

Impacts of land exclusion on women's socio-economic wellbeing in post-war Sri Lanka

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keywords:</p> <p>women land exclusion well-being Sri Lanka post-war period</p>	<p>Land is widely considered a fundamental asset and provides economic and social security to women. Land-based access is complicatedly linked to various dimensions of women's well-being. The exclusion of women from land ownership or use of land creates limits to their ability in economic activities, and decision-making processes, leading to socio-economic inequalities. Before the war, women in Sri Lanka's Eastern Province owned land-based assets, ensuring economic welfare and social status. Post-war, their loss of land raises concerns about their economic strength. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of land exclusion on women's welfare in Batticaloa district, Sri Lanka, by using qualitative research methods. A purposive sampling was used, and the sample size was 25. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were carried out to collect primary data and a thematic analysis was used for data analysis. The study found that most women were excluded from their land in the post-war context, leading to significant economic hardship, loss of rights, and social exclusion. Therefore, this study recommends a multidimensional approach to addressing the socio-economic impacts of land exclusion on women, including legal reforms, targeted support programs, and community-based initiatives.</p>

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Introduction

Land plays a crucial role in both individual and societal existence, providing economic well-being, identity, and cultural foundation (Agarwal, 1994). It is universally recognized as a fundamental asset (Rooyen & Stewart, 2016) and plays a vital role in shaping opportunities and livelihoods, offering economic security and social stability (Quisumbing et al., 2014; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). For women, land is a critical resource that supports their economic stability and social well-being. Systematic denial of women's access to land is referred to as land exclusion (Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2013; Doss & Meinzen-Dick, 2015). The socio-economic well-being of landless women is a significant concern, intersecting with issues of social justice, economic development, and gender equality. The loss of land assets severely impacts women's socio-economic status, economic independence, social inclusion, and personal security, undermining their overall quality of life (Davies, 2017; Rooyen & Stewart, 2016; Adem et al., 2022; FAO, 2022).

Furthermore, the study of the African Development Bank [AfDB] (2023) consistently highlights that such land-based access is intricately linked to various dimensions of women's well-being. In particular, the exclusion of women from land ownership or use of land reduces their economic opportunities and pushes them into poverty (Perry, 2019). Similarly, Adem and others (2022) explain that land rights are important for securing livelihoods, improving economic conditions, and improving social status. Without these rights, landless women often face limited access to resources, resulting in low-income levels. As well as it can be noted that their social connections are also diminishing in society (Doss, 2002; Davies, 2017; Rooyen & Stewart, 2016).

Similarly, the World Bank (2018) pointed out that land dispossession exacerbates

gender inequalities and reinforces cycles of exclusion. Women's landlessness limits their ability to fully participate in economic activities and decision-making processes, leading to wider socio-economic inequalities. Also, Cultural norms, legal structures, and institutional biases often contribute to the systemic barrier landless women face, compounding their challenges and perpetuating inequality.

In this regard, studies on the land in Sri Lanka indicate that, especially in the Eastern Province, Tamil women owned more land than men in the pre-war period (Ponnambalam, 2015). Particularly, women have been the landowners through dowry, customs, and property segregation (Jayawardena, 2017). Women have been using such land for various purposes such as agriculture, small plantations, renting out, and using the property as an investment to start small business activities. Despite this, they were forced to lose and abandon their lands due to displacement from their war territories and many areas being declared as Military reserves. Studies reveal that such loss of land has pushed women back from social and economic positions.

The prolonged civil war in Sri Lanka caused the displacement of a large population from the Northern and Eastern provinces (Geiser & Hasbullah 2021). This displacement has particularly affected Tamil women, who have increasingly faced issues related to land (Rajesingham, 2011; Oakland Institute [OI], 2021). Many women lost access to land due to this displacement. Despite the end of the civil war, both legal and traditional land policies have continued to overlook women's land rights in Sri Lanka (Alwis, 2002; Rajasinhham, 2011; Sri Lanka Campaign for Peace and Justice [SCPJ], 2022). Women who owned most of the land before and lost their land after the war. They were also not given their land by the government (CPA, 2005a).

Similarly, after the post-war period in Sri Lanka, the exclusion of women from land ownership has profound social and economic consequences in Tamil society. Specifically, it is identified that Women could not access or control their land, which intensified poverty, and marginalization (Eichhorst & Marx, 2011; Holland, 2020). This exclusion affects economic well-being, social status, and participation in women's decision-making processes (Kanakasabai, 2018).

Studies indicate that the prolonged war-induced displacement has significantly impacted women, particularly by severing their connection to their lands. Many have lost access to their residential, agricultural, and property holdings, leaving them further marginalized (African Development Bank, 2023; Arulthas, 2024; D'Costa, 2018; Ganhewa, 2020, 2024; Sultana et.al., 2024). Specifically, land that was once maintained as property and used for agriculture and income generation has been lost (Ganhewa, 2024). However, in the post-war context, the government has not taken steps to reallocate residential or agricultural land to women. The study findings emphasize that women's land-related losses have not been recognized as a significant issue by policymakers.

Land serves as a vital source of economic support for women worldwide, significantly influencing their well-being (Agarwal, 2018; International Centre for Ethnic Studies, 2024). This highlights a clear connection between women's access to land and their overall well-being. Given this connection, it is crucial to examine how women are excluded from land ownership and the subsequent impact on their well-being. Therefore, this study seeks to explore this issue in depth.

At the same time, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) instruct to promote women's development in health, education, freedom from violence, employment, and income security, and ensure women's participation in the public

sphere. (UNDP, 2016). Despite this, studies have shown that women's basic right to land is still not protected in the eastern region of Sri Lanka (PARL, 2019).

Many families have lost their land due to the war in Batticaloa. Despite this, women have been directly and indirectly excluded from their land in various ways even after the end of the war for about 15 years. Media reports highlight how these land losses affect their daily lives, while women themselves have expressed in discussions that land-based exclusion is a significant factor contributing to their challenges. Given the seriousness of this issue, it is essential to scientifically examine the reliability of such claims. Therefore, this study aims to assess the impact of land exclusion on women's well-being.

Method

To achieve the above research objective, this study used the qualitative research method. In-depth interviews and Focus group discussions served as the primary techniques for primary data collection techniques of this study. The Batticaloa district was selected to study the land exclusion issue against women in the post-war context. The Batticaloa District comprises 14 Divisional Secretary's Divisions (Divisional Secretariate, 2024). Among these Divisions, the Chenkalady area under the Eravurpattu Divisional Secretariat Division was selected as the sample. This area is one of the most war-affected and displaced areas in the district. In addition, most of the people in this area are engaged in agriculture and cultivation activities. Thus, this area has been selected as a sample area for the study from Batticaloa District. This area encompasses approximately 695 square kilometers and is home to around 27884 families (Divisional Secretariate, 2024).

Within the Chengallady-01 division, approximately 980 families reside across

four villages. Among them, 345 families experienced displacement and have since returned, with agriculture being their primary livelihood. Women for this study were selected using a purposive sampling approach, aligning with the study's objectives. Notably, before their displacement, 246 women in the Chenkalady area held land rights. As landowners during the pre-war period, they earned their income through farming and cultivation (International Centre for Ethnic Studies [ICES], 2024). However, upon returning to their village, these women have been denied access to their lands. To explore their experiences, qualitative data were gathered from 45 women belonging to affected families. This sample included 10 participants for in-depth interviews and 35 participants for group discussions. The group discussions were conducted in five separate sessions, each consisting of seven participants.

Based on the objectives of this study, two main themes were identified. The first theme focuses on the receipt of a basic income, while the second explores the relationship between land and social relations. Accordingly, the in-depth interviews followed a semi-structured format. The main guiding questions were prepared in advance, but the interview evolved based on the participants' responses. Flexible and probing questions were asked to gain deeper insights, and all data were recorded with the participants' permission. Similarly, the group discussions were designed to encourage guided interaction. The researchers introduced key topics related to the study, explained them, and facilitated open discussions. These discussions prompted participants to share personal experiences freely. Based on their responses, the researcher asked follow-up questions for further clarification. With the participants' consent, the discussions were audio-recorded for data collection.

Utilizing these themes, this study examines the impact of land exclusion on

women's welfare. Data was collected based on two key concepts: (1) income generation and well-being in the context of land exclusion, and (2) land-based social relations and social status. The collected data were systematically organized and documented. The analysis followed established data analysis techniques, beginning with transcribing the audio-recorded data into written form. The transcripts were then reviewed and categorized according to key themes, with data segmented into relevant sections. Coded classifications were assigned to these categories to identify patterns and relationships within the data. The categorized data were further refined under the main themes and structured using tabulation techniques, leading to the extraction of meaningful results.

Results and Discussion

Income generation and well-being in the context of land abandonment

According to sociologist Allardt (1976, 1993), well-being is defined as the satisfaction of a need and is distinct from happiness, the standard of living, or overall quality of life. In this context, income is a fundamental necessity for sustaining life (Sen, 2000). Women's income plays a crucial role in their economic well-being, the welfare of their dependent family members, and broader aspects such as gender equality and labor market participation (Eichhorst & Marx, 2011; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). Income also serves as the foundation of livelihood, where access to income directly influences the ability to generate it. Before displacement, all the women studied in this research earned an income from their land. A majority were engaged in crop cultivation on large plots attached to their households, with many relying on family farming as their primary source of income.

A woman, Baghirathi (all names have been changed) who had been involved in agriculture for a long time mentions this:

My family-owned lands had been passed down for generations, and we continued the tradition of farming. I cultivated my land by employing many workers, and the income I earned brought me a sense of happiness and fulfillment. The earnings from my labor provided a satisfactory and stable life.

Another woman named Lavanya mentions this:

Previously, our large land near the house was filled with trees like mango, jackfruit, banana, guava, and sugarcane. This provided a seasonal income that allowed me to cover both personal and household expenses. This not only ensured financial stability but also brought me a sense of peace and deep satisfaction.

The perspectives shared by the respondents highlight that women's income from land is not merely a means to meet economic needs but also a source of mental well-being, fulfillment, and a sense of purpose. Land is primarily viewed as a vital source of livelihood and financial stability. The income women generate from their land, particularly through agricultural businesses, plays a crucial role in strengthening their economic standing (Rahman & Hossain, 2023). Moreover, evidence suggests that financial independence through land-based income empowers women to make decisions at both the family and community levels (Adamu & Kanu, 2022), contributing to an improved quality of life and overall life satisfaction (Miller & Peters, 2016; Bulankulame & Indika, 2006; African Development Bank [AfDB], 2023; Sultana et al., 2024).

This study also reveals that most women developed savings and spending habits with their land-based income. They used their earnings to meet daily household needs

and invested in jewelry and land as a means of financial security. Wearing these pieces of jewelry at family events symbolized a prosperous life and enhanced their social value within their families.

A woman, Kala, explains this:

Our garden lands are used for livestock and horticulture, and we get a good income. Beyond my expenses, I built a big house in my area and bought two plots of land. This continuous income resulted in savings.

Therefore, these financial opportunities provided women with a sense of individuality and social security within their families, both socially and personally. However, while some women were able to save and invest their earnings, others faced financial instability due to their husbands' alcoholism. Despite these challenges, the income generated from their land played a crucial role in meeting household needs, supporting their children, and covering expenses for ritualistic family events.

A woman named Maya who continuously engaged in cultivation explains this:

Due to my husband's alcoholism, his income was insufficient to support our family's needs. Despite this, we continued cultivating crops such as chilies, brinjal, ladies' fingers, and onions on our land, adapting to seasonal conditions. The income from our farming efforts helped us manage our household expenses, though not without some difficulty.

Thus, income from land serves as a crucial support system for women and their families during difficult times, providing financial stability and protection against economic crises. Some women described their land as a shield that safeguarded both their families and their social standing. Land ownership plays a vital role in mitigating the risks of poverty (Agarwal, 1990; 1994a; Fonseka et al., 2011) and significantly contributes to

enhancing household income (Rahman & Hossain, 2023).

The loss of land due to displacement has stripped most women of their primary sources of income. Despite living in displacement for an extended period, the government has failed to properly identify suitable locations and provide them with permanent housing. As a result, many families have been forced to migrate repeatedly over the past 20 years, preventing them from settling in one place and sustaining their livelihoods. Even in cases where women have the potential to engage in income-generating activities, the lack of government support and land allocation has left them without opportunities to rebuild their agricultural livelihoods. Consequently, they are unable to farm, leading to financial instability, mounting debt, and a persistent struggle with income insecurity.

Kalpana mentions this:

The government and its agencies ignored us for a long time. I have extensive experience in agriculture, yet I currently own no land. The government forced me to leave my home for security reasons but never provided me with alternative land. In the area where we were relocated, there are no opportunities for agriculture. Some organizations require land deeds to offer agricultural support, but how can I provide one when I no longer have my land? Without a land deed, it is impossible to engage in farming or access the assistance needed to rebuild my livelihood.

The above statement highlights the government's delay in addressing women's land-related issues and the lack of a swift resolution. Land remains a complex and unresolved issue in the post-war period in the Eastern region (Lindberg & Herath, 2014). Additionally, when organizations require land deeds for agricultural support, the slow process of issuing these documents further hinders women's ability to resume farming. This instability has severely depleted their

income and savings. For instance, studies in Sri Lanka have shown that the livelihoods of those displaced by war and later resettled have been significantly affected due to their inability to access and utilize their land (International Centre for Ethnic Studies [ICES], 2024; Ganhewa, 2020; Chandran, 2024).

Despite managing to earn small or occasional income through alternative means, the loss of land and resettlement under the new settlement program has been a significant setback for women. The failure to allocate land for agriculture has severely disrupted their livelihoods, making it difficult for them to sustain their families. Moreover, the houses and surrounding areas provided in the resettlement program lack the essential facilities for crop cultivation. While some women have attempted to pursue alternative occupations, limited resources, and opportunities have left many families struggling with income insecurity and financial hardship.

A woman named Rohini mentions this situation:

During the war, we left our lands for military protection and moved to other areas where there were no facilities for land and water to cultivate crops. In this new location, the lack of agricultural conditions and limited connections with the local community have directly impacted on our ability to earn a stable family income. Despite making several appeals to government authorities for agricultural land in residential areas, no action has been taken. If I had been given land, I could have established a home garden and earned an income. However, the government has failed to provide alternative land, forcing my family to rely on unstable wage labor. As a result, we are frequently trapped in cycles of debt, making everyday life a constant struggle.

The above conditions highlight how women have not only lost their primary source of income but have also been pushed into debt. The lack of access to land for

agricultural activities, compounded by unstable wage labor opportunities, has left them in an uncertain financial situation, further deepening their vulnerability.

Seetha also highlights another situation:

Having lost our lands and being relocated to a small plot of land provided by the government, we are now considered non-income earners. This situation shapes how others relate to us, and we feel marginalized because of it. It is incredibly heartbreaking to experience this, all due to our landless status. If we had been provided with suitable land, we could have sustained ourselves through our labor, but instead, we are left with few options for livelihood.

The above opinion reveals that women are acutely aware that the loss of land has weakened their social relations. Their sense of marginalization stems not only from their landless status but also from how this loss has affected their social standing and relationships with others. They feel that their value in the community has diminished, highlighting the deep social consequences of losing their land.

Many women, having experience in crop cultivation and horticulture on their own or leased land before displacement, are now unable to engage in similar businesses due to a lack of experience in other areas, such as handicrafts. When these women seek loans from banks to lease land for agricultural activities to generate income and meet their families' needs, the requirement of a land deed becomes a significant barrier. Having lost their entitled LDO (Land Development Ordinance) land, the government has yet to provide the necessary deed documents, making it impossible for women to access loans. Additionally, neither the government nor the private sector has implemented any special programs or benefits for displaced individuals in war-affected areas. As a result, these women remain landless and homeless, which severely hinders their

ability to apply for loans or engage in income-generating activities. Consequently, they are left dependent on their husbands' non-permanent wage work, often facing debt due to the instability of low and uncertain incomes. The loss of land, therefore, plays a pivotal role in the economic challenges these women face in the study area.

According to Vithanagama and Gunatilaka (2023), women's land ownership enhances their ability and power, significantly influencing the economic status of their families. Post-war land reforms in some countries have played a crucial role in reducing gender inequalities in land ownership, which, in turn, has strengthened women's economic power (Joshi, 2025). These reforms highlight the transformative potential of land ownership in empowering women and improving their socio-economic standing.

The findings of this study indicate that the loss of land has significantly weakened the well-being of women and their families in the study area. After the war, Sri Lankan women faced considerable difficulties in reclaiming their lost lands, which directly impacted their economic stability and overall well-being (Gunaratna & Pathmanathan, 2017; CPA, 2016). Specifically, Sritharan (2024) highlights that in the North and East of Sri Lanka, the loss of agricultural land holdings among women has resulted in diminished power, ownership, and asset value, leading to economic alienation. This aligns with the human development and empowerment approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2000), which emphasizes the expansion of individual freedoms as essential for living a dignified life and achieving well-being. Similarly, feminist thought argues that securing fundamental rights is critical for achieving gender equality, economic development, and social justice (Shiva, 1989; Mies, 1986). Land, in this context, is more than just an economic asset, it is a source of income,

security, and self-determination. UN Women (2023) further asserts that excluding women from land ownership directly marginalizes them in society by restricting their access to income and economic opportunities.

According to women, delays in government procedures for transferring land deeds, whether from their husbands' names or joint ownership have created significant obstacles in reclaiming their land rights. Practical challenges in this process have prevented them from resuming their livelihoods. Before displacement, many of these women were actively engaged in agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. However, due to unresolved land issues, they are now unable to continue these occupations, which has severely impacted their daily income. Additionally, the loss of access to their land has diminished its value over time (Ganhewa, 2024). Fonseka and Raheem (2011) further highlight that, in the post-war period, the Sri Lankan government faced considerable difficulties in effectively addressing land-related issues, resulting in serious consequences for people's livelihoods and security. This study finds that displacement has had a profound impact on women's income and employment opportunities, limiting their economic independence and deepening their vulnerability.

Women also shared that even after 30 years since their husbands' disappearance, they have been unable to reclaim land that was jointly owned or registered in their husbands' names. As a result, they have lost numerous opportunities to secure landownership for themselves. Many of these lands are located near grazing areas, making them ideal for cattle rearing, which could serve as a viable source of income. However, due to the lack of official documentation, these women now constantly fear losing access to their land. Despite filing multiple complaints with the authorities, their cases

remain unresolved, leaving them uncertain and economic insecurity.

Kawshalya refers to this:

Our land was classified as LDO land, which we had acquired from another person. We lived there for six years before being displaced. Unfortunately, during the displacement, our land deed was lost. I have repeatedly requested a new deed for the same land, but it has yet to be provided. This lack of documentation creates significant barriers when seeking financial assistance for self-employment, particularly in animal husbandry. Financial institutions require a land deed to approve funding, and even non-governmental organizations demand proof of ownership before providing support. These bureaucratic hurdles make it difficult to rebuild my livelihood. I am constantly torn between visiting government offices to resolve this long-standing land issue and focusing on earning an income for my survival. For years, this struggle has persisted, preventing me from engaging in self-employment on my own land. The uncertainty and economic hardships are overwhelming, making it difficult to find peace and stability in life.

This observation highlights the significant barriers women face in carrying out self-employment due to the absence of land deeds. The slow response from government institutions in addressing these issues further exacerbates the problem. Instead of adapting policies to support displaced individuals, these institutions continue to rely on outdated laws when granting loans, making it nearly impossible for affected women to access financial assistance. Additionally, the bureaucratic delays in the land allotment process hinder women's ability to reclaim ownership and utilize their land for economic activities. As a result, their income opportunities remain restricted, deepening financial insecurity and limiting their overall well-being.

This situation clearly illustrates how the systemic exclusion of women from

land ownership and resettlement programs has deepened their financial struggles. The incidents of losing their husbands caused problems for women to regain their land (Gunaratna & Pathmanathan, 2017; Punyasena, 2018). Likewise, it also caused problems in acquiring land under resettlement projects. Despite government initiatives like the Regularize Land Management memorandum (2011) and the Special Legal Provisions bill (2016), these policies have not effectively addressed the land-related challenges faced by displaced women. Many remain unable to reclaim their land or secure new land under government resettlement programs. As a result, women who once relied on agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry for their livelihoods have been left without a sustainable income. This financial instability has forced many into microcredit schemes, trapping them in cycles of debt with no viable means of repayment. The exclusion from land ownership has not only stripped these women of economic independence but has also heightened their vulnerability to poverty.

Land-based social relations and social status

This study further reveals that land ownership plays a significant role in shaping women's social relationships, determining their social status, and facilitating communication within their communities. The loss of land has not only impacted on their economic well-being but has also led to a decline in their social standing. According to Amartya Sen (2000), while economic well-being is a fundamental aspect of development, it cannot be the sole measure. True development must also account for the fulfillment of social and psychological needs within one's community. In this regard, maintaining and improving social status is crucial for overall well-being. The findings

of the study indicate that many women who lost their land have experienced a decline in their social recognition. Previously, land ownership provided them with security, influence, and a respected position within their communities. However, displacement and landlessness have marginalized them, weakening their social connections and diminishing their societal roles. This underscores the broader impact of land loss, extending beyond financial hardship to social exclusion and diminished personal agency.

In the Eastern Province, it has been a longstanding tradition to provide land as a dowry to women upon marriage, reinforcing their economic security and social status (Raheem & Fonseka, 2011). Through this custom, women gain recognition not only from their own families but also from their husbands' families, as landownership symbolizes stability and respect within the community. Even in the post-war period, such traditions have persisted in these regions, although their implementation has faced challenges due to displacement and land-related disputes (Kumarage, 2018).

Most of the families of the women studied lost their land due to displacement, making the practice of exchanging land as dowry in marriages less common. This has deprived women of direct access to land, limiting their economic independence and security. Some parents have attempted to provide land located in other areas as dowry, but these lands, often restricted from public use, have significantly lower value. Since they are largely unusable, they are perceived as worthless, even if women legally own them. Notably, these same lands were once profitable and held significant value before the war. However, due to restrictions and lack of access, they no longer contribute to women's financial stability or social status. This shift has further marginalized women, reducing their ability to assert ownership

and economic influence within their families and communities.

Priya mentions this:

I own two acres of land where I once cultivated mango and banana, while my parents have land for betel and horticultural crops. These lands were given to me as dowry by my parents and previously provided a good income. At that time, they held significant value. However, after relocating, we have been unable to use the land, causing its value to decrease. As a result, the worth of my assets has declined, and my income has been lost. This has led to a noticeable change in our social and economic status in the living environment.

This statement highlights the vulnerability of women who have lost the strong support that land once provided them. Gnanamuthu (2019) found that while Sri Lanka's constitution and international laws claim to uphold gender equality, these rights often remain ineffective in practice. Furthermore, Dick and others (2019) emphasized that landlessness inherently creates a state of insecurity, as land offers women spatial security, economic independence, and social status. Mastorillo and others (2012) and Pallas & Sabine (2011) further argue that landownership empowers women by allowing them to act independently, especially in communities where they have lived for generations. Sritharan (2024) also pointed out that the loss of land has particularly affected women in Sri Lanka's northern provinces, depriving them of access to resources, opportunities, and power, ultimately leading to their marginalization.

Land-related issues act as an obstacle for some women in securing marriage. Even when women possess land, security concerns and the absence of proper land deeds prevent them from confirming ownership. This uncertainty affects the longstanding tradition of providing land as dowry, which

is often a key factor in marriage negotiations. As a result, many women face delays in marriage, and in some cases, negotiations are abandoned midway. This situation significantly impacts on their social prestige, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities in a society where land ownership is closely tied to status and security.

A father named Ahmad pointed out this:

We have been displaced from our traditional home for 15 years. Over the years, I purchased three plots of land for my daughters' marriages, using savings from 30 years of hard work. We have carefully maintained these properties. However, due to the displacement, the settlement of people in the area has decreased, leading to a significant decline in the value of our land. When marriage negotiations arise, we lack the financial resources to build a house in our current location. Selling the land at a lower price is not a viable option. As a result, my daughter's marriage proposals have been delayed three times, which has greatly impacted her life.

Similarly, the tradition of men staying in women's homes after marriage persists in the Eastern region. However, even in the post-war period, women from landless families face significant challenges when it comes to marriage. This situation has created a considerable gap in their social status (Silva, 2021; Kumarage, 2018). It is customary for parents to provide homes for their daughters after marriage. In this context, the lack of land to build houses delays both the marriage process and the construction of homes for their children.

Furthermore, some parents have sold their land to support their families due to the lack of income in the post-war period and the ongoing economic crisis. These families have been internally displaced, sold their traditional lands, and settled in new areas. The high prices of land in these new areas, the unavailability of land deeds, land insecurity, and the delays in government

departments issuing new land deeds for the original documents lost lands have reduced the value of their land.

Therefore, to sustain themselves in new areas and cover their living expenses, some families have sold their ancestral lands, which they had inhabited for a long time, at very low prices. The lack of land to build houses and provide for their daughters' marriages has significantly impacted on the marriage process. As a result, land directly and indirectly affects the delay in women's marriages, and this, in turn, influences their social status.

Sridevi mentions this:

After our migration, my parents sold a significant portion of their land to build a house in the city. Now, when planning for my marriage, both land and a house are expected, which has caused a delay in my marriage. I currently have a permanent job, and I have two sisters and a brother. If we had not been displaced, we could have easily earned enough money from farming on our native land, as it was highly productive. Now, we have nothing, and my future feels uncertain.

While a mother named Gayatri mentions her daughter's situation:

My family owned 4 acres of land, 2 acres of agricultural land, and 2 acres with a house. When we were displaced, we had to leave everything behind. We have been living in the town area for about 20 years. During this time, many people have come forward to buy our land, but the price is continuously decreasing. As a result, we are being forced to sell parts of the land urgently. We would not consider selling if the government officials addressed the land issue promptly. This situation is also delaying my daughter's marriage. We lack the resources to build a house, and our daughter is now surpassing the marriageable age. This condition is making her life even more complicated.

These expressions highlight the connection between land and the fear women

have regarding their future. Studies show that war significantly reshapes women's roles and alters their social positions (Silva, 2021; Fidgerald, 2021; Mohammed, 2022). A similar dynamic is observed in this study area, where women's marriage prospects and social status have been challenged (Fidgerald, 2021). Additionally, the social relationships of women have been damaged. Similarly, in the pre-war period, many women engaged in agriculture, particularly the cultivation of millet and various vegetables and fruits. This involvement in agricultural practices allowed them to interact with a variety of stakeholders, enabling their participation in different social platforms. Some of these women are involved in millet production on their lands, which has helped them establish strong relationships within the business network, including local and regional markets. Additionally, they have maintained commercial relations with various parties involved in the distribution of agricultural products to the markets.

These activities provided women with unique opportunities. However, in the post-war situation, government restrictions on land use significantly delayed their ability to utilize their land for productive purposes. Specifically, the need to prove ownership of land excluded many women from engaging in agricultural production, creating barriers to rebuilding their commercial relationships. At the same time, this study highlighted a shift in women's roles within the agricultural sector, revealing that some women, excluded from agricultural production, turned to commercial activities. In the post-war era, women gained access to new microcredit opportunities, enabling them to establish small businesses (DVK, 2014).

A woman named Zia explains the situation:

Before the war, I had strong occupational relationships with many people, from cultivating grains to distributing them at the village

markets. It gave me great strength. However, after 20 years of displacement, we have returned to our native place for 6 years. Our agricultural lands, which were left uncultivated for 20 years, have now turned into overgrown forests. The government now classifies these lands as forests, and therefore, they do not allow us to use them. As a result, agricultural activities have become unsustainable, severely obstructing interactions and economic opportunities. In response to these challenges, I have shifted to small-scale business activities to sustain my family.

Likewise, in some families, the weakening of close familial connections has resulted in significant psychological distress among individuals. After periods of displacement, some relatives have migrated both within the country and abroad. These families once had strong ties, but women have reported that this fragmentation has led to reduced or limited interaction within family relationships, contributing to feelings of loneliness and unhappiness.

Another woman named Rania explains the situation:

During the war, my family was displaced, which significantly affected our familial structure and relationships. Of my three siblings, one currently resides at home, and two have moved abroad. Currently, my brother and I have sold our land at a cheap price, and we have been living in different areas for about 20 years. As a result, we are no longer as close as we once were. This situation often leaves me feeling empty.

In addition, some displaced women have mentioned that their exclusion from land has led to new environments, experiences, and relationships.

Mallika has mentioned this:

Two of my brothers have settled in different regions of Sri Lanka, while I have also established myself in the city. It is often sad that our contact is not as direct or frequent, but I can't deny that living in the urban environment has brought

about positive changes. The city has allowed me to develop new relationships and connections, enriching my life in several ways.

The above explanations indicate that women have experienced dual impacts following their exclusion from their land. Researchers such as (Bourdieu, 1986 as cited in Vonneilich, 2022; Coleman, 1990; as cited in Alpino & Mehlum, 2021; Putnam, 2000; Levitas, 2005) have identified social capital as primarily a function of social relations, where limited access to these relations negatively affects social capital and leads to social alienation. Bourdieu (1986) views social capital as a collective asset deeply embedded in social structures and relationships, arguing that it serves as a valuable resource accessible through social networks. Levitas (2005) supports this perspective, highlighting that the wealth of social networks influences individuals' ability to access and utilize economic, political, and cultural resources. A lack of such access weakens social capital and contributes to marginalization. However, this study also reveals that some women have successfully forged new relationships and adapted to their changed environments. Research further suggests that war has significantly reshaped traditional roles and relationship dynamics for women within their families (Perera, 2017).

Conclusion

The study highlights the profound socio-economic consequences of land exclusion on women in post-war Sri Lanka, particularly in the Batticaloa district. The loss of land has severely impacted women's financial independence, social status, and overall well-being. Considering the objectives presented in this analysis, the study reveals a clear relationship between income generation and

exclusion. Most of the women explained they had been excluded from their lands, particularly in the post-war context, which has led to important direct and indirect economic consequences for them. However, few women have successfully accessed small business opportunities, allowing them to generate their income. This dynamic emphasizes the complexities of post-war recovery, where exclusion from sources of livelihood coexists with the rise of new economic activities for some women.

Displaced women, who once played a vital role in supporting their households and communities through agriculture, now struggle with economic hardship, social isolation, and restricted opportunities for self-sufficiency. The loss of access to their land has directly impacted on their livelihoods, stripping them of financial independence and diminishing their social standing. Women who previously engaged in farming not only lost a source of income but also their sense of agency and connection within their families and society. The forced displacement, whether permanent or temporary, has severely impacted the economic stability of many women. Losing access to their land has led to increased financial strain, forcing many into debt and compelling women to sell personal assets to survive.

Despite their struggles, government policies have largely failed to address these land-related injustices, trapping women in a cycle of poverty and uncertainty. The inability to reclaim or access land has not only restricted their economic participation but also weakened their decision-making power. This exclusion has profoundly disrupted their social relationships, diminished their status, and limited their roles within the community. It has also significantly impacted marriage negotiations, particularly traditional practices such as dowry-based security tied to land ownership. Before

displacement, women actively engaged in economic activities that fostered connections with land workers, cooperatives, and markets. However, the loss of their land has severed these essential social and economic ties, further deepening their marginalization.

This situation highlights the urgent need for comprehensive support mechanisms to address the economic challenges faced by displaced women in post-conflict contexts. Policymakers must develop a prompt and effective support system that tackles the various issues arising from women's exclusion from land. A multidimensional approach is essential, including legal reforms to secure women's land rights, targeted financial and social support programs, and community-based initiatives to reintegrate landless women into economic and social structures. Without immediate intervention, land exclusion will perpetuate gender inequalities and hinder the socio-economic recovery of affected women and their families.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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