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# Microfinance Crisis



VOICE OF CITIZENS



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CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES

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மீட்டிங் கொள்கைகளுக்கான நிலையம்

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மீதர்ப்புக் கொள்கைகளுக்கான நிறுவனம்

The Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA) is an independent, non-partisan organisation that focuses primarily on issues of governance and conflict resolution. Formed in 1996 in the firm belief that the vital contribution of civil society to the public policy debate is in need of strengthening, CPA is committed to programmes of research and advocacy through which public policy is critiqued, alternatives identified and disseminated.

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## Government Intervention essential

The Microfinance Loan is a successful tool to uplift poor people in numerous developing countries. This enables the social margin who do not have the qualifications to get a loan from a Bank a way of accessing the capital needed for carrying on their livelihood on a very concessionary basis. Bangladesh is a good example for this. A lot of studies have been conducted on this subject and it has been accepted as a positive method.

Initial capital of the microfinancing loan system is built on the savings of those who join. They build a fund getting used to thrifty saving practices and based on that they give loans on a very small scale. A very small interest is charged on this. Such successful societies then get together with other institutions and such loans are given on a proper assessment of the projects to be run on such loans and the ability to repay such loans.

Governmental financial authorities regulate this process.

But the microfinancing loan system in Sri Lanka from its very outset started operating in a distorted form devoid of those basic objectives. Microfinance arms have mushroomed from various financial institutions and came to the villages to give loans to the women in competition with each other, without a proper assessment, charging a higher actually exorbitant interest. No consideration is given to what purpose the loan is taken for, and whether repayment terms are sustainable. There is no proper assessment on the ability of the receiver of the loans to repay them. Lakhs of women who have obtained loans in this way are caught up in a serious debt trap that has led to a widespread and grave social crisis. This situation has led to family disputes, mental

health problems and even suicides.

Most of the loan recipients are not aware of the actual conditions of such loans. The agreements to which they have placed their signatures have been in English. In that way the language rights of those Sinhala and Tamil people also have been violated. Copies of the agreements have not been given to the debtors and no receipts have been issued to them when paying back installments. This has led the debtors to be confused about what they have obtained as loans and what in fact they have repaid. This situation has led to an acute exploitation of the debtors. The most prominent issue about microfinancing loans in Sri Lanka is that the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) which has the responsibility over all financial institutions is not having any regulation of these institutions. Apart from the licensed banks and financial institutions there are only four microfinance companies registered under the CBSL. But according to the reports of the CBSL itself there are various institutions numbering more than hundreds engaged in the microfinance field. That indicates how complex this crisis is.

This volume of “Voice of Citizens” exposes the information we managed to gather from various parts of the country in our search in those areas regarding the issues generated by microfinance institutions. Here we have drawn our attention more to the voice of the victims

who have borne the brunt of this crisis.

Diverse aspects of this crisis are manifested in these presentations.

The government has a responsibility to intervene immediately in this situation and prepare a policy framework on microfinancing thereby subjecting it to a formal regulation. The Financial Committee of the Parliament, Ministry of Finance and the CBSL should

combine forces and do a broad study on this situation. Strict action should be taken on the institutions that have acted in irregular and unjust ways. Further, immediately a restitution process should be started aimed to support the debtors who have suffered injustices and they should be awarded maximum possible compensations.

The current is high time for all the parties including the experts on microfinancing, civil society and policy makers etc. to get together and initiate a broad discourse on all related issues of this subject.

**Editor**

**There is no proper assessment on the ability of the receiver of the loans to repay them. Lakhs of women who have obtained loans in this way are caught up in a serious debt trap that has led to a widespread and grave social crisis. This situation has led to family disputes, mental health problems and even suicides.**

# How Micro-finance could lead to a Macro social disaster in Sri Lanka

**Thusitha Siriwardana**

Attorney-at-Law/Researcher - CPA

## Introduction

Microfinance is an essential aspect of the economy, where low-income people often lack access to essential financial services.

Improved access to financial services among the low-income population assists in poverty reduction, enabling the underprivileged to build assets, increase their income, and reduce



### **Christina Madam, Kantalai:**

We took out microfinance loans - we are not saying that we didn't, but even though we took the loans out, we got the official news saying not to pay them. Then we didn't pay them. Now we are getting letters saying that the interest has been tripled or quadrupled. We don't have the means to repay these loans - if they had taken the money back then, we could have paid it. Now they are issuing an interest rate of around 31%. Back then

they said that the interest rate would be 18%. Now it has become 31%. We don't have a way of paying. If they send us a letter today saying we have to pay 34 000, they will send another letter next week saying we have to pay 54 000.

We went to the Central Bank to tell them of our woes. We spoke to the Central Bank officials and explained to them that an injustice has been done to us. After that they spoke to us for about an hour and said that they will offer us a solution of some kind. We still haven't received a solution - we hope that we will receive a solution in future.



their vulnerability to economic recessions. Further, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP, 2006) has defined microfinance as the "*provision of financial services to low-income people*" and further states that "*microfinance services help people fight poverty on their own terms, in a sustainable way*".<sup>1</sup>

The argument that microfinance is essential in the given country context of Sri Lanka in particular, where access to finance is very stringent, is well-accepted. Establishing and effectively implementing robust regulatory and supervisory mechanisms is essential to prevent consumers from being exploited by unauthorized financial businesses.

In this context, as far as the micro-credit facilities provided by various financial institutions are concerned, poor and marginalized communities with little or no assets are the core target audience of those initiatives providing access to finance. Further, it is also a fact that in many local areas, the

overwhelming majority who have received credit facilities from a range of financial institutions and have, in turn, faced potential rights violations are women and members of women's groups.

This article briefly highlights the critical issues faced by communities in Polonnaruwa, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Nuwaraeliya districts. However, it is well known that the crux of the problems emerged from the lack of implementation of regulatory and supervisory mechanisms, lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of loan recipients and lack of know-how in relation to legal frameworks and referral system through which victims of unauthorized financial businesses can seek remedies are more or less the same in other parts of the country.

Due to a range of issues faced by communities involved in or access to either microfinance or micro-credit services, a substantial number of people, women,



**K. M. Chithra Kumari,**  
**Thalagaswawa**

We have paid now, no? We have paid interest on interest. When we take a loan of 1 lakh we pay 1.5-2 lakhs for it. We get letters demanding that we pay even more than that. It is honestly very difficult for us. Everyone in Thalagaswala has been subjected to this and they can't repay their loans. It's really unfair. I have borrowed close to 1 lakh to repay those loans but I

don't have money to repay the loan and I don't have gold jewelry I can use to settle these loans either.

They bring us an English paper for us to sign. We don't know previously that this is in English. When it's in English we don't know what's in it no? We sign. They take 15-25 signatures and they take and take and take our signatures. In the end they tell us that they have rights over our properties and we have signed to agree to this.

are struggling to maintain their minimum standards of well-being. In many cases, various human rights are also at risk. People who have envisaged rebuilding their livelihoods through easy access to microfinance or micro-credit services are seen to have lost their human dignity in addition to losing their assets. It is important to examine how the right to Livelihood can be recognized as an integral element of the "Right to Life" in the context of social debates on rights of people and the Constitutional reform discussions in which many demand meaningful accountability in all aspects of life. Despite not being explicitly recognized as fundamental human rights by the Sri Lankan Constitution, they can be safeguarded while ensuring that low income and asset less communities have access to well-regulated financial services.

When observing judicial interpretations regarding the "Right to Livelihood" in other jurisdictions; the Indian Supreme Court, known for setting examples for broader and meaningful interpretations of human rights of people, has decided in 'Pavement Dwellers Case' (*Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation*)<sup>2</sup> that 'right to livelihood' is borne out of the 'right to life, as no person can live without the means of living, that is, the means of Livelihood.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is pivotal to look at the issues, and challenges communities face due to unauthorized financial business services and activities being operated to support low-income groups in to fight against poverty. In turn, it has primarily led to further suppression of poor people.

Information of this article is based mainly on the evidence-based information gathering, and advocacy initiatives carried out by the Centre for Policy Alternatives (CPA)

in close collaboration with the National Collaboration and Development Foundation (NCDF) and a range of state institutions, independent commissions and other non-state stakeholders.

## What laws govern activities incidental to microfinance and micro-credit?

The Microfinance Act, No. 6 of 2016,<sup>4</sup> is the key piece of legislation that provides provisions for, inter alia, the licensing, regulation and supervision of companies carrying on microfinance business.<sup>5</sup> The Monetary Board of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL)<sup>6</sup> may issue directions to licensed microfinance companies on any aspect of a company's business and corporate affairs. Under subsection (1)<sup>7</sup> and (2) of section 12 of the Act, the Board may issue guidelines on monitoring compliance. In case of failure to adhere, it may cancel the license of said microfinance company under the provisions of Section 17, respectively.<sup>8</sup>

In 2019, there was an effort to introduce a piece of legislation to regulate the money lending business and the microfinance business and provide for matters connected in addition to that or incidental thereto, including the protection of customers of said businesses. However, even after a few years, the said bill is stagnant in the Attorney General's Department and is yet to be tabled in Parliament. What is significant is that, before being tabled in the Parliament, this bill requires a comprehensive review to ensure the most recent developments in relation to the moneylending business and the microfinance business amid the COVID-9 pandemic and



the subsequent economic crisis context are adequately addressed.

## Who is engaged in microfinance-related services or providing credit facilities?

As per the details available with the Central Bank, as of June 30, 2021, there are only four licensed microfinance companies<sup>9</sup>; namely,

- 1). Berendina Micro Investments Company Limited
- 2). Lak Jaya Micro Finance Limited
- 3). Dumbara Micro Credit Limited
- 4). Sejaya Micro Credit Limited

Notably, there are other institutions not registered as 'Licensed Microfinance

Companies' (LMFCs) but registered as Licensed Finance Companies (LFCs)<sup>10</sup> that provide, inter alia, small-scale loan facilities for a range of purposes. Such Licensed Finance Companies are regulated and supervised under the Financial Business Act No. 42 of 2011. One of the core objectives of introducing the Financial Business Act, in place of the previously operated Finance Companies Act No. 78 of 1998, was to strengthen the regulation and supervision of unregulated, illegal and unauthorized financial businesses. It shows that even a decade ago, unauthorized financial businesses had created issues that adversely affected people who access such financial institutions seeking financial services.

However, many institutions delivering microfinance-related, micro-credit and/or money lending services are part of the Lanka Microfinance Practitioners' Association



**G.G. Niluka Kumari,  
Thalgaswawa**

I have gone to court against HNB Grameen - to this day I haven't received a single receipt and they haven't even issued a document to prove that I've taken a loan. They put money into the HNB card and they told me to take money from that and they came to my house and filled the form. They are saying that the 13,000 I paid monthly for the loan over the course of a year has not been paid and that they

haven't received a cent and they have gone to courts against me for the nonpayment of a loan of over 2 lakhs. They told me that they don't issue receipts and to this day I haven't received a receipt. They don't mark it - they bring a small machine - the same one used to issue tickets in buses. That's what they use to issue receipts and there's no point in keeping that because the print dissolves so we can't keep it for a long time. That is their system. We don't get any other card or document to prove that we have agreed to a loan. They took 15 000 rupees saying its for insurance but even for that we haven't received a single document. We are helpless because of this.

(LMFPA)<sup>11</sup> under two categories: 1). Ordinary Members and 2). Associate Members. Lanka Microfinance Practitioner' Association is a network formed by several Microfinance Practitioners in Sri Lanka. LMFPA has been recognized & accepted by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka as "The coordinating body for Microfinance Institutions in Sri Lanka".<sup>12</sup>

Most importantly, the absence of a national policy on all aspects connected to microfinance, including all kinds of credit services provided by licensed finance companies, licensed microfinance companies and any other institution or individual engaged in micro-credit related activities, is recognized to be one of the core policy

issues in Sri Lanka. The repercussions being emerged due to the non-existence of such a national policy are further exacerbated due to the lack of awareness among communities, as the service recipients, on money lending criteria, method of interest calculation, and legal repercussions of defaulting that result in additional charges for delays. Also, the absence of information concerning the functions and legitimacy of institutions providing microfinance loans, and lack of knowledge on referral systems from which they can seek remedies when injustices have occurred.



#### **H. A. Nishanthi Nilmini:**

I took a loan from Commercial Credit. After that I pawned my gold jewelry due to an emergency - my gold chain of 3.3 sovereigns, a 1 sovereign pendant and 4 rings. After that when I went to recover them they told me that there are arrears and that until I paid off my loans I couldn't redeem them. After that I didn't look into this matter and forfeited all my gold jewellery.

While I was repaying my loan my husband had a heart attack and I couldn't repay my loan. After about a year I lost my husband and after that I couldn't repay the loan for about a year actually about one and a half years. Before I got the loans, those men are saying that if the guarantors who signed the loan - my husband or son, suddenly die, they will strike off the loan but until this day they haven't struck off a single loan of mine. They filed cases after my husband died - after they filed those cases I had a land which I sold off to repay the loans to these societies. There was one loan which I couldn't pay off from Commercial - I have paid some of that but they have filed a case against me saying that I have to pay 62,000 and they have sent me letters as well. I have become helpless now and there is no one to look after me - I have a son who works in a garment factory and he is still giving me food so what I'm saying is that no one should take loans. You should become aware. In reality they keep telling us lies. and then we become helpless and unable to pay.

## Social impact of unregulated and illegal activities in the guise of microfinance or micro-credit services.

Voices of many people, those who have received microfinance or micro-credit related services, have been subjected to various issues, including injustices, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis context.

Issues faced by people as a result of unregulated money lending/microfinance business activities	
Loan agreements are not in languages understandable to loan recipients violating language rights (Agreements are mainly in the English language)	Sexual harassment /demanding sexual bribes when unable to repay loan instalments
Copies of loan agreements are not provided to loan recipients	Violating Privacy rights of women
Unjust interest rates charged	Lack of knowledge of loan recipients on financial management and available redress mechanisms <sup>13</sup>
Money collectors verbally harass/intimidate loan recipients	Forced to provide deeds/vehicle books as securities
Loan recipients are threatened with taking legal actions	Defaulting matters linked with previous transactions
Lack of access to information about legal or referral systems of loan-related matters	Unjust loan rescheduling and lack of complaint mechanisms <sup>14</sup>
Non-provision of long-lasting receipts for payments	No follow-up/supervision of the effective use of financial services received
Lack of follow-up/supervision by authorities at district and divisional levels	Adverse impact on children's education of loan recipients
Adverse consequences on the right to a dignified life	The mental trauma of loan recipients leads to deteriorating overall social well-being

While the fact that the lack of knowledge and understanding of communities to effectively manage financial resources gained through microfinance/micro-credit facilities has also assisted in exacerbating these issues, the gaps in weak regulatory systems can be recognized as the core challenge. This regulation challenge requires practice and policy-level reforms in the sector of microfinance and other financial services that target low-income segments of so-

ciety. Women, traditionally having less property ownership, are the majority among persons accessing such financial assistance. Thus the consequences of these issues are easily reflected, not only on the individual women but also on their broader family setups. It inevitably translates the initial economic problem into a very complex irreversible social disaster making the primary objectives of 'microfinance' null and void.



One can sense the gravity of the unregulated, unauthorized and illegal activities occurring as part of the microfinance/ microcredit services by looking at some personal experiences shared by female loan recipients.

A female loan recipient from kanthale stated,

*"We had taken a loan of LKR 300,000/- from a financial institution against our land deed of which my husband is the legal owner. That loan was in the names of both of us because to apply for the loan, the respective financial institution wanted my husband to open a joint account at the financial institution to receive the loan. We repaid the loan properly and in between, I took a separate*

*loan from the financial institution and it was a group loan with two other women in my community. That had no link at all with our loan against the deed. However, once we completed the repayment, we asked the financial institution to return the deed to us. Surprisingly they refused to say that I was supposed to repay the full amount of the subsequent group loan too. So, we took money from another money lender and settled the group loan too. The financial institution continues to refuse to return the deed and now saying that two other women in the said group loan are also expected to complete their repayments to release the deed and until such*



**M.G. Siromi,  
Madagama,  
Kantalai**

I got a loan of 3 lakhs against my deed from an institution called LOLC. After that, while I was repaying it, another group was made from the original group of borrowers - three people - me and two others we got together and borrowed 1 lakh. After that, me and my husband are the ones who kept our deed together and took the 3 lakhs.

After that when we were getting closer to paying the 3 lakhs, and while I was paying for that other 1 lakh, I first paid off the first bond and after that I asked why I wasn't getting back my deed after I paid and they said I have a group loan which I need to pay. I paid that as well. After I paid, they didn't give me back the deed - I went 3 or 4 times to the bank and asked and when I asked they said your group loan has two guarantors and they haven't paid and therefore we can't release the deed to you. I finished paying off the loan in the first month of 2021. Now its been a year and still I haven't got my deed back. My husband has also taken money on a loan to pay for this and all of this is still not there.

*time, the financial institution will keep my deed as security even for another 10 years."*

She further stated that,

*"they came with a big document and we were asked to sign on number of places and we could not even read and understand because it was in English language, but as we wanted to build our livelihoods, we were compelled to sign to a document that was in an alien language."*

This approach of the said microfinance company raises several concerns in terms of the human rights of these loan recipients. One problem is whether the loan agreement related to the group loan of women contained a provision, term or condition referring to the possibility of taking a moveable or immovable property as security for a loan of another person who has defaulted. The challenge of offering legal assistance to such victims who

have faced these injustices is that there are no loan agreements with these affected women, and they are unable to understand the terms and conditions thereof until they appear before a court of law for litigation.

Agreeing in a language that is not understandable to one party but is compelled to sign as "read and understood" is a violation of the contract law and an infringement of the language rights of a citizen too. Therefore, the story quoted above unveil a range of issue that need careful analysis and strategies for solutions. Envisaged solutions should essentially include policy changes that regulate illegal practices adopted in providing microfinance services to poor communities.

Another female farmer from Kanthale stated,

*"I took a loan of LKR 400,000/= for cultivation as it was our Livelihood. But due to the Corona virus issue and unexpected health matters, I could not repay loan instalments for some time. Sadly,*



**Sinayya Arulechchi,  
Estate worker,  
Hatton**

These sirs don't differentiate between day and night - they come all the time and then one day they came at 7 and my husband was also home and they came and demanded that I repay the loan. I said I don't have money - the loan was taken for my sister so I asked them to ask my sister and they said

that she doesn't have money and they said that the loan is in my name so I will have to pay. They said they will come tomorrow morning and that I have to pay them 20 000 and if I don't they said they don't know what will happen and they left. After they left I thought about it and I set myself on fire.

*officials of the financial company came with two persons, said to be a lawyer and a surveyor, and threatened me that if I did not pay the loan, they would survey a part of my land and that I must transfer it to the company. When I refused to transfer a part of my land, they compelled me to hand over the Three Wheel we have that has no link with the loan."*

According to the person who made the above statement, the officials had rescheduled the said loan and had asked her to repay LKR 580,000/= to settle the matter. Unfortunately, she does not have proper documentation of

how much she had already repaid and the receipts of such payments to prove her case. It is noteworthy stating that these financial companies do not provide a proper receipt when loan recipients repay instead they issue a receipt generated from a machine of which the ink of details printed appears to be faded in a few hours. The loan recipients complained that microfinance companies purposely do so to exploit them, leaving no proof with them.

The incident mentioned above demonstrates the massive mental trauma that the loan recipients undergo, mainly due to the unregulated manner in which their services are operated and the illegal ways they follow to frighten communities and somehow ensure repayments. The most problematic concern



**Niluka Kumari,  
Pallegedara,  
Kantalai**

In front of the Human Rights Commission The people in our village have faced many issues like this and now either they don't have family lives - some ingest poison and some have these problems which cause family issues which they have to live with.

With so many issues we have come

here on behalf of everyone in our village - at least the 3 or 4 of us.

Actually, we did take loans from microfinance societies - we aren't denying that. On August 1, 2018, we got to know from the news that all women will be released from their loans. We then contacted the societies and said that the government announced that they will be canceling our debt and that we won't be paying the debt and then half of us paid the complete loan and we had 20 000 - 30 000 left to pay for our loans. There are 50 -60 women in our village who took loans and what has happened to them is that if they took out 1 lakh, they now have to pay one and a half lakhs or more. They send letters, they come to our houses and scold us - even yesterday they came and scolded my family. I wasn't there so they scolded my mother, they also scold my children before they leave. We are facing grave injustice.



is how long the undue pressure directed at these affected women by the microfinance companies could be managed by people who are already suppressed socially and economically, leaving hardly any hope of their lives and livelihoods in future.

A civil activist working against injustices in society in Trincomalee stated,

*"Women who actually wanted to build their livelihoods with the support of microfinance support have now come to a situation where they have even given up their right to life. Some have already committed suicide. The microcredit loan trap is a terrifying issue in many areas. When women get trapped in this issue, they even do not pay sufficient attention*

*even to giving education to their children. There are cases of sexual harassment allegations by persons representing microfinance companies and coming to villages to collect loan instalments from women. We need to support these women to seek legal support and link with authorities to find solutions."*

These quotes witness the conversion of an issue related to the economy into a severe social disaster which needs urgent and robust action to redirect the implementation process of most of the microfinance/micro-credit schemes to one streamlined process which derives from a legally enforceable legislative and policy framework.



**Ravindra Ranasinghe,  
School teacher,  
Kantalai**

It's a truly pathetic situation. Sometimes the men who come to ask for the repayment of the loans put so much pressure and even sexually harass these women - I have met women who have faced this issue.

I have met women who have sometimes faced so many issues that

they are driven to suicide or attempt suicide multiple times.

My suggestion is get these women together and provide them training for a manufacturing process so that the whole team does one industry based on the area that they are from. For example, if everyone grows one crop or engages in one profession such as animal husbandry or raising chickens or cows or growing ginger or turmeric - if everyone got together and worked on one project then the selling etc can all be done as well I feel. We can send one resource person and offer everyone the advice they need and we can help these people with the required regulations. If we can reach a solution like that then I think we can rescue these vulnerable women from the debt trap.

CPA has proactively engaged in and facilitated a range of advocacy efforts to address the issues highlighted in this article. This process includes interventions from the capacity building of affected communities to understand their human rights to making legal and policy analyses and creating advocacy dialogues with the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, Governors and officials of Provincial Governments, the Ministry in charge of Provincial Councils and Local governments and District Secretaries including divisional level officials in the administrative system.

As part of the broader advocacy strategy, it is expected to bring this matter to the Parliament, particularly the Committee on Public Finance and the Women

Parliamentarians' Caucus to influence policymakers to act immediately while exploring potential other opportunities to build public movement push authorities enact the Credit Regulator Authority Act. Additionally, authorities will be influenced to establish a National Policy that facilitates both service providers and service recipients of microfinance/micro-credit services to realize their ideal objectives and make it to be a recourse to assist low-income communities and fight against poverty.

## How can microfinance be of assistance to low-income groups in rebuilding their livelihoods?

As has previously reiterated, microfinance



**Suranga Rupasinghe,**  
National Collaboration Development  
Foundation (NCDF)

My name is Suranga Rupasinghe, I am President of the National Collaboration Development Foundation which is also known as NCDF. We have been working on this issue, with the Center for Policy Alternatives for around a year in Polonnaruwa and Trincomalee districts. Around 95% of women have got trapped in microfinance debt. We have been offering them some legal recourse and we have been identifying

issues at the village level and we have been looking for a solution for this issue including by utilizing the help of the Human Rights Commission and the Right to Information Commission. We have filed a complaint to the Central Bank against unethical practices and we have also filed a complaint to the Central Bank. We hope to develop the rural economy of these women in future, particularly through lending through women's committees or through a self-formulated method which these women come up with.

can undoubtedly play a crucial role in rural economies assisting society's poor and low-income segments. However, such expectation will remain a pie-in-the-sky unless and until relevant authorities, including legislators, address the emerging core issues. Therefore, the recommendations mentioned below are only on some aspects of the broader socio-economic issue briefly illustrated in this article. Further research needs to be conducted when finding lasting solutions to the unregulated microfinance activities in Sri Lanka.

- Designing a national policy framework with an action plan for implementation which entails all activities connected to microfinance, micro-credit and other means of money lending in Sri Lanka.
- Expediting the process of finalizing the proposed Credit Regulatory Authority Act with necessary consultation processes with victimized

communities. Such legislation should essentially include provisions related to implementing an effective and robust regulatory mechanism that meaningfully standardizes the functions of the microfinance sector in Sri Lanka. Such regulatory policy should prevent individuals or institutions from exploiting underprivileged communities desperate to seek financial assistance for their income-generating activities.

- The criteria for regulations through the Microfinance Act, Finance Business Act or any future legislation to be issued thereunder should include guidelines to respect the language rights of service recipients of microfinance institutions enabling money lending. The unfair contract terms and conditions presented in a language that cannot be read and understood by the signees should be recognized as a violation of the provisions



**Kanthi Jayamaha,  
Pradeshya Sabha Councillor,  
Kantalai**

If someone has to pay back a loan to a microfinance institute, the representatives of that microfinance institutions frequently go to those houses and threaten these people telling them they must pay, they harass them.

When a loan is given through a microfinance institution, this should be given for some kind of self-employment. This was not done - it really wasn't done. Because of that, I request the Central Bank to do something to stop these institutions - if they can do that it would be really great. These institutions have appeared in Sri Lanka just like sprouting mushrooms. They compete with each other to offer loans to these women.



stipulated in the Unfair Contract Terms Act, No. 26 of 1997.<sup>15</sup>

- The implementation of the concessionary scheme of micro-credit loan 'write-off' amid the pandemic is exceptionally complex, and thus, the Central Bank and other mandated government institutions should take immediate action to conduct a full investigation of the said debt-relief

facilitation process and identify the gaps, challenges and lessons learned. Actions should be taken to rectify the injustices faced, particularly by the women rural and marginalized self-employed women engaged in micro and small-scale businesses who have lost their income due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Suneth R. Wimalasiri, AAL,  
Kantalai**

Worldwide Microfinance is accepted as a way of uplifting rural women. But in Sri Lanka microfinance is used to help companies prosper, instead.

When we look into this industry we find organizations which are offering loans at higher interest rates than that approved by the Central Bank, in some places as high as 40%. We found agreements which prove

this.

One of the issues I heard from these women is sexual harassment (coercion). The men who come to collect the loans say that they will reduce the installment amount and they put pressure on them. This too is a serious issue. The women who come to us have even provided us with sworn statements.

Microfinance loans are provided with the intention of lifting people out of poverty. Unfortunately, microfinance companies in Sri Lanka go to the villages and provide loans for reasons such as purchasing a fridge, television or redeeming gold jewelry.

This microfinance issue becomes a problem because of the negligence of the authorities who should be regulating microfinance institutions. . These institutions are going to villages and meeting women - they have a modus operandi. This modus operandi has not been regulated by the relevant stakeholders such as the Central Bank, the Finance Ministry and the government. This lack of regulation has made these women extremely vulnerable, the main reason being that the interest rate of these loans is much higher than the Central Bank limit.

These institutions have filed cases against these women even for amounts less than 100,000 rupees. When these lawyers appear for amounts of less than 100 000, a big issue arises. Even though the loan amount is 50,000 rupees, the lawyer's fee to appear for the case is more than 50,000 rupees..

- District administrations, with due support of and collaboration with the Statistics Division of the District Secretariats, Regional Offices of the Central Bank and the respective Divisional Secretariats, should conduct an assessment of people trapped in microcredit loan issues and collect evidence-based data of affected communities.
- Assigning district-level and divisional-level focal point officials in the administrative system to observe, monitor, evaluate and advise poor and marginalized communities seeking micro-financial support for their livelihood development.
- An assessment is to be conducted on the need for financial assistance communities need to rebuild their livelihoods through self-employment and various entrepreneurship.
- Officials in charge of small enterprise development, Samurdhi, social development, women and child affairs and social integration at district and divisional levels to ensure more proactive engagement with and supervision of the rural and poor communities, women in particular, whose livelihoods are based upon the financial assistance of micro-credit based financial services.
- Officials of District and Divisional administration to enhance their collaborations with the officials of the Regional Office of the HRCSL across the country and the Legal Aid Commission in taking action against alleged violations of rights such as language rights, unfair contract terms, illegal methods of collecting loan instalments, women's rights, right to privacy.

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1. Central Bank of Sri Lanka, <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/financial-system/financial-system-stability/microfinance-sector>
  2. <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/709776/>
  3. 2.1 The sweep of the right to life conferred by Article 21 is wide and far reaching. It does not mean merely that life cannot be extinguished or taken away as, for example, by the imposition and execution of the death sentence, except according to procedure established by law. That is but one aspect of the right to life. An equally important facet of that right is the right to livelihood because, no person can live without the means of living, that is, the means of livelihood. If the right to livelihood is not treated as a part of the constitutional right to live, the easiest way of depriving a person of his right to life would be to deprive him of his means of livelihood to the point of abrogation. Such deprivation would not only denude the life of its effective content and meaningfulness but it would make life impossible to live. And yet, such deprivation would not have to be in accordance with the procedure established by law, if the right to livelihood is not regarded as a part of the right to life. That, which alone makes it possible to live, leave aside what makes life livable, must be deemed to be an integral component of the right to life. [79 F-H, 80 A-B]
  4. Microfinance Act, No. 6 of 2016. [https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb\\_documents/laws/acts/en/Micro\\_finance\\_act\\_6\\_2016\\_e.pdf](https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/laws/acts/en/Micro_finance_act_6_2016_e.pdf)

5. Section 11, 'Directions to and rules governing licensed microfinance companies', *ibid*.
6. Monetary Law Act (Chapter 422)
7. Section 12 (1), Microfinance Act, No. 6 of 2016.
8. Section 17, 'Ground for cancellation of a license', *ibid*.
9. <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/en/authorized-financial-institutions/licensed-microfinance-companies>
10. Licensed Finance Companies as at 21st September 2022, CBSL, <https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/authorized-financial-institutions/licensed-finance-companies>
11. The Lanka Microfinance Practitioners' Association is incorporated as a non-profit organisation under the Companies Act No. 7 of 2007, <https://www.microfinance.lk/membership/>
12. <https://www.microfinance.lk/about-us/>
13. Proposed Credit Regulator Authority Act contains provisions to address this issue. Section 49(10) The Authority shall carry out programmes to improve financial literacy of the general public, including enhancing knowledge, skills and confidence on using financial services. [https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb\\_documents/laws/consultation\\_paper\\_20190705\\_proposed\\_credit\\_regulatory\\_authority\\_act\\_e.pdf](https://www.cbsl.gov.lk/sites/default/files/cbslweb_documents/laws/consultation_paper_20190705_proposed_credit_regulatory_authority_act_e.pdf)
14. *Ibid*, Section 50 (Handling of customer complaints to the Authority)
15. Section 8, the Unfair Contract Terms Act, No. 26 of 1997 <https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/unfair-contract-terms-3/>



# Indigenous women: Trapped in the web of microfinance

Lakmal Baduge

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The indigenous Vedda community, who live in the forests around Wellassa and Bimthane preserving their culture and traditions, had to leave their homelands due to the advent of scattered development in the country with the introduction of the open economy. These development initiatives did not usher in the progressive well-being of the Vedda community but only resulted in destroying their culture, their way of life and the homeland of the Vedda people. The attempt to develop their lives was overshadowed by the giant monster of development.

The Veddas were forcibly evicted from their natural habitats in the 80s with the transformation of forests into wildlife parks and sanctuaries. As a result, they were forbidden to hunt and collect honey, livelihoods they had engaged from since the dawn of time. Many cultural practices, beliefs and duties entwined with hunting were also abandoned due to the laws and decrees of the government prohibiting them from entering

the forests where they conducted their rituals and traditions over the ages.

The Veddas, therefore, had to resort to several other means of livelihood for their survival. The young Vedda leader from Dimbulagala, Dalukana is now mixing concrete for his living. The other youth like him are doing manual labour work in the struggle for survival. These indigenous communities having formerly lived in Dimbulagala forest for many generations have sacrificed their caves, the way of life and have been left helpless and desperate without even an option to feed themselves since no one has cared to find out about their integration, survival and sustenance of life, tradition and values in this transformative period.

## Easy prey for corporate sharks

The Vedda community, marginalised and now victims of poverty due to the negligence of government officials regarding their

responsibilities to the indigenous groups, are now easy unsuspecting prey to be exploited by microfinance companies that flourished in this country like mushrooms from a decade ago. The context was ideal for the companies and laid the groundwork to pounce and exploit these helpless communities. These companies have gone into the far corners of these distant villages in search of the indigenous people

and have started their work very quickly. It has become apparent that these companies, who have identified the Vedda people as easy prey, have snared the Vedda people of Heninagala, Ampara-Pollebedda, Galwalayaya and Dimbulagala-Dalukana into a vicious debt trap.

The Vedda community is severely marginalized economically with their entry



### **Sixty thousand deducted to be transferred as savings is missing**

**Thala Warige Kusumavathi from Henanigala South**

A female officer arrived from the bank. Teams were formed. They said we can open accounts and obtain a loan. Thereafter, we formed groups and opened accounts and obtained loans. Our house was partly constructed, so I took a loan of two hundred thousand rupees to construct the balance components of the house. I

obtained two hundred thousand as a loan. Sixty thousand rupees from the loan was deducted saying it is for the book. They provided the balance after deducting 60,000 rupees. We paid regularly for about two years and then we ran into a lot of difficulties. My husband did not have a proper job. He used to go to the lake to fish for his livelihood. He was arrested by the Wildlife officials and after spending on the court cases, I could not pay the loan instalments and it went into default. I obtained the loan from the R.D.B bank. Recently I received a letter stating that I had to pay around 50,000 rupees. They had stated that I had to pay over 86,000 rupees inclusive of interest. I checked the book and it did not contain the 60,000 rupees that was deducted to be transferred to the book.

Subsequently, I realized that an unreasonable interest was being charged unfairly. Interest was charged interest. I am not that literate, so I signed the documents without reading them.

Now I have no way of paying the balance money. I received a letter saying that they would file a case against me. So if they file a case I will have to go. All I can request from the government authorities is that it would be good if our loans are written off.

into the reserved forests being prohibited and the lack of paddy land for cultivation. They believe that if they are permitted to enter the forests to collect honey and dig up wild yam, there would be some resemblance of comfort and better incomes. Many women from the Vedda community in the village of Ampara Galvalaya, who are impoverished without any land for cultivation have become easy prey of microfinance companies. Group loans given with an initial amount starting at Rs 30,000 have been recovered weekly by some companies. Other companies have recovered their installments monthly. However, these illiterate people have become easy victims because of the veil of poverty that surrounds their lives.

*"I used to go hunting but now I can't go. The wildlife department and the police arrest us and charge us fines. Therefore, we took a loan to be used for cultivation. We planted peas but it was destroyed due to the drought. We could not pay the loan. They are threatening to take us to court. We get letters, but I don't know what's in them,"*

says 37-year-old Thala Bandaralage Chandrani, one of the debt-ridden women of Polle Badda, Galwala Yaya Vedda village in Ampara.

Microfinance companies that target only women, form groups. They say that



## **If they file a case, we will have to go to jail**

**Uru Warige Vimalavathi from the Henanigala indigenous village**

My husband's livelihood is centred around the lake. He also goes to the forest to collect wild honey. My husband fell from a tree while attempting to collect honey and broke his arm. His situation took to the worse and he was bedridden. I took a loan of one hundred thousand rupees from

Commercial Credit. After taking the loan and continuing to pay I am still left with a balance of thirty-seven thousand. I got a letter requesting me to pay the balance. I could not pay the loan because my husband was sick. Now I have no way of paying.

They came to our home and gave us the loans and obtained our signatures. Four people were taken as signatories and the loans were obtained in batches of three, we did not read any of the documents and signed blindly because we do not know how to read.

If they file a case all we have to do is to go and serve the sentence, what else can we do? There is no Samurdhi and no labour work. We do not have any jobs in our village. The government has not given us anything. It would be some relief if this debt is written off and measures are taken to provide employment opportunities to the village.



their policy is not to provide loans for more than one member of the family. They claim that they are giving loans to help develop the economy. However, they have given loans to the same community and have snared them into a vicious debt trap similar to the women in other villages.

*"I borrowed R 100,000. I had to pay Rs 2650 per week. When the officer's come to collect I give about*

*Rs 500. We don't know what to do, sir. My husband goes to work as a hired labourer since we don't have any money to cultivate again. We can't even go to the forest. We don't even have land."*

23-year-old Thala Bandaralage Punchi Menika, a woman from Galwala Yaya Vedda village, is caught in a debt trap with a loan of Rs 50,000 rupees that she is unable to pay.



## **They will not leave the compound till we pay the instalments**

**Adivasi Uru Warige Anulavati**

We took the loan because there was no way to buy nets. In the end, we could not even get the nets properly done. We took the loan and used some for our livelihood and the others were for consumption needs.

The officers from Commercial Credit came here. They asked us to collect about ten people. I collected

the group. We got together and took the loan. The first time I took Rs 50,000. Subsequently, they gave me Rs 100,000. They filled out the forms and asked me to sign them. I don't even know what language those documents were written, because we don't know letters. After taking a loan of 100,000, I paid around Rs 60,000 and was unable to pay off the balance. They sent letters calling us to the mediation board. When we went to the mediation board they said to pay what we could. When there were still twenty thousand to be paid, they sent us a letter saying that they had written off the debt. After that, we did not obtain any loans.

We have paid a lot of interest on all these loans. It is not the instalment that is given today that they ask from us the next week. We are not literate to read the documents. We try to get someone to read and explain to us what they mark on the books. Even if there are incorrect or false numbers we will not know. State banks did not give us loans. And we borrowed from those who came.

When there are delays to pay the loan instalments, they come to the houses and harass us. If you don't pay the instalment, they won't go. They stay in the garden. They harass us even at night and insist that they need the instalment. Anyway, if we can borrow money from someone, we will pay, if not we just tolerate their scolding. How can we give when we don't have any money?

## A loan to an ailing woman

A female with a slight mental disability is another victim of microfinance loan companies. The 50-year-old woman, Korala Gamage Sriyakanti Perera in Galwala Yaya village says that she has been tricked by someone else in the group and a loan has been obtained.

*"I obtained the loan to Bandara Menike. After I signed, I got letters asking me to pay. The lenders came to the house. They said to pay because if not they will file a case," she says.*

If the institution that provided loans did a proper evaluation, it would not be possible for a person who is in such a condition to sign the loan agreement. She only knows how to sign. Not only her but also the rest of her team are illiterate. Many of the borrowers in the Vedda community said that they only signed the forms that were first fully filled out by the officers who provided the loans.

Uruvarige Anulavathi, a woman of Henanigala Vedda village, said that although she took a loan to buy nets for her husband for fishing, she could not repay the loan as



## How to pay loans when we don't have money to eat

P. Ajanta

The bank officers came to the village and gave the loans. We also filled out the forms and took a loan. I took the loan to build the house. My husband does labour work. The house was built out of clay. Later, we cut bricks and built a house with two rooms.

I paid a monthly instalment of Rs 8,700 for a loan of 150,000 rupees. I can read and write. Those documents were in Sinhala. One of the three in the team fills out the forms. So I did not fill out

the forms. When we sign the forms and give them to the bank, the loan is approved. I did not care too much about what was in those forms.

I could not pay the loan when there was no labour work. Now the loan is in the default stage. They come to collect the loan instalments. They left when we said that we have no way to pay the loans. I don't know what they have done now. It is difficult to pay because there is no work these days. If they file a case, we will have to go to court. We are unable to even live without any proper work. So where do we have money to pay the loan? We also have to pay the electricity and water bills and they also have been increased. We have to send children to school. When you do all that, it is not possible to pay the loans.

We will have to face the situation as it comes. It is good if the loan can be written off. Who knows what will happen?

they were spent on her family's consumption needs.

"Rs 50,000 was taken earlier, and it was paid in full. Then we took another Rs 100,000 and Rs. 60,000 was paid, but he could not pay the rest. They said that they are

going to file a case now, so what to do," she says.

Henanigala is another vulnerable Vedda village caught in the microfinance trap. Even the Vedda leaders have not been able to solve the problem. It is because the economic challenges due to poverty in which the rest



### **Have to pay 100,000 for the overdue thirty thousand** **Uruvarige Anulavati**

I am now in Henanigala South. I am 42 years old. Previously I was in Dambane. We came here when we were young. I took Rs 100,000 from LOLC to build a house and continued to repay the loan. Subsequently, after paying about Rs 30,000, I found it difficult to pay. They started sending letters and threatened that they will file a case in court. Now I have to pay Rs 100,000 for the balance of Rs 30,000

inclusive of interest.

I cannot read or write. I only know to write my name. They gave us a form and asked us to sign it in different places, but we don't know what was in that form. We didn't even ask what was in it. The officers who came also did not tell us what was written on the forms. The loans were given for two and a half years. The instalments came to eight thousand rupees. We are not aware of the interest rate.

While I was paying the loan I felt that the interest was too high and that I had paid more than what I had borrowed. In the end, there were many problems. Our husbands do not have a proper income. They go to the lake for fishing. When there was no work they went all over looking for work. We paid quite a lot considering the amount we borrowed. Now, I have to pay Rs 100,000 for the balance of Rs 30,000 including the interest.

When the letters come it does not matter to me now. Now it does not matter if they file a lawsuit. If they file a lawsuit we have to go to court. Anyway, I cannot pay Rs 100,000 for the balance of Rs 30,000.

They came looking to somehow give us loans. They will give loans even when we do not need them. So we also took and only now we have realized the difficulties after obtaining the loans.

All we can ask the government is to write off the loans taken from these banks and give us relief.





## We are like works in a bitter gourd fruit

Uru Warige Karunaratne

I was not there the first day when they came to provide loans. I had gone to the lake for fishing. I did not have a reasonable catch that day, I had only about five kilos of fish.

When I came home, some officers from the Commercial Bank had come and spoken to some of our leaders. I then asked how these loans are provided. Then they said that they

would give loans under a concession scheme. We are not literate and cannot read or write our surname is Uru Warige. In fact, I don't have any idea what U.W. means.

After three days, one of those officers came. They formed teams of three each. They provided a loan of fifty thousand rupees at the start. I completed paying the loan. Then I tried to get a loan of 100,000 rupees. However, they said that they would give 60,000. I tried to get a loan of 100,000 rupees to lay the foundation to build a house. Then he said he will give me sixty thousand. This was not enough for me. I told my wife that this is of no use to us and it is not necessary for us since we will not be able to get any work done even if we get this loan. My wife also agreed.

Obtaining signatures on these documents from people who are not literate is unfair. Since, we are not aware when these loans are given to our spouses. The officers have come and informed our spouses to obtain the loan since it can be paid on a concessionary scheme. After listening to these things, these foolish people have agreed. When we got to know they were already caught in this vicious trap. So now we continue to pay. We understand now that the interest is too high. We really don't have any knowledge in this area. Now we have to somehow pay this loan.

All we can say is not to file an action against us in court. In fact, we are unauthorized people. We do not have a place to stay and no place to go. We survive from day to day by finding some labour work. We struggle to find out daily food. We have to send the children to school. We also have children. We are also struggling to figure out how to get out of this massive hole we are in. At least the children will support us when they study and get a job.

Now we have no help from the government. Recently, they provided nine thousand rupees to those who have the Samurdhi. We did not get anything. The indigenous community is given step motherly treatment. There are local councilors in Dehiattakandiya and Henanigala. They got elected from our vote. In the end, they don't even look at us. If we are surviving with daily labour work, what do we need these local councilors for? There is a saying that the worms in the bitter gourd fruit eat it and then die inside the fruit itself. This is our story; this is what has happened to us.

of the community is suffering have pushed the leader to force many people to take loans. Many people of Henanigala village are victims of the vicious microfinance debt trap.

## Dalukana is also caught in the debt trap

The Vedda tribal leader Talawarige Priyantha says that the Dimbulagala, Dalukana Vedda communities are also victims of microfinance loans. He says that his family members have become victims of this debt trap because the wildlife officers and forest conservation department officials have blocked access to their traditional forest area.

*"There are about 200 people in our village, many of them are working as hired labourers because there is nothing else to do. I'm also going to mix concrete. Some days I also went to work in Colombo. Because there is no way to live, many people take these loans that are given by officers that come to the village. The main leaders are saying in the councils for the tribal leaders not to engage in work but to oversee the people, but now it is difficult for me to do that. Mahaweli officials will not let us go to the forest which belongs to us. Our people cannot go to the forest to hunt, collect honey and dig yams. There is no land for Chena cultivation. We are not allocated land but other people cut down the forest and grab land. Because of this, we have to go to work as labourers to survive," he says.*

## The government should intervene

Suranga Rupasinghe, the head of the National Cooperation Development Foundation (NCDF), said that the indigenous people of this country have become helpless victims of micro-finance schemes. He further said that the epidemic of microfinance loans has overrun not only the common agricultural workers but also the Vedda people of this country and has thrown them to the extreme of poverty.

"This is a very dangerous situation. If you take a microfinance loan and cannot pay the loan instalment that comes with the exorbitant interest, you are forced to commit suicide. These institutions do not give loans after evaluating whether the people are in a position to repay the loan. As a result, poor farmers and fishermen families in the villages of this country have been caught in the debt trap and have died prematurely. It is a tragic situation that this situation is now affecting the lives of many people in the Vedda community. The Vedda women of villages like Henanigala, Dalukana and Pollebedda are now caught in the vicious debt trap. These indigenous people do not know to read and write. They have not seen the agreements when they have taken loans, they don't know what is in them, but have become borrowers of large loans with high interest. This is a dangerous situation. If this situation continues, the poor families of this country will sink further into the abyss of poverty. Therefore, we are taking all possible measures to prevent this situation. We urge the government to take immediate measures to control these microfinance loans.

Lionel Guruge, Senior Researcher of Centre for Policy Alternatives, who worked

together with government officials to provide some relief to the Coastal Vedda community, said that a tragic situation can be seen in the government policy towards the Indigenous people in this country. This is evident when you consider the respect and treatment shown by the Australian government to the indigenous people in their country in comparison to the treatment of the indigenous community of our country.

## **A Community deceived**

With the advent of the Mahaweli movement, the former minister Gamini Dissanayake converted Dambana and its surrounding villages into wildlife sanctuaries. A team led by Thapal Bandiya from Henanigala was misled with promises that they would be given a forest, houses and jobs. Some of them returned to Dambana during that period. The indigenous group is a community that truly loves the forest. Their life and sustenance have been robbed from them. The government did it under the guise of development and other decrees. This is a great tragedy. As a result, they have now become victims of debt, since they have lost their lands, fishing as a livelihood and left without any permanent income source. They don't have the proper education to get a job, they don't even know how to write. Therefore, these people have become easy prey for microfinance companies. Although microfinance loans are a valuable access to finance, these financial companies have no discipline or regulation. That is the main cause of this problem. Since the Central Bank does not properly regulate these companies and the Ministry of Finance does not pass appropriate ordinances covering them, these people are taking advantage of

these loopholes and are abusing this scheme in Sri Lanka. Therefore, government policies in relation to the indigenous people should be wider and more extensive and legislation should be introduced. A system should be established in the provincial councils to protect the Vedda people's culture and their traditional lifestyle. The Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance should immediately intervene and ensure justice."

It is not merely our duty, but our responsibility, to save and protect the culture, traditions and lifestyle of the indigenous community connected to our ancestral forefathers. Then the indigenous people will be able to stand up independently yet again with the sweet smell of their ancestral homelands. They will go hunting, offer their sacrifices, collect wild honey and when this takes place they will no longer be prey to microfinance companies. They will be independent, and self-sufficient and proudly acclaim their status as the indigenous community of Sri Lanka.



## Editor's Note

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### **Response of institutions rendering microfinance/microcredit services to grievances raised by service recipients.**

In this study, we also endeavoured to publish the responses of institutions providing services related to microfinance or short-term credit facilities to grievances presented by the borrowers/service recipients and the crisis that has emerged in the microfinance sector. However, achieving it within the expected time frame was difficult.

In this regard, an online discussion was initiated with Mr P.S.R.C. Chitty (Executive Director) and a team of the Commercial Credit and Finance PLC, and they agreed to a face-to-face conversation in the near future to provide further input.

Further, a request was made to LOLC and although no response has been received so far, we hope that there will be an opportunity to have a conversation with them too in the future.

Additionally, a request has been made for a discussion with Mr. Anura Athapattu, Chairman of the Lanka Microfinance Practitioner's Association, which is made up of many institutions that provide microfinance or short-term credit facilities, and it has been agreed that an opportunity will be given for it on a future date.

After receiving a comment on behalf of the providers of services related to microfinance or short-term credit facilities, we will ensure publicizing their comments through our publications in the same way.

**Editor**



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