, British rulers introduced the Rent restriction ordinance in 1942, Town & Country Planning Ordinance in 1946 and Special Areas Development Ordinance in 1947 to address issues of population growth, hiking building materials prices and rental housing.

In terms of housing in independent Sri Lanka, in 1953, the government established a separate ministry for housing. At the same time, it introduced the National Housing Act No. 37 of 1954. In the 1970s, there were significant movements in the housing sector as follows:

1. Introduction of the Housing Development Finance Corporation of Sri Lanka Act,
2. Establishment of the National Housing Fund,
3. Rent Act of 1972, Ceiling on Housing Property Law in 1973,
4. Apartment Ownership Act in 1973,
5. Common Amenities Board Act in 1973,
6. Urban Development Authority Act in 1978,
7. National Housing Development Authority Act in 1979, and
8. Establishment of powerful institutions like National Housing Development Authority (NHDA) and Urban Development Authority (UDA).
9. The Hundred Thousand Housing Programme was initiated in 1977, which became a turning point in the history of housing policies in Sri Lanka.

The National Housing Policy was first drafted in 1958, but was not properly documented. Since the adoption of “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and its subsequent reaffirmation at the 1996 UN Habitat Conference, housing has been recognized as a basic human right. The “Sustainable Development Goals” and the “New Urban Agenda” adopted recently by the international community at the Habitat III, emphasize the need to ensure inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable human settlements and the promotion of housing policies based on the principles of equity, welfare and shared prosperity. Sri Lanka as a signatory to these declarations is

committed to uphold them. Accordingly, the Cabinet of Sri Lanka approved the first well-documented housing policy of Sri Lanka in 2014. In 2016, it was recommended to revise this policy to reflect the new vision of the Government and to focus more attention to emerging issues such as urbanization, impact of natural disasters and implementation of the concept of sustainable human settlements development. The revised version of the National Housing Policy of Sri Lanka was approved in 2019, which is the referred policy in this research study.

The NHP of 2011 emphasized that the housing issues pertaining to tea estates are unique to that sector. The revised policy of the NHP 2017 and 2019 recognizes that the Tea Estate sector needs a sensitive community action plan to address those specific issues. Specific objective is to progressively improve housing and living conditions of about 135,000 estate families living in line rooms (National Housing Policy, 2017; 2019). Above objective going to achieve base on eight policy conditions. Those conditions formulate to address problems in estate sector (Table 1).

Table 1: NHP conditions and implementation policies in terms of factors
Source: Authors

Factor	National Housing Policy	Implementation policy
Housing condition and living environment	Improve housing and living condition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy on housing structure are, Floor area of the house is 550sqft (7 perch). 1 perch=272sqft=16.5ftX16.5ft. dur to the slope, rock outcrops, the land extent can be slightly varied. House is consisting with a veranda, a living room, two bed rooms, a kitchen and an attached toilet. Add 40% for common area. Water and electricity should be available and roads, Drains, and other facilities need. Beneficiary should be agreeing to hand over present dwelling (line room) to the management.
	Open up estate employment opportunities to people who living in peripheral villages.	
Housing finance	To improve housing condition, extend the small loans program for the families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loan 52% (Rs.494,000) + Grant 48% (Rs. 456,000). Loan is recovered within 15 years with a 4% interest rate. Monthly installment is Rs. 3,800.
	Allocate one billion rupees for estate housing sector to provision housing needs for 1,250 families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total estimated cost is Rs. 1,000,000 and Rs.50,000 for preliminary work and Rs. 950,000 for civil work.
Land & Land use planning	The creation of integrated villages within the Estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should close to their working site. Concern on Township concept
	Provide land with secure tenure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide secure tenure.
Safety and Resilience	Ensure minimum disruption to estate landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free from land slide and other hazards. Land slope should be less than 31 degree. Should need NBRO approvals for earth retaining structures, storm water drainage etc. Use DDR techniques including four corner columns, provision of plinth and lintel beams, adequate roof pitch with heavy roofing materials
Institutional framework	Mainstreaming Estate workers as portion of the government structure rather than being under the Estate management as they are presently	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening implementation agencies such as, MHNV (overall coordination), IHC (provide fund to EWHCs installments), RPCs (Grant necessary to approval to release the land), PHDT (coordinate regional level work), IAS (Guide and assist) and EWHCs (Assisting the estate management).

Research Design and Methodology

This research adopted a mixed approach with both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Three different methods were adopted to investigate the three research questions. In order to identify sector specific housing problems of the plantation sector compared to urban and rural housing (Research question 1), eight expert opinion surveys were conducted. The sample of experts for the study was found through snowball sampling technique. The selection criteria of stakeholders were having at least 10 years work experience in plantation housing or academics who have research on housing policy, and demography disciplines for at least 5 years.

The interview questions were framed under seven main components of housing; namely housing structure, land title, infrastructure facilities, housing finance, neighborhood environment, social life, and ethnical background. Data were analyzed using content analysis in NVivo and QDA miner lite software.

To find out whether the NHP2017 appropriately identified the plantation housing issues and provided measure for them, a document review and eight focus group discussions with following stakeholder groups were conducted:

- Ministry of Hill Country, New villages, Infrastructure & Community Development
- Ministry of Housing, Construction & Cultural Affairs
- National Housing Development Authority
- Plantation Human Development Trust
- Regional Plantation Companies

In the analysis, it was compared whether the identified plantation housing problems mentioned in the research question 1 with the priority issues in the NHP2017. Focus group discussions were analyzed through narrative analysis on the appropriateness of the NHP2017 measures in addressing plantation-housing problems.

The last research question was on the implementation aspect of the NHP2017 policy measures. Three plantation-housing schemes of Diagama in Nuwara-Eliya, Gee-kiyana kanda in Kalutara, and Thalangaha in Galle were used as case studies. All of these schemes were implemented after the introduction of NHP2017 and have some variability for the study in terms of method of financing, location (on plantation site and off plantation), safety and resilience, and land use (Table 2).

Table 2: Justification for case study selection, Source: Author

Case study Aspect	Diagama	Gee-kiyana kanda	Thalangaha
Housing condition and living environment	Located in a hilly area. 550 sq ft house with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, toilet and a veranda	Landslide affected community. 550 sq ft house with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, toilet and a veranda	Located in a slope area. 550 sq ft house with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, toilet and a veranda
Mode of finance	Grant	Grant	Half grant and half loan
Safety and resilience	Have safety concerns	Have resilience concern on post-disaster housing	Have safety concerns
Land and land use planning	Provide housing for both estate labor and non-workers	Provide housing for both estate labors and non-workers	Provide housing only for registered estate labors
No. of housing units	150	12	20
Plantation company	Lankem	Kotagala	Watawala
Project partners	Habitat Humanity MHNV, PHDT, RPC, Plantation management, EWHCS ¹	MHNV, PHDT, RPC, Plantation Management, EWHCS	MHNV, PHDT, RPC, Plantation Management, EWHCS
Funding	Indian government	Government of Sri Lanka	Government of Sri Lanka

¹ Estate Workers' Housing Cooperative Societies

There were 172 housing units in the case study areas and a questionnaire survey was conducted with a total of 172 respondents. It adopted a five-point Likert scale to ranking the satisfaction level under main factors of housing conditions and living environments, housing finance, safety and resilience, and land. The analysis was based on descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of the SPSS software. Additionally, responses for open-ended questions were analyzed with frequency analysis of the NVivo software.

Plantation housing and sector specific issues

Tea is a main foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka since the British era. However, the status of the estate labor community is not commendable (Chandrabose and Sivapragasam 2015). The NHP of 2011 emphasized that the housing issues pertaining to tea estates are unique. The revised policy of the NHP2017 recognizes the Tea Estate sector as a sensitive community and the need to provide an action plan to address those specific issues.

According to the 2011 census data, 4.4% of the total population of the country is living in 500 tea estates. Out of that, 75% of people live in traditional line rooms (Ministry of Housing and Construction 2011). Hence, they suffer from various issues (Fig. 3) and therefore, in order to address these issues, the government policy interventions are essential and the policies must be successfully implemented at the ground level.

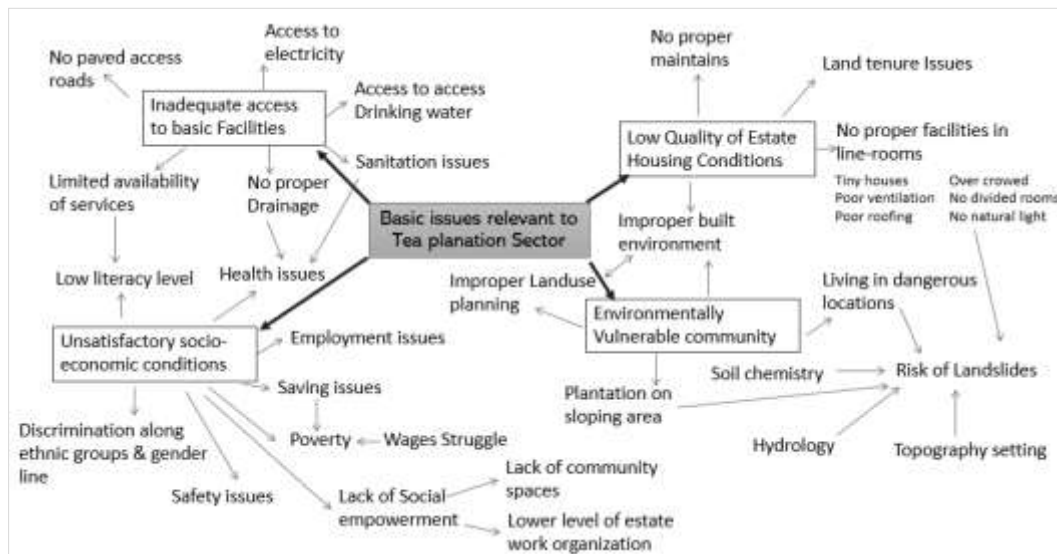


Fig. 3: Housing Issues
Source: Author

Fig. 4 shows the results of the word frequency analysis² of the expert opinion survey for the urban, rural and estate housing. Accordingly, urban housing is more dependent on urban services, accessibility, densities, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. Rural housing is more attached with agriculture. However, the plantation sector housing is strongly connect with laborers job and tea plantations.

² Word frequency analysis highlights the words with highest frequency in a given content



Fig. 4: Word frequency analysis on urban, rural and estate housing (from left to right)
 Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

Additionally, collected expert opinion data, further analyzed using code frequency analysis³ of QDA miner software and text search query⁴ of NVivo software for further refinement (Fig. 5).

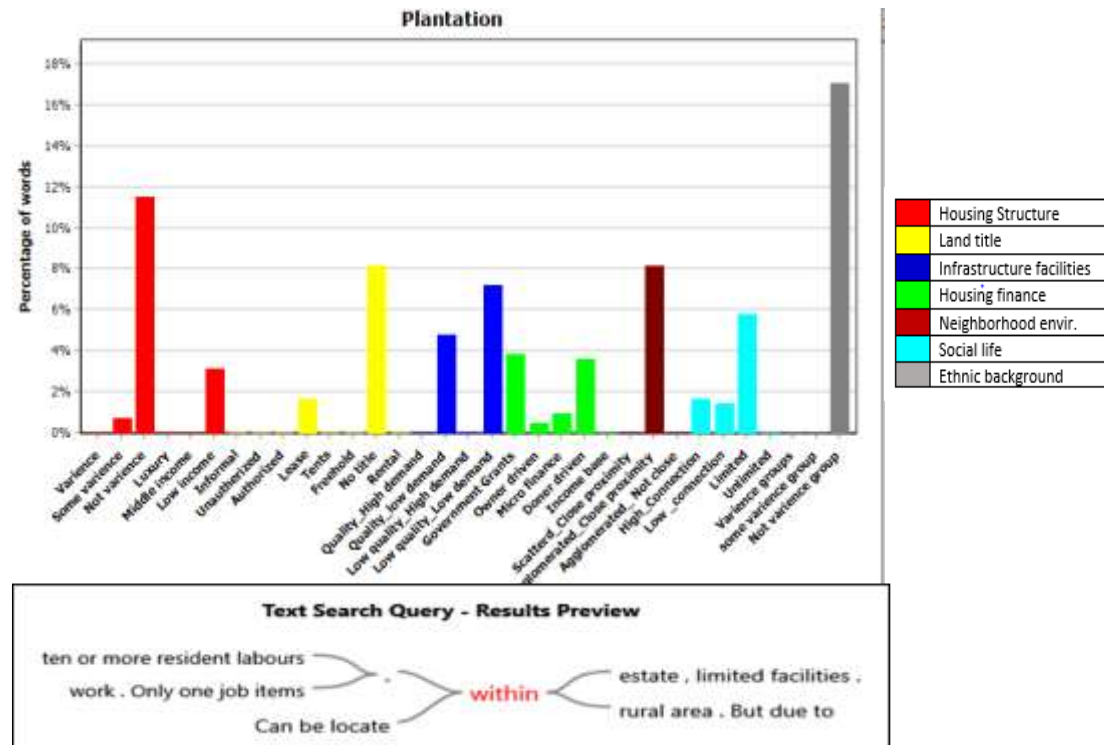


Fig. 5: Results of code frequency analysis and text search query on plantation housing
 Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

The key sector-specific characteristics of plantation housing have been compared with urban and rural housing in the table 3 below.

³ Code frequency analysis visually highlights the codes with high frequency

⁴ Text search query visualize the words associated with the search term in sentences

Table 3: Key sector-specific characteristics of urban, rural and estate housing
 Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

Criteria	Urban	Rural	Estate
Housing design	Heterogeneity	Some heterogeneity	Homogeneity
Land ownership	Vary from Informal to freehold	Freehold, state grants and state permits	Plantation agreements
Infrastructure	Quality infrastructure and high demand	Moderate quality infrastructure and low demand	Basic infrastructure with low quality. Low demand.
Utility services	High quality private services	Moderate quality private services	Mostly shared services (toilets, water connections, etc)
Housing finance	High access to finance due to asset ownership and values	Moderate access to finance due to low values of assets	Depend on government grants and donor funds
Social networks	Low networks within the community. But strong external networks	Moderate level of networks within the community	Strong networks within the community. But low external networks
Ethnic background	Heterogeneity	Homogeneity	Homogeneity

Further, the sector-specific housing issues of the plantation sector were identified using word frequency analysis and text search quarry of NVivo software. Accordingly major issues of the sector are land ownership, poor infrastructure and utility services, unfavorable socio-economic environment leading to out-migration, negative impacts of housing for productivity of the plantation, etc.



Fig. 6: Issues in Planation sector

Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

Fig. 7 below has listed a comparison between priority problems identified in the NHP2017 and issues based on this analysis outcome of the research objective 1. Therefore it can be identified that there is a gap in the problem framing stage of the NHP2017 in terms of issues of fund allocation and negative impacts to the plantation production.

Issues according to analysis,

- Issues regarding the line rooms,
- **Issues regarding the fund allocation**
- Inadequate infrastructure
- Exposure to disasters
- Unsatisfaction on socio-economy background
- Land tenure issue
- Labour shortage, labour migration
- **Negative impact to production**

Issues according to NHP,

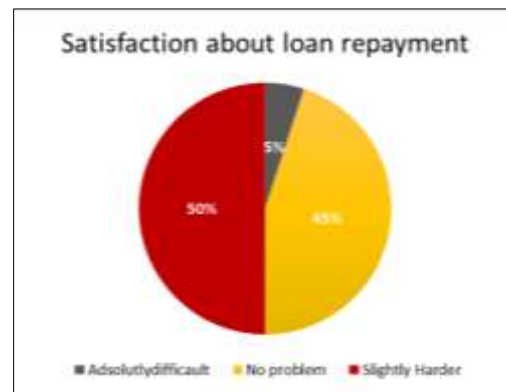
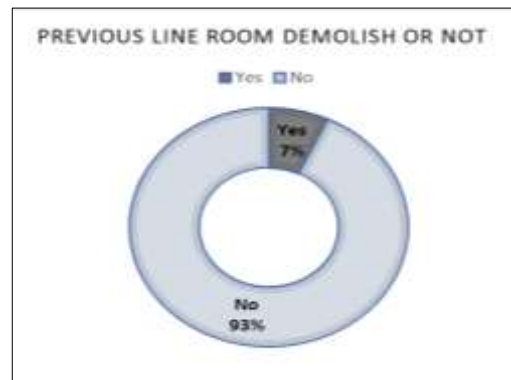
- Fundamental issues is Land tenure, estates are reluctant to release land for housing
- workers accommodation being tied to the job in the estate.
- Issues on inadequate housing, plot size, location, facilities.
- Labour shortage due to workers retiring from work, Young generation migration.

Fig. 7: housing issues in the plantation sector

Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

Finally, the real ground applications of policy measures of NHP2017 were tested with three case studies under four aspects of beneficiary selection, housing condition and living environment, housing finance, land ownership, and safety and resilience. The analysis revealed the following limitations in three aspects:

- Policy implementation on Beneficiary selection – As shown in the chart on the right, only 7% of the beneficiaries have handed their previous line rooms. The balance 93% have not handed over due to them being still estate workers who did not get new houses but living in the line rooms and due to the political effects not demolish line room and use for another uses.
- Policy implementation on Housing Finance – in all the three case study areas, the allocated fund was one million per house, but quality differences between them could be seen. Talangaha estate housing is a half loan and grant housing project and must pay Rs. 3800 per month. Results show 50% of them have found it quite difficult to repay the loan.
- Policy implementation on Land tenure – No proper land title.



In addition to above analysis, a correlation analysis was conducted among 13 satisfaction criteria used in the study (Fig. 8). Accordingly, Housing condition, Social integration, Cultural diversity, Satisfaction on fund, Infrastructure facilities, Resilience, and Environmental considerations represent positive relationships in terms of overall satisfaction. As an example, when satisfaction on housing condition is high, overall satisfaction on housing project will increase. Similarly, difficult terrain represents a negative relationship and it shows when the satisfaction on overall housing project is high, the satisfaction on different terrain will reduce.

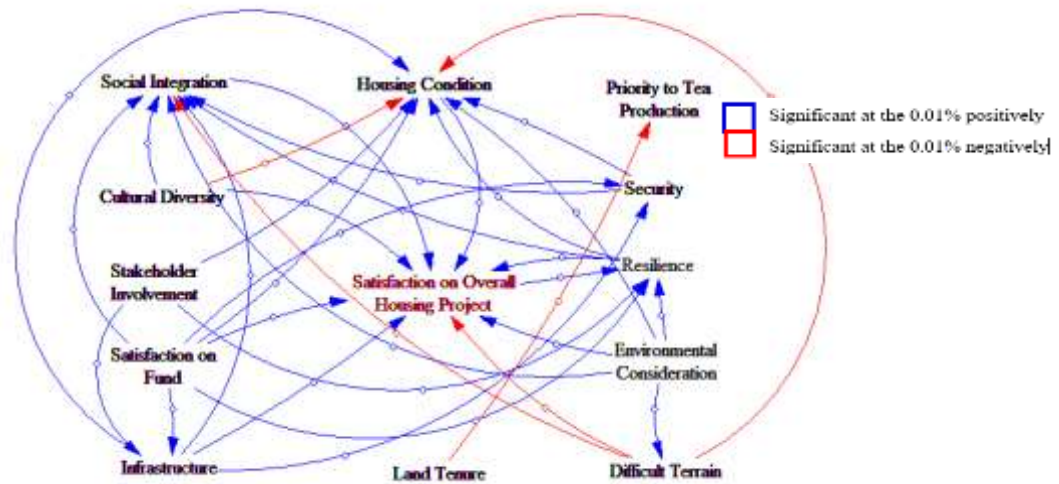


Fig. 8: Correlation between 13 housing satisfaction criteria
 Source: Compiled by authors based on primary data collection

Considering the positive significant factors represented in its implementation provide satisfaction to people. Considering land tenure, priority to tea production does not represent any significant contribution to the overall satisfaction. It emphasizes a limitation on the policy framework in terms of negative factors and insignificant factors.

Conclusions

According to the research findings, the research question 1 emphasized the gaps in problem framing stage of NHP2017. Land ownership and off-site relocations have a negative impact on the tea production. In the implementation stage, the beneficiaries are satisfied on Housing conditions, safety and resilience, and social integration aspects. However, there are implementation gaps in housing finance, land ownership, living environment, and priority to tea production aspects.

Analysis and findings offer recommendations on policy. According to the opinions of stakeholder, policies must be created as follows to address the existing limitations in the plantation sector.

- Policies with more attention to the tea productions not just the housing provision.
 Living in a line room is a motivation to work in an estate. However, it causes to reducing the world market for tea. When given a single home, it opens up new employment opportunities, resulting in a labor shortage in the estate. Moreover, the young generation is not interested in working and the beneficiaries who are looking to get a house, do not work in the plantation sector. Most of them had retired from work. Form the total production cost, 70% or a higher amount goes to harvesting and due to less contribution of tea picking it will negatively impact tea production. Therefore, there is a need for policies to retain the working community within the estate.
- Strengthen the enforcement of demolition of old line houses
 There must be strong legal agreements to demolish the previous line rooms. There is also a need for a better legal framework in the plantation sector.

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