

Education for all in times of global transformations

Aspirations and opportunities of poor families in
marginal areas of Sri Lanka

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB - Asian Development Bank
CCF - Christian Children's Fund
CMR - Colombo Metropolitan Region
EFA - Education for All
EPZ - Export Processing Zones
FDI - Foreign Direct Investments
GOSL - Government of Sri Lanka
ICT - Information and Communication Technologies
IDP - Internally Displaced Person
IRDP - Integrated Rural Development Programs
JVP - Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna
LTTE - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDG - Millennium Development Goals
MFA - Multi-fiber Agreement
NEC - National Education Commission
NYC - National Youth Commission
PTA - Parent-Teacher Organisation
PPP - Purchasing Power Parity
PRSP - Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SAP - Structural Adjustment Programs
SLFP - Sri Lanka Freedom Party
UGC - University Grants Commission
UNP - United National Party

1. INTRODUCTION: PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.1 Educational opportunities in times of global transformations

This study is concerned with the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka. The point of departure is the fields of tension between the kind of education these families perceive themselves to need in order to lead lives they value, and the kind of educational opportunities that are accessible to them. As formulated in a recent report by the Asian Development Bank:

...governments are under much greater pressure than in the past to expand education and increase its quality to develop the highly skilled labor forces needed to compete in the global economy. They also have to meet the demands of families striving to give their children an advantage in an increasingly competitive environment in which to secure a good job. At the same time as such competition intensifies, there is an increasing tendency toward inequality and inequity of access to good education (ADB 2003: 39).

The research deals with spatial dimensions of educational opportunities in relation to broader processes of exclusion and inclusion in times of globalisation. This is in line with how development research is changing, especially within the field of geography. The focus is turning away from large-scale theory, towards "...meso-conceptualisations that focus on specific issues or dimensions of development in an attempt, not only to separate out a slice of development for scrutiny, but to see how it relates to the development process as a whole and to local situations" (Potter *et al.* 2004: 320).

This introductory chapter outlines the main tenets of the research problem. It starts with a discussion about enrolment expansions and increased competition for educational opportunities, which is understood in relation to a reproblematisation of development taking place in the international community (1.2). This reproblematisation is linked, in turn, to various challenges relating to global transformations (1.3), reinforcing and transforming old dilemmas of educational planning (1.4). Possible local implications of these macro-level educational dilemmas are outlined in 1.5, before the aims and the research questions are presented together with a few necessary delimitations (1.6). Following this, there is a short description of the geographical focus (1.7), as well as of the main methods and material used (1.8). Finally, in section 1.9, the overall structure of the thesis is outlined.

1.2 Enrolment expansions and competition for educational opportunities

Since the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) throughout the South¹ there has been an ongoing discussion about the need for more inclusive development policies. Since the end of the 1990s, several attempts in this direction have also surfaced, such as partial debt-rescheduling, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and, more recently, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) derived from the Millennium Declaration. More radical than these are the targets and strategies formulated at various Global Summits during the 1990s. Regarding education, there was a World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien in 1990 and a World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000. In Jomtien, it was pledged, among other things, that all children should have access to and complete a primary education of good quality by 2000. In Copenhagen five years later, this goal was postponed until 2015, which was to be reconfirmed in Dakar. In the MDGs from 2000, the reference to quality is gone, but the ideal of universal primary school completion is reaffirmed, and it is to be made reality before 2015². All of this can be seen to form part of a reconceptualisation of security interests, where underdevelopment and exclusion are increasingly seen as dangerous, and where development issues are reproblematised to involve more than mere economic dimensions (Duffield 2001). In addition, education is increasingly seen as a key tool to counter exclusionary processes at both local and national levels. It is even argued that there is a "...coinciding interest for education" (Abrahamsson & Nilsson 1996: 118) between governments in the South seeking legitimacy among their own populations and the international community striving to integrate these countries into the global economy.

Prospects for universalising primary school completion in due time are, at best, slim. One of the main reasons for this, apart from misguided or poorly implemented education policies and a lack of resources, is that "...progress towards the goals will require structural changes which extends well beyond the influence of Ministries of Education" (Colclough *et al.* 2003: xi). Education systems must therefore be seen as integral parts of wider social and spatial structures and processes. Furthermore, there have been political pledges for universal primary education every decade since the 1940s (Tomasevski 2003). Already in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights stated that education is a right for all, and that governments are responsible for providing free and compulsory elementary education to their citizens. At a UN-

¹ I tend to agree with Dodds (2002: 5) in arguing that despite the intellectual limitations of terms like "the South" that "...there is good reason to persist with these descriptions in the sense that they draw attention to the profound inequalities that endure in the post-Cold War world". In general, "the South" will be used interchangeably with "poor countries". When discussing "generalisations" of the outcomes of the research, however, this discussion needs to take its point of departure in specific mechanisms identified to be of importance in the case studies as well as in related research.

² The primary completion rate measures the proportion of *all children* who complete primary school, not only of those who are enrolled in school. However, it is rather a measure of access to the final level of the primary cycle, in that it does not take into account those children who reach the final year but drop out from before graduating (UNESCO 2003: 59).

sponsored conference in Addis Ababa in 1961, universal primary education was set to be achieved by 1980. Yet regardless of whether the MDGs for education will be fulfilled or not, overall trends today show numerical enrolment expansions in many parts of the South. Equally, education is an important part of many PRSPs (Caillods & Hallak 2004) and an important aspect is that school fees at primary school level are disappearing in many countries (Bentaouet Kattan & Burnett 2004).

The ongoing numeric expansion presents policy-makers with fresh challenges in terms of both quality and equality (Närman 2003). To start with, it is difficult to uphold even meagre levels of educational quality unless rhetoric is backed up by a substantial increase in resource flows, and in much of the 1990s, donor support for education actually decreased (UNESCO 2003). Whether pledges made in Dakar and in the Millennium Declaration will materialise remains to be seen, and there is also a key role to be played by poor countries themselves. Nevertheless, aid levels in education are increasing, albeit modestly, in the beginning of the new millennium (UNESCO 2005), and so is "pro-poor" social spending, including basic education, in many countries with PRSPs (Hermele 2005). Furthermore, as student enrolments increase, intensified competition for quality education, as well as for higher education levels, is likely to follow suit, with potential implications for equality. Research on increased competition for educational resources in Western countries suggests that this imposes clear risks of increased inequalities (Lauder & Hughes 1999; Fiske & Ladd 2000). Most available research on education in the South does not stress these relative and relational dimensions, as the alleviation of absolute poverty, for legitimate reasons, has been at the top of the agenda. Yet, when more and more children are going to school, it becomes increasingly important what kind of school they go to and whether it is good or bad in relation to other schools. This is especially true if opportunities for further studies and employment are limited (Little 2000c). As noted by Graham-Brown (1991: 51), "...there is a considerable tension between the ideal of education as a means of democratising knowledge and creating a meritocratic society, and the limited opportunities offered by dependent economies".

Rapid expansion and increased competition within education sectors in the South is thus an important field for research, especially in relation to issues of quality and equality. Education is indeed a human right and to this principle, it seems, virtually no one would disagree today. However, apart from the major challenge of materialising this principle into substantial progress, other issues that increasingly will have to be dealt with concern what kind of education is considered to be a right for whom, of what quality, and where. Answers to these questions are closely tied up with processes operating "outside" education sectors. At the same time as there are pledges for Millennium Development Goals, a number of tendencies in relation to globalisation are challenging both the scope and the legitimacy of many of these pledges.

1.3 Four important tendencies in times of global transformations

Four tendencies are identified to be of importance to educational policy-makers and to the understanding of educational opportunities, and all of these can be seen in the light of present forms of globalisation and the related threats of exclusion, at various levels of scale. The concept of globalisation is defined in Chapter 2, but broadly it refers to a widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness (Held *et al.* 1999: 14), giving rise to new and complex patterns of inclusion and exclusion (Castells 1998b). The extent to which these tendencies refer to material realities or to discourses of Globalism³ must be determined contextually, but they are equally important for this study, as long as governments and parents act as if they were real.

First, the global economy is knowledge- or informationbased, with competitive advantage increasingly reliant on the prevalence of highly skilled human resources (Castells 1996; Dicken 2003). In this context, basic education is deemed insufficient for generating a globally competitive work force. Hence, education for poverty alleviation and education for global competitiveness might increasingly be seen as two separate issues, opening up for differentiated education strategies aiming for both (Riddell 1996; Carnoy 1999; Tikly *et al.* 2003). Second, intensified competition between countries to attract global flows of investments might affect available public means for financing education, and there is a tension between the short-term interest for cost-reduction and the long-term need for skilled manpower (Stewart 1996). As part of this, geographies of social welfare provision are changing worldwide (Pinch 1997), including global tendencies towards privatisation and commodification (Mok & Welch 2003). Some of these endeavours challenge less contested educational goals, such as a numerical expansion of enrolments, but more fundamentally, the possibilities of providing all children with equal opportunities.

Inequalities in educational opportunities are not only normative issues; they also relate to another tendency that is connected to global transformations. Third, then, increased interconnectedness between people and places, through physical, virtual and medial mobility, has increased spaces of comparison, which imply that people are generally also more aware of what kind of life chances are *not* within their reach (Buffoni 1997; Beck 2000). In this context, this might mean that ideas of what constitutes a good or at least a decent life are changing, with implications for how educational opportunities are valued and evaluated. Many parents and children continue to hope for a better future through the means of getting an education (see Narayan *et al.* 2000; 2000b; 2002) - a more complex and under-researched issue is what kind of education they identify to be important, where, and how this is affected in times of globalisation. Related to this, and fourth, many rural areas are diversifying away from primary economic activities, for various reasons, something which is further increasing

³ Beck (2000) discusses Globalism as the notion of a world market superseding or altogether replacing the political. This ideology exists in both a denying and an affirmative form, where the latter is what is usually referred to as neo-liberalism or the TINA-syndrome (There Is No Alternative).

the competition for skills and livelihoods outside agriculture (Ellis 1998; Francis 2000; Rigg 2001; Murray 2002; Bryceson 2002). There is a gradual reduction of two of the most common occupations in the South - peasant farming and civil service - alongside a diversification of rural livelihoods towards wage labour, migrant work, petty trading, etc. The privatisation and/or reduction of public services reduce their contribution to employment. Furthermore, although agriculture remains the main source of income in most parts of the South, it is often increasingly difficult to eke out a living from it, with rural youth unemployment evolving as a great challenge in many areas. This transformation of rural livelihoods is likely to affect attitudes among poor families in marginal areas as what kind of skills they identify as central to the children being able to secure a good future.

The first two of these tendencies should guide more research towards the accessibility of different kinds of educational opportunities in different geographical settings, and for different groups of people. The latter two of these tendencies should stimulate research about educational accessibility to include people's aspirations with education, and to connect these to more general life chances within diversified and transformed opportunity structures. Taken together, possibilities for providing equal educational opportunities are challenged from both above and below - from both the expansion and competition "within" education sectors and the four tendencies relating to global transformations "outside" them. So today, it is important to understand what educational opportunities are accessible to different groups of people in different places, and how this is linked to processes of social exclusion and inclusion. One way of understanding relationships between these global and local processes is through the model of an educational planning dilemma.

1.4 An educational planning dilemma and its spatial dimensions

The tendencies presented above both reinforce and transform old dilemmas facing policy-makers; especially in poor, dual societies⁴. After a period of rapid quantitative expansion of enrolments in the 1960s, followed by disillusionment with formal education in the 1970s, structural adjustment programs (e.g. cost-reduction/cost-sharing) posed major restrictions for education sectors in the South in the 1980s and early 1990s (Samoff [ed.] 1994; Närman 1995; Watkins 2000). Since the 1990s, however, increased attention has also been devoted to education for global competitiveness (Carnoy 1999; Tikly *et al.* 2003; ADB 2003), including demands for higher education and "global skills" like international languages and ICT-competencies

⁴ By dual societies, I do not refer to the old notion of the modernisation school, which saw countries in the South as divided between economically and culturally distinct, and functionally unrelated, modern and traditional sectors, where the former were seen as dynamic and the latter as stagnant. I rather mean societies where there are large gaps and differences between rural and urban areas in particular, in terms of economic development levels as well as in terms of what kind of economic activities and occupational groups predominate and what services and physical infrastructure are available. It is important to note, however, that urban and rural sectors are related in many, and sometimes conflictual, ways.

(Information and Communication Technologies). In addition, there are the various commitments to universalise access to primary or basic education, referred to here as education for poverty alleviation. The latter is also related to ideas of basic education being an end and a right in itself, regardless of its contribution to other social goals (Sen 1999; Tilak 2002; Tomasevski 2003). Though partly complementary, this double focus on global competitiveness and poverty alleviation is prone to cause tensions:

On the one hand, the goals of poverty reduction and economic growth are complementary, as poverty reduction in the long run will depend on achieving economic growth. On the other hand, it is possible to detect an unresolved tension in the development literature between education and training policies and priorities to alleviate poverty and those required for global competitiveness (Tikly *et al.* 2003: 307).

Furthermore, global competitiveness and poverty alleviation are not the only issues that governments need to take into consideration. It is argued in Chapter 2 that these two compete for attention with other issues of importance when formulating educational policies - especially in relation to labour markets. These other issues are social and spatial equality and local relevance, and together with financial restrictions, they form a dilemma of educational planning. Although all countries need to address all these issues in their education policies, there is a need for governments to prioritise. Prioritisation, in turn, will have to be determined with ideological considerations; education is about the distribution of resources and power in society and space, and is therefore mainly a political rather than a technical issue (Fägerlind & Saha 1989). Yet, different contexts will result in different kinds of responses to the challenges outlined above. Tikly (2001) notes a shortcoming of much research on globalisation and education to be a lack of specification of the context in which theories are supposed to be applicable. It is often taken for granted that opportunities and threats would be the same across countries, and across sections of the population within those countries (cf. Tikly *et al.* 2003). However, in addition to ideology and financial restrictions, many other factors and actors will influence and constrain how governments handle the educational planning dilemma. These include the physical size of the country and the spread and growth of its population, physical infrastructure, democratic traditions, the history of the education system, the global division of labour, and donor agency activities.

National averages are also likely to mask large spatial variations. This relates to what Gould (2000) - from another perspective - discusses as a possible spatial mismatch between educational opportunities and the world of work:

Even though they may not exactly match the distribution of the population, the distribution of schools and training opportunities are unlikely to match the distribution of demand for skilled labor, which is largely in towns (ibid: 105).

At least two broader scenarios are possible in relation to this spatial mismatch, within the framework of the educational planning dilemma. Either all citizens are provided with equal educational opportunities, regardless of where they live, possibly leading to

frustration and educated unemployment or increased migration for appropriate jobs and internal or external "brain-drain". Or else educational opportunities are differentiated so as to be locally relevant in different geographical contexts, possibly strengthening social exclusion if certain groups find themselves deprived of resources deemed necessary to lead lives they value. It is from this perspective that it is crucial to ask people what kind of education they perceive to be necessary for what kind of futures, and recent research from India suggests educational aspirations are being homogenised across society and space (the Probe Team 1999). However, even if there was a political will to equalise educational opportunities across space, and if resources for doing this were readily available, there would still be important problems with the spatial distribution of both schools and teachers, making this will difficult to materialise (see for example Gould 1993; Närman 1995; 1998). In addition to these aspects, educational opportunities also depend on family resources outside the education network proper - such as parental income, education levels and language skills, social connections and mobility. These are resources that are likely neither evenly distributed in space nor static in times of global transformations. Consequently, there are several ways in which geographers could contribute to the understanding of educational opportunities with a focus on spatial differentiation, the particularities of places, and the way social relations and processes are accommodated within material circumstances.

1.5 Local implications of the "new" dilemma of educational planning

Globalisation now provides a rationale behind calls for differentiated education strategies, designed to address both lagging global competitiveness and immediate poverty concerns simultaneously. Whether this is translated into an actual policy shift remains to be seen but recent research seems to suggest that this is the case even in several very poor countries (Tikly *et al.* 2003). Ilon (1994) argued more than 10 years ago that *processes* of structural adjustment would not only result in decreased budget allocations and increased privatisation, the normal focus of the research community. Public education systems would also be forced to stratify, she suggested, and notions of equal opportunities would have to give in to more differentiated types and qualities of education, mainly in response to a segmentation of the world of work. To her, this stratification into "...local [education] systems for the poor and global systems for the rich" (ibid: 99) would have a clear urban bias. More recently, but in a similar vein, Carnoy (1999) and ADB (2003) argue that increased competition between nations translates into sub-national competition for access to educational resources, as education systems are likely to become more, rather than less, stratified. A search for a clear-cut, functional correspondence between education and the global division of labour should be avoided (cf. Tilky 2001), but it is important to illuminate whether this stratification is played out in different geographical settings, and if so, how and with which factors affecting the its outcomes.

It should be noted, however, that a stratification of educational opportunities is not the only possible outcome of the challenges facing policy-makers. Four possible scenarios are proposed in the analytical framework in Chapter 2: polarisation, stratification, increased prospects for educational mobility, and equalisation. Much of the more theoretical literature that has influenced this study would suggest overall trends to be towards stratification; the more "pessimistic" literature would even have it that trends are towards polarisation with an absolute worsening of the opportunities available to the poor. Yet others, however, would propose that in the era of EFA-initiatives and MDGs, trends are rather towards equalisation, or at least towards increased prospects for educational mobility. To me, these disparate positions are partly due to conceptual confusion, as well as to a lack of recent empirical research stressing relative, relational and contextual dimensions of educational opportunities. There is therefore a need for more empirical research regarding what is actually happening to the educational opportunities of different groups, in different geographical contexts, as well as for a clear analytical distinction between different possible outcomes.

Summing up, a study about the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas is motivated by both renewed interest in education among policy-makers *and* the "new" dilemma of educational planning in times of globalisation. There is a need for empirical research stressing relative, relational and contextual dimensions of educational opportunities by linking them to the particularities of places as well as to aspirations with education among different groups in these places.

1.6 Aims, research questions and delimitations

There are two aims of the present research study. The *first* aim is to better understand how the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas are affected in times of global transformations. This aim is addressed with the help of a proposed analytical model with four possible scenarios: polarisation, stratification, increased prospects for educational mobility, and equalisation. The *second*, subsidiary aim is to better understand how the accessibility of educational opportunities is related to processes of inclusion and exclusion in times of global transformations, that is, the difference made by the current distribution of educational opportunities. This is addressed by relating the accessibility of educational opportunities to three themes identified in the literature about social exclusion: relativity, agency and dynamics.

To accomplish these aims, I will address two sets of empirical research questions focusing on poor families, parents and students, in parts of a marginal district in Sri Lanka called Hambantota. To start with, it is crucial to link issues of educational opportunities to people's aspirations and expectations with education, that is, their attitudes to education:

- a) What role do poor families in marginal areas perceive education to have in leading lives they value, that is, what do they aspire to with education and what do they expect to get out of it?
- b) How are these families' educational aspirations affected in times of global transformations?

An interesting matter is the possible dissonance between the kind of education the government perceives to be relevant for poverty alleviation and the kind of education parents might identify as "...the stepping stone for their children's occupational and geographical mobility" (Tomasevski 2003: 29). The lack of a longitudinal research approach means that the necessary time-dimension is handled retrospectively.

The second, and most important dimension of educational opportunities in this study regards accessibility, giving rise to a new set of empirical research questions:

- c) What kind of educational opportunities are accessible to poor families in marginal areas, that is, what segments of schools are available and what resources are important in affecting who will be able to go where?
- d) How is the accessibility of educational opportunities of these families affected in times of global transformations?

The concept of accessibility is interpreted here to consist of two interrelated dimensions and to have both spatial and individual/family attributes. On the one hand, it is about the spatial distribution of the education network, mainly different kinds of schools and teachers. On the other hand, it is about family resources that are important to being entitled to different segments of this network. These resources are identified theoretically to be economic, social and cultural capital, as well as physical mobility. To understand gender dimensions of accessibility, it is crucial to also look at what goes on within families, whether and how the educational opportunities differ between boys and girls. The time-dimension is handled by using time-series in the data about schools and teachers, through retrospective questions, as well as by comparing the present situation with earlier situations with the aid of secondary material.

Two principles are important to understanding factors affecting the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas. The first regards not conceptualising poor families as an isolated group but including relationships between poor families in marginal areas and other groups in other areas, as well as with elite groups in the same areas. In doing this, it is important to acknowledge that these relationships might in many ways be conflictual (Yapa 2002), even within local areas (Mohan & Stokke 2000). In this study, this aspect is handled by including non-poor local groups and their activities in the empirical research and by relating the findings to the situation of other groups in other areas, both within and outside the district. The second principle is about the need to take note of the interplay between local, national and global processes and actors (Närman 1995). Even though this is a difficult task, it is attempted by connecting the empirical results to the model of the "new" dilemma of educational planning.

There are a number of issues that are *not* included in this study although they are of relevance to the problem area in a broader sense. First, I do not study learning *per se*, but rather a number of factors important to the opportunities to learn. By this I mean that I do not follow what is going on in the classroom; I do not relate my discussion to any pedagogical reasoning and I do not try to explain educational outcomes. This limitation is imposed both because it might be beyond the scope of a geographer to deal with many of these issues and because a lack of skills in local languages makes it difficult to follow classroom-practices and analyse curricula.

Second, my focus is on educational opportunities within the *formal education system*. Coombs & Ahmed (1974) distinguish between informal, non-formal and formal education, all overlapping and interacting. They see informal education as a lifelong process whereby a person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes and insights through daily experiences and exposure to the surrounding environment. Non-formal education is seen as any organised and systematic educational activity for particular subgroups of the population outside the framework of the formal education system. The formal system is defined as "...the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured 'education system', spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university" (ibid: 8). Among other things, this means that I leave out much of the important discussion about vocational training. One reason is that time-restrictions made me realise that the planned inclusion of vocational training was impossible to go through with. Another reason is that the main issue for the parents and students that I met was gaining access to high-quality formal education. Having contemplated these limitations, I feel that the study still deals with issues of high academic relevance and of particular concern to poor families in marginal areas.

1.7 Geographical focus: Southern Sri Lanka

The small island-state of Sri Lanka is used here as something of a "special case" in terms of having an almost unique post-independence history of being a poor welfare state. Sri Lanka's experiences with regard to education are relevant in this era of numerical enrolment expansions, as the country has almost accomplished universal primary enrolment and completion rates (World Bank 2005). The *ideal* of a unitary education system with equal opportunities for all has long been hegemonic in the internal Sri Lankan debate (Dore 1976; Jayaweera 1998). As an example, education has officially been free from kindergarten to university since the 1940s and it has largely been conducted in local languages, rather than in the colonial English. Still though, the system has never been egalitarian and regional disparities in provision and achievements have remained distinct (ibid; Nyström 1985; Baker 1988; 1998). Further, a civil war has plagued the island since the early 1980s, fought between the Sinhalese-dominated government and a Tamil rebel movement (LTTE), although a formal cease-fire agreement has been in place since 2002. The war has caused tremendous suffering for all Sri Lankans, and most specifically to inhabitants in the north-east. Around

65,000 people have died, while around 800,000 people were internally displaced and an equal number were living abroad as refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2000 (Brun 2003). Economic activities in the north-eastern provinces have been disrupted and their combined contribution to GDP decreased from 15 percent in the 1980s to 4 percent in 1997 (ADB 2001b). The war also means that national statistics often exclude areas in the north-east where most of the violence has occurred.

Regarding the four tendencies identified in relation to global transformations, however, Sri Lanka is rather to be seen as "normal". Calls are heard for Sri Lanka to seize emerging opportunities in the global economy as a regional service and banking centre, due to a perceived "Low-Skill, Bad-Job" trap for the present export orientation (GOSL 2002). However, the resources available for financing the education system are very limited and the role of private education is increasing (Hettige 2004). On the labour market, the situation resembles that of many other countries, with decreasing possibilities for peasant farming and public sector jobs (Dunham & Edwards 1997). There is a diversification of rural livelihoods, with a number of new sources of employment emerging. An open economic policy since 1977 has been partly successful in terms of economic growth and employment rates, but the quality of the new jobs is often challenged (Shanmugaratnam 1999; Lakshman 2002). Furthermore, socio-economic benefits from opening up the economy show a massive regional concentration in and around the capital Colombo (Central Bank 1998; IPS 2003). At the same time, it is noted that the general population has raised the threshold for what is to be regarded as poor (Silva 1998; Hettige 2000b; Dunham 2000). In relation to these tendencies, it is interesting to see what role the government sees education to have for global competitiveness and poverty alleviation, as well as what role poor families in marginal areas see it to have for social inclusion.

There are no perfect examples in the social sciences, but in line with the reasoning above, Sri Lanka could provide important insights about educational opportunities in marginal areas in the South in times of global transformations. Most fieldwork is conducted in parts of the spatially and socio-economically marginal district of Hambantota in the south-east. From a national perspective, the district lags considerably in income per capita and youth unemployment rates seem particularly high in a comparison with most other districts. Empirical material has mainly been collected in four areas within the dry, sparsely populated parts of the district - two rural, one semi-urban and one urban - but available statistics are compared with the situation in the entire district and with the country as a whole. Although a very difficult area in a national comparison, Hambantota District was initially selected to "represent" large parts of the island outside the main cities, with the exception of areas directly affected by the conflict and areas in the plantation sector. Selecting marginal areas also *within* the district, however, has important implications for how aspirations should be interpreted, as well as for what educational opportunities poor families can access.

1.8 Research approach

The focus of this study is on the local and the empirical level, although I try to continuously keep wider structures and issues in mind. There is a need to keep track of linkages and interfaces between local "containers" and other geographical scales without losing sight of the fact that these levels are mere analytical constructs. Studying these linkages should be done in a way that illuminates both global and national processes, as well as interpretations, resistances and mediated practices at the local level; from people living and working these processes. As a consequence, diversity and local contexts have to be taken seriously in a way that does not cause us to ignore structures of global integration and domination (Booth 1994; Mohan & Stokke 2000). This is a difficult task, and there is a great risk of losing focus when trying to move between the different scales, instead of merely isolating the local level and studying it in great detail. On the other hand, I do not consider it possible to gain a thorough understanding of the local level unless other scales are brought into the analysis as well. Rather than lend a part of the full picture, an exclusive local focus would provide a misleading picture.

Subsequently, I have made attempts to understand connections between local, national and global levels and to link my local level findings to the general situation in Sri Lanka as a whole. This has to a large extent been achieved with the aid of secondary material, discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, as well as by conducting interviews with politicians, certain actors at the Ministry of Education and the National Education Commission (NEC), and the secretary to the Ministry of Education, for example. I also interviewed a former Minister of Education, as well as donor representatives. The aim of these interviews was to better understand factors behind the distribution of educational opportunities, including probing deeper into the linkages to global transformations.

Fieldwork has been conducted in three phases. Between June and August 2001 I spent time mainly in Colombo to collect secondary material and conduct preliminary interviews with key informants, primarily within the education administration. On all but one occasion these were conducted in the offices of the respondents, and they were structured with interview guides which differed slightly to suit each person. This phase was much about specifying the research problem in relation to the Sri Lankan context. During the second trip between September 2002 and March 2003, I spent about five months in Hambantota District, and this is when a lion's share of the work was conducted, in particular interviews with families and the collection of student essays. A third field visit lasted for three months in 2004. This time I spent about half the stay in Hambantota District visiting schools for data collection and interviews, including follow-up interviews with families. The other half of the trip was spent in Colombo collecting secondary material and interviewing key informants, mainly within the administration.

The first set of research questions, about attitudes to education, was primarily dealt with through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were mainly conducted with parents, although students and school personnel were also included to complement or qualify the information. For the second set of research questions, about the accessibility of educational opportunities, the material is even more diverse. To cover distributional dimensions, statistical information in short time-series was collected from the Ministry of Education, as well as from Zonal Education Offices and schools, mainly on the whereabouts of schools, teachers and students. Teacher and student attendance rates are also included. Interviews were conducted with all principals in the four areas (including a small survey on the availability of school-facilities) as well as with a number of teachers and key informants. As to family resources important to educational opportunities, a large part of the material stems from interviews with parents, but I have also invited students to write essays about their aspirations with education and about problems they face in achieving these aspirations. Here too interviews with school personnel provide additional insights regarding policies and practices of school admission and hidden costs, for example.

Who, then, am I, and what have I got to do with Sri Lanka? My first experiences of Sri Lanka dates back to 1997, when I participated in a youth exchange programme - Youth Partners in Development (YPD). Between July and September I lived in a small mountain village temple in Nuwara Eliya District, together with a Sri Lankan counterpart. After these three months, my counterpart followed me to Sweden for a similar three-month period in a Swedish town. In 1999, I returned to Sri Lanka for another three months to do a Minor Field Study, sponsored by Sida, during a course in Development Studies. At that time, I spent about one-and-a-half-month travelling around Hambantota District by bus and three-wheeler, visiting a broad array of Sri Lankan and international NGOs working with poverty alleviation, and another month in Colombo visiting the headquarters of these organisations. The following year I wrote my BA-thesis in Human Geography - "Structurally Adjusting a Poor Welfare State" - about Sri Lanka and based on secondary material. Having finished this, I was given the opportunity to work in a group consisting of six Swedes and six Sri Lankans, conducting a study about people's perceptions of development in Hambantota District. This work forms part of a larger Sida-Sarec funded research programme on "Regional Development in an Open Economy", jointly conducted by two geography departments in Sweden and Kelaniya University in Sri Lanka (see, for example, Karunanayake & Närman 2002; Dangalle 2002). This is when the idea of a study on the accessibility of educational opportunities arose, because the hopes that most people expressed as to what education could do for their children fit uneasily with my experiences from visiting a small number of schools in the area.

Although far from being an "insider", I already had several first-hand experiences of Sri Lanka in general, and of Hambantota District in particular, when beginning my Ph.D. studies in late 2000. Moreover, apart from a theoretical and

political interest in relationships between globalisation and processes of inclusion/exclusion, the focus of this thesis has largely originated from problems identified "from below".

1.9 Outline and structure of the thesis

The rest of this thesis starts by contextualising the research problem, as well as by introducing central concepts, related research and an analytical framework of help for the empirical chapters (Chapter 2). Of importance are both global processes of change and the related threats of exclusion, as well as more concrete aspects of the education network and factors affecting the accessibility of educational opportunities. Following this is a general introduction to Sri Lanka (Chapter 3), which is also an attempt to contextualise the more general tendencies discussed in the theoretical chapter in relation to the geographical focus of this study. Chapter 4 presents the essential characteristics of the Sri Lankan system of education, its history and present strengths and weaknesses. The chapter ends by discussing the dilemma of educational planning in relation to the case of Sri Lanka. Methods and material is the subject of Chapter 5, with the intention of being both detailed and reflective.

After this, the empirical findings are presented. Chapter 6 is concerned with attitudes to education among poor families in marginal areas, including both their aspirations and their expectations. In Chapter 7, the focus turns to the distribution of the education network, that is, schools, teachers and school-facilities. Chapter 8 deals with family resources that are of importance to getting access to the segments of schools providing the kind of education that can fulfil aspirations. The reason for presenting the chapters in this order is that I find it important to contextualise the discussion about the education network by immediately relating it to local aspirations. Chapter 8 ends in an analysis of student attendance records, and information obtained in the three preceding chapters is used to understand the emerging patterns. The empirical chapters end with a brief summary of the main findings to link them with the following chapters, while a more thorough analysis is found in Chapter 9. Chapter 9, the concluding chapter, also returns to the aims of the study by way of addressing the research questions.

2. CONTEXT, CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the following chapter is to contextualise the research, introduce central concepts, and provide an analytical framework for the empirical chapters. The contextualisation is by necessity held very general, mainly providing references for my own understanding of the situation, while subsequent sections aim to be more in-depth and problematising. The chapter starts with a few thoughts about values and objectivity in the social sciences (2.2) as well as by positioning myself in relation to other geographers focusing on education (2.3). After this, I introduce the concept of globalisation and the related threats of exclusion, at different levels of scale, as well as how I will use the concepts of social exclusion and educational opportunities in the empirical sections (2.4). This more general part of the chapter is followed by a discussion about key issues regarding education and development in the South, since the time of independence (2.5). The idea with this second part is, not only to give a brief historical background, but also to link the more general first part to the third one, focusing on local geographies of education systems. This more concrete part starts by discussing attitudes to education among poor parents (2.6), it continues with the education system as a network (2.7), and it ends with a presentation of the various family resources crucial for entitlements to different segments of this network (2.8).

The whole chapter is concluded by an analytical framework (2.9), in which the main implications for the empirical sections are outlined. This framework circulates around a dilemma facing educational planners and policy-makers, the way this dilemma is being transformed in times of global transformations, and different possible scenarios for the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka.

2.2 Values and objectivity in the social sciences

The field of development studies is explicitly normative, as most researchers engaging with development issues not only want to analyse the world; they want to change it (Hettne 1995: 12). But there are political dimensions to all social science work. Values form part of what the researcher chooses to focus on, whom is listened to, the degree to which views of different actors are given space in the final product, whether social institutions and dominating ideologies are seen as "given" or if they are challenged critically, etc. At the end of the day, social scientists tend to either legitimise and reproduce, or problematise and question, social institutions, ideologies and interests (Alvesson & Deetz 2000). I believe the intervention by Yapa (2002), to be illuminating

in this context. He highlights the problems arising from researching poverty as a non-relational phenomenon, that is, where the poor are seen as an isolated group to be distinguished from non-poor groups, which are not seen as part of the poverty problem. The risk with this is, not only to conceal important dimensions and get a skewed understanding of the poverty problem. It might also serve to reproduce and legitimise structures producing poverty, if these are not illuminated or dealt with. At the same time, it is of course important to be sensitive to the empirical material and to acknowledge if structures of domination or conflicting interests do not surface⁵ (Alvesson & Deetz 2000: 146).

This study is inspired by what is usually referred to as critical realism (see Sayer 1992). Ontologically, it means that the world is assumed to exist independently of the beholder, while researchers only can interpret it through theory-laden concepts. Epistemologically, a critical realist perspective means that all knowledge is fallible, though not equally so, as certain knowledge claims are more plausible than others are, at particular times. Social objects are both socially defined and socially produced (but nonetheless real), which means that there is a double hermeneutics involved, in that social scientists interpret interpretations of others. Consequently, there is a need to make explicit the assumptions and concepts upon which empirical observations are made; to not only think with concepts but to also think about them and to make explicit what it means that concepts are used in a particular way. In critical research, a fundamental point of departure is that phenomena not always are what they appear to be, e.g. stated reasons behind actions should not automatically be taken as the real motives. From such a critical perspective, making sense of empirical material is about gaining insights, by highlighting hidden or less apparent aspects and meanings of what is studied. Insights should be followed by critique, that is, by illuminating the problematic nature of these aspects and meanings, and material arrangements and social orders they are supporting. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) suggest that critical research should contain at least these two parts - insight and critique - but they furthermore mention a third part, which is about transformational reassessment. This final aspect of critical research means to undermine the apparent sturdiness of the present order by pointing at alternative ways of constructing reality. The intention with this thesis is to at least fulfil the first two of these ambitions, by gaining insights about educational opportunities in times of global transformations and by seeing how their distribution relates to (or supports) processes of exclusion and inclusion.

⁵ If structures of domination do not surface, this does not necessarily mean that they are not there at all. One example, from this dissertation, is about the relative educational opportunities of boys and girls. It is commonly shown, from many different contexts, how girls are discriminated against in terms of educational opportunities. Yet, this study shows few such gendered inequalities. This is, however, not to say that there are not gendered aspects of educational opportunities in Sri Lanka, which could have been better illuminated with the use of other methods, like discourse analysis of curricula and textbooks, or tracer studies.

2.3 Geographers and education

Education systems tend to discriminate unequally also along spatial boundaries. In very general terms, it is argued that "...problems are inversely related to proximity to the national capital - the more distant children are, the less likely problems are to be addressed" (Tomasevski 2003: 24). Another spatial dimension in education systems is that between urban and rural areas, with rural children generally being at significant disadvantage. UNDP (2003) contends that, in the developing world, a man living in an urban area is twice as likely to be literate compared to one in a rural area, not to speak of a rural woman. At a local level, Pryor *et al.* (2003) note that in their study of a village in Ghana, economic poverty acts as a strong constraint for success in basic education. But, they continue, also those who are relatively well off in this rural village fail to achieve good results. It is hence something about where people live, which affects their educational opportunities. Yet, too much focus is still on national aggregates (for which data admittedly are better), masking important problems lived and experienced at local levels. Further, there is a need to better understand spatial patterns and processes, including why they are changing or not changing over time.

If space matters in education systems, what then could be the contribution from geographers for the understanding of them? Unfortunately, few geographers have focused on education in itself. Gould (2000: 96) comments, regarding geographical research, that "[e]ducation and schooling have at best been marginalised; but more commonly, ignored altogether". There are of course exceptions. Hoppe (1976) sees a role for geography in understanding what education means for the spatial behaviour of individuals, e.g. physical or hierarchical distances of movements, intensity of these movements, whether borders get crossed, etc. Närman (1998) suggests that geographers can contribute by focusing on the spatial distribution of educational data, as well as by explaining these variations. To understand spatial inequalities, he stresses the need to connect local, national and global structures and actors (Närman 1995). Gould (1993: 14-15), in turn, sees a geographical focus as "...spatial, social and economic processes governing the allocation of and access to schools". He has also been interested in the relationship between education and physical mobility, as well as in the role of education in mediating cultural and other influences in the era of globalisation (Gould 2000).

Geographers have furthermore been doing research on school competition and parental choice in western countries. Taylor (2001), for example, is interested in effects of parental choice on the spatial organisation of competition between schools. By conceptualising "the education market" as a spatial phenomenon, he claims, the behaviour of parents, schools, and other key actors are situated within the "real" world. This perspective could then help in seeing the specificity of localities and allow more grounded generalisations. In an earlier contribution to the debate on parental choice, Bradford (1991) criticises educationists for neglecting social geographies of catchment areas, and argues that local residential environments must be brought into the analysis.

According to this perspective, geographers could have something to add about attitudes to education, by linking them to local contexts.

From these diverse voices, at least two broader approaches can be distinguished. On the one hand, geographers look at how education affects spatial behaviour, like brain drain or urbanisation. This could include discourse analyses of curricula and how these relate to place-preferences. On the other hand, focus is on factors behind the accessibility of education, stressing spatial variations on the supply side and/or how local contexts affect both attitudes to education and actual entitlements. My focus rests firmly in the second of these approaches - the accessibility of educational opportunities. For understanding reasons behind patterns and their effects, I have to take note of factors on the supply side (that is, the education network) as well as family attitudes and resources embedded in local environments. This means that I consult research from several disciplines, which is in line with how another geographer sees the role of geography for understanding educational issues:

...it is not possible to undertake effective research focusing solely on the politics, sociology or geography of education. Thus, attempts to explain policy decisions in education must consider the social and geographical context alongside political processes. Conversely, attempts to explain geographical patterns in education invariably lead to examination of social and political factors (Bondi 1988: 309).

Accordingly, I will start this chapter with a general discussion about global transformations and the way these relate to threats of exclusion, at different levels of scale, before I move on to the spatialities of education systems.

2.4 Global transformations, social exclusion and educational opportunities

2.4.1 Globalisation and the threats of exclusion

Few concepts have received as much attention and criticism during the last decades as globalisation, commonly referring to an intensification of global interconnectedness⁶. More precisely put, globalisation signifies...

a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions - assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact - generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power (Held *et al.* 1999: 16).

Essentially, globalisation implies that national boundaries are increasingly permeable to various cross-border flows and networks, with transnational companies emerging as key actors (see also Dicken 2003). Distance is losing much of its friction with new

⁶ I use the concepts of Globalisation and Global Transformations interchangeably. There will be no attempt here to go through all the different aspects of the globalisation debate - the ambition is merely to make my own understanding explicit - and reality is of course much more "messy" and complex than it will seem to be in this presentation. For important overviews and contributions to the globalisation debate, see Harvey (1989); Hirst & Thompson (1996); Castells (1996; 1998; 1998b); Beck (2000), Bauman (2000); Held *et al.* (1999); Hoogfeldt (2001); Stiglitz (2002); and Dicken (2003).

technologies for communication and transport and with de-regulations of markets for primarily money, goods and services (Harvey 1989; Castells 1996). The novelty and openness of the present era has been challenged in quantitative terms (Hirst & Thompson 1996). However, to understand what is new, it is necessary to include a qualitative perspective, and to see globalisation as a set of processes rather than as an ideal type or end-state (Held *et al.* 1999). It might not be most relevant to look at actual flows across borders but rather to look at potential flows. Mobility can, for example, be a source of power in bargaining relations even if the exit-option is not exercised (Bauman 2000). In the rest of this section, I will abstract a number of processes relating to globalisation that are of importance for the accessibility of educational opportunities. These include the role of the state in global competition, fiscal dilemmas, diversification of rural livelihoods, and increased socio-spatial permeability.

My understanding of the role of the state broadly resonates with the part of the regulation school claiming that relatively autonomous states aim to secure both accumulation and legitimacy⁷. Legitimacy can be attempted through both symbolic and material means, and policies are the result of struggles between various actors within and outside the state. This way of thinking has naturally been applied with regard to education, where education policy is seen as...

...the outcome of contestation between competing interest groups within the state over accumulation strategies (aimed at proposing solutions to economic crisis) and hegemonic projects (primarily concerned with the construction and maintenance of the social basis of support for a particular form of state) (Tikly 2001: 163).

As the globalisation debate matures, few would now claim that states are irrelevant and powerless actors, although most would agree that forces from both below and from above increasingly circumscribe their powers. Globalisation generates changes in the ways states – as well as other actors - perceive and pursue their interests (Wood 2000). Beck (2000) discusses this as living in globality - an irreversible state of mind where the imagination of a closed space has turned into fiction. Territorially defined states identify their interests in line with rationales of an increasingly mobile global capital, as governments see themselves to be competing with each other to attract investments (Dicken 2003). Strategies of accumulation have gone from being influenced by territorialism - e.g. import-substitution - to an increased degree of market orientation and functionalism (see e.g. Hettne 1995); the mainstream rationale is to find one's place in the global division of labour rather than attempting to alter this structure or go for self-reliance⁸. To many commentators, this is because threats of exclusion from the

⁷ For a geographical discussion about the role of the state, see Stokke (1999).

⁸ The counter-revolution in development theory - i.e. the rise of "neo-liberalism" in the 1980s - implied a major shift in the way lack of development, or underdevelopment, was analysed. Essentially, it meant that "...the development problem was seen as primarily domestic, created by 'rent-seeking' bureaucrats and corrupt politicians, with no blame at all put on the 'world-system'" (Hettne 2002: 8).

global economy appear far worse than unfavourable inclusion and old fears about exploitation (Castells 1998b; Duffield 2001).

In the competition for investments in an increasingly knowledge-intensive global economy, there is furthermore a gradual shift from "old" factors of competitive advantage, like raw materials and cheap labour, to "new" ones, like knowledge, sophisticated infrastructure and new ways of organising production (Dunning 2000; Dicken 2003). People and places lacking in these qualities run a risk of becoming irrelevant to the logic of global capital⁹ (Castells 1998b). Only limited areas of the South - commonly but not solely around capital cities - are included in the global economy, although all areas are affected by its operations. Threats of exclusion hence have important spatial dimensions. This might generate tensions between goals of accumulation and legitimacy, for example if people and areas within countries are excluded from the benefits of accumulation. Governments, in turn, end up squeezed between demands from below and perceived or real imperatives from above (ibid.).

Threats of exclusion operate at various levels of scale. Of particular importance today is what happens in rural areas where "old" livelihoods - like peasant farming and public service work - are gradually diminishing in importance, whilst other forms of employment grow stronger, like self-employment, wage-labour and migrant work (Cristoplos 2001). The reasons behind rural diversification are multiple and far from only relating to globalisation. The demise of public sector work, for short, is related both to anti-statist ideology as well as to changing demands among citizens. Yet, in the fierce competition for increasingly mobile capital, there are rationales for lowering government expenditures, in so far as they are seen as hindrances to flows of private investments. Bryceson (2002), in turn, sees a number of factors contributing to "de-agrarianisation" of rural areas in Africa. These include the removal of agricultural subsidies as well as increased needs for cash-income to pay for social services. Other factors that are often discussed in this context regard the pressure stemming from population growth, leading to a fragmentation of land-holdings, as well as policies of liberalising agricultural trade in a way which forces small-scale producers to compete with cheaper imports¹⁰. These structural changes are not necessarily negative, but it is important that people are not caught "in-between":

Globalization is both a threat (especially to traditional ways of earning and living) and an enormous opportunity (especially in providing new ways of being prosperous and affluent). The ability of people to use the positive prospects depends on their not being excluded from the effective opportunities that globalization offers (such as new patterns of exchange, new goods to produce, new skills to develop, new techniques of production to use, and so on). If people are excluded from these opportunities – either because of international restrictions or due to national or local lack of preparedness – then the overall

⁹ Hoogfeldt (2001) illustrates, with figures on trade and investments, the implosive character of the present phase of capitalism, and accordingly presents a thesis of capitalist involution.

¹⁰ For various interpretations of processes of de-agrarianisation and rural livelihood diversification, see Bryceson (1993; 2002), Ellis (1998), Bebbington (1999); Francis (2000), and Rigg (2001).

impact of globalization may be exclusion from older facilities of economic survival without being immediately included in newer ways of earning and living (Sen 2000: 28).

There are, finally, important sociological aspects of globalisation, which are relevant here. Buffoni (1997) and Beck (2000), among others, argue that globalisation makes people relate to a wider social space. This is due largely to increased physical mobility and to the spread of mass media and new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This can be termed increased socio-spatial permeability (Ellegård 1999), which loosely means that people, information and other resources, more readily can move - or be moved - across borders in space. Effects of increased socio-spatial permeability might well be enabling and liberating, for example by challenging gender relations and traditional hierarchies (Berg & Karlsson 2000). But experiences on the ground are more complex. It is also inducing a sense of extended relativity where people tend to value the lives they live in relation to different possible lives as celebrated on - especially - the television (Beck 2000). This might lead to a tension between the two and to changing perceptions - also in marginal areas - of what is regarded a decent life. As noted in a study on effects of new ICTs in a poor village in Ghana: "...both the means of access and the nature of the texts only emphasised their sense of inferiority and exclusion" (Pryor *et al.* 2003: 89).

These possible relationships between globalisation and exclusion are partly what the new security concerns in many countries are about (see Abrahamsson *et al.* 2001; Duffield 2001). The threat of an excluded South to international stability - e.g. through the spread of violent conflict and terrorism - is part of a security framework within which underdevelopment and exclusion are seen as dangerous. As social space is shrinking and spatial borders get more permeable, it is increasingly acknowledged that stability and development are interdependent since failed development efforts and social exclusion in one part of the world might make very distant areas unstable:

Many world leaders in recent years have rightfully stressed the powerful relationship between poverty reduction and global security. Achieving the Millennium Development Goals should therefore be placed centrally in international efforts to end violent conflicts, instability, and terrorism (Sachs 2005: 9).

The intensified attack on absolute poverty attempted in the donor community - including the Millennium Declaration - can hence partly be understood in this light, where, "...remedial development is not only a moral right, but can be justified as a form of enlightened self-interest" (Duffield 2001: 37). Development is explicitly presented as a security issue, replacing the era of structural adjustment and "...a purified modernisation paradigm of disciplined economic development, completely (and naively) divorced from security concerns" (Abrahamsson *et al.* 2001: 13). Importantly, education plays a major role in strategies of fighting exclusion of both states - from global flows of investments - and of their citizens. Outcomes of these

strategies - in marginal areas - will partly depend on the nature of the phenomenon of social exclusion, as well as on how it relates to educational opportunities.

2.4.2 Capabilities and social exclusion

Globalisation is seen here as a largely irreversible set of processes, but not as an immanent one beyond the influence of human action. A normative challenge for development theory and practice is thus to find ways of making processes of globalisation more inclusive and to make them serve the interests of poor people and the environment in best possible ways. An important starting point is the whole question of what development is, or rather, should be - what is it that people should be included in? I find the work of Amartya Sen (e.g. Sen 1999) a useful point of reference¹¹. Sen sees development as an enhancement of people's real freedoms, in contrast to more narrow ways of conceptualising development; as economic growth; as a rise in personal incomes; as industrialisation and "modernisation"; etc. These might all be important means to development but they must not be confused with its primary end, that is, to increase people's capabilities of doing and being. Accordingly, social arrangements, like education systems, ought to be evaluated in relation to how they affect the extent of freedom that people have to pursue and fulfil objectives they value and prioritise. Here, Sen introduces the concept of functionings, meaning the various things a person may value doing and being. This might include very elementary things, such as adequate nourishment, as well as more complex issues, such as self-respect and being able to appear in public without shame. In short:

Capability is thus a kind of freedom: the substantive freedom to achieve alternative functioning combinations (or, less formally put, the freedom to achieve alternative lifestyles) (Sen 1999: 75).

Focus for a capability-approach is hence not necessarily on *realised functionings*, but it could also be on the *freedom to achieve*, and poverty is essentially seen as a deprivation of these capabilities. Sen (1999) includes several dimensions in his approach, such as political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security. A focus on education is hence partial, in the sense that only one dimension of social opportunities is stressed.

Linking the concept of social exclusion to the capability-approach, further, adds value to it by *stressing* relative and relational aspects of a deprivation¹² (Sen 2000). Atkinson (1998) notes that although the term social exclusion is widely used, its meaning is not always clarified. Still, he identifies three recurring themes in the

¹¹ For overviews of and recent contributions to the development debate, see Hettne (1995; 2002); Sen (1999; 2000; 2002); Nederveen Pieterse (2000); Mohan & Stokke (2000); Abrahamsson *et al.* (2001); Desai & Potter [Eds.] (2002); Power (2003); Potter *et al.* (2004). For a supportive problematisation of "the spaces of Amartya Sen", see Corbridge (2002), and for a critical discussion about defining development as *what it should be*, rather than *what it is*, see Rist (2002).

¹² For various interpretations of the popular concept of social exclusion, see Rodgers *et al.* [Ed.] (1995); Atkinson (1998); Bhalla & Lapeyre (1999); Sen (2000); and Edgren-Schori (2000).

literature on the concept. The first has to do with relativity, and although there are absolute dimensions to a capability-deprivation, social exclusion always refers to a particular place and time, and cannot be understood by looking at the circumstances of an individual in isolation. Social exclusion would then prevail when people are being excluded from substantive capabilities important for leading lives they value, and have reason to value in the societies where they live. This means that more people than only the absolutely poor run a risk of being socially excluded. The second theme concerns agency, as "...exclusion involves an act, with an agent or agents" (ibid: 13). This also means that processes of exclusion may be active or passive. In their passive form, there is no deliberate attempt to exclude, whereas in active exclusion - exemplified by Sen (2000) with inferior political status given to immigrants - there is. The third theme regards dynamics:

People are excluded not just because they are currently without a job or income but because they have little prospects for the future. By "prospects", we should understand not only their own, but also those of their children. Social exclusion may apply across generations. Assessment of the extent of social exclusion has therefore to go beyond current status. (...). Social exclusion is not only a matter of ex post trajectories but also of ex ante expectations (Atkinson 1998: 14).

Narayan *et al.* (2000; 2000b; 2002) show that many of the world's poor perceive themselves to be worse off today than earlier, and that this partly is due to that they see few prospects for positive change in the future. This dynamics-dimension of social exclusion has also been discussed with regard to Swedish families with scarce resources. Hjort and Salonen (2000) identify as a central theme the way these families prioritise their children. Many parents have given up to improve their own lot, but common to them all is their permanent feeling of insufficiency. This feeling of insufficiency regards not being able to provide for the children with what is considered "normal". However, these parents also feel that they cannot do sufficiently for their children not to end up in a similar situation in the future. Important for these intergenerational traps could well be limited access to educational opportunities.

This interpretation of social exclusion resonates with the way Abrahamsson *et al.* (2001) call for a conceptualisation of poverty that is relative, relational and contextual. It is relative as it relates to standards existing elsewhere in society; it is relational and contextual as it relates to "...cultural, economic and political structures and brings the interaction between the poor and the non-poor into focus" (ibid: 57).

2.4.3 A partial perspective on educational opportunities

Educational opportunities can be looked at from many different angles. Nyström (1985) distinguishes four dimensions in his discussion about regional inequalities in educational opportunities. The first concerns what he calls the accessibility of educational services, and means that factors such as social class, race, sex or place of residence should not determine access to the provision of schools, teachers and other

educational inputs. The second dimension is about participation in education and the extent to which students can take advantage of accessible inputs. The third dimension regards results of participation; the outputs as measured by the system's own criteria (e.g. examination results). The fourth and final dimension is about the long-term effects of education and includes aspects such as occupation and earnings. My use of the concept in this study is from a somewhat narrow view of educational opportunities, at the same time as several of these four dimensions are included. I am interested in the accessibility of schools of different segments ("who can go where?"), where I also try to take into account the ability of these schools to provide skills identified to be important by poor families for leading lives they value. A weakness is that many subtle dimensions of educational opportunities are lost as I largely exclude what is going on in the classroom. I agree with Tomasevski (2003) that a focus on hardware - like funding and schools - risk putting key questions about what should be taught in the background. It is therefore important to connect the discussion about educational opportunities thoroughly to the aspirations of poor families in marginal areas, and hence to a discussion about, "Equality of what?"

Focus here is on the *equality* of educational opportunities. From a different normative perspective, it is often argued that relative dimensions are of less concern as long as the poor are not made absolutely worse-off. There are, in my view, two major flaws to this argument. These flaws are even more apparent when looking at relationships between educational opportunities, capabilities and exclusion. First, inequalities in educational opportunities are problematic as credentials are positional "goods" (Hirsch 1977), the value of which partly depends on how much of the same "good" that other people have. In relation to small and/or segmented labour markets, and limited opportunities for higher studies, the positions of students are in much interdependent (Little 1997). In this context, Samoff (1999) stresses the exclusionist intentions of education systems. There is a tendency, he claims, to ignore...

...the design of the education system itself, which in most countries is explicitly structured to screen and filter students out of the system. Most education systems are designed to restrict progress to an ever-smaller elite. That the pyramid is smaller at the top than at the bottom is not an aberration, a mistake, or a problem to be overcome but an intentional objective (ibid: 71).

Inequalities in such a system would either – in so far as there is a connection between education and job opportunities – give unequal access to the labour market, or strengthen the stratified nature of society by channelling people with poor educational backgrounds into its lower segments. In this sense, relative disadvantages in terms of educational opportunities may lead to an absolute deprivation of capabilities.

Second, and as argued by Sen (2002), to suggest that the poor are not necessarily made poorer from a particular social arrangement can never itself be used to defend inequalities generated by it. It might and it might not be correct in particular

situations, but the relevant question is whether it is a fair way of distributing resources, or if this can be made in a manner that is *better* for the poor:

...one cannot rebut the charge that the global system is unfair by showing that even the poor gain something from global contacts and are not necessarily made poorer. The answer may or may not be wrong, but the question definitely is. The critical issue is not whether the poor are getting marginally poorer or richer. Nor is it whether they are better off than they would be had they excluded themselves from globalized interactions. Again, the real issue is the distribution of globalisation's benefits (Sen 2002: 3).

The discussion by Sen is about the benefits of free trade for the world's poor - and how to "judge globalism" - but it should be equally applicable to any discussion about justice. The most equal education policies would thus be the ones that enhanced capabilities of disadvantaged groups in *best possible ways*, in any given situation. The optimal choice of policies is, however, likely to vary between different societies and must be related to life aspirations of the poor, and to the ways they see that education could be useful for enhancing their capabilities of leading lives they value.

2.4.4 The accessibility of educational opportunities

Focus in this study is not on educational opportunities in the sense that I will study outcomes of education, but it is rather on the accessibility of these opportunities. In search for spatial dimensions of education systems, it might be helpful to see them as networks. Gould (1993) outlines the education system as a network of nodes organised in a hierarchy, and with interactions of teachers, students, information and materials between nodes as well as in and out of the system. The nodes in the network normally refer to schools, but education can of course be delivered in other ways, for example through the television or the radio. Focus here is, however, essentially on the accessibility of different segments of schools.

What, then, do I mean by accessibility? Johnston *et al.* (2000: 2) define accessibility to be, at its simplest, about "...the ease with which one place can be reached from another". When looking at the accessibility of *opportunities*, rather than places, a broad conceptualisation has been suggested:

Accessibility to public goods such as employment opportunities, resources and welfare services, can be defined both in physical and social terms. In a physical sense, it relates to the distance to be covered by an individual in an attempt to secure the good; socially, it relates to barriers of class, status or recognition which he [*sic.*] may also have to overcome in the process (Mabogunje 1980: 40).

Both physical and social dimensions are hence important here, with the possible addition from Johnston *et al.* (2000) that it is not only about physical distance *per se*, but also about the ease with which these distances can be bridged (that is, the linkage with mobility). In this way, the accessibility of educational opportunities is conceptualised to involve two interrelated dimensions - distribution and entitlements - and accessibility is thus seen both as a spatial *and* as an individual/family attribute.

To start with, the accessibility of educational opportunities is about the physical distribution of schools, facilities and teachers in space, which at least partly can be approached extensively. Mapping the spatial distribution of schools, facilities and teachers to grasp their physical availability and quality is important in its own right. This would also, perhaps, have been the classical geographical approach. Yet, to understand the accessibility of educational opportunities, in my view, it is necessary to ask questions about what resources that enable entitlements to different segments of schools. This second dimension should be approached intensively, and it calls for an integral understanding of social and spatial factors. The concept of entitlements is borrowed from Amartya Sen (1981) who - in his famous study of starvation - suggests for the focus of social sciences to be, not only on what exists, but primarily on who can control what (and where). The entitlement-dimension of the accessibility concept is understood here to be about the resources that different families have at their disposal and how these resources affect their access to educational opportunities. The three forms of capital identified by the sociologist Bourdieu (1986) – so far almost exclusively applied to more industrialised contexts¹³ - will be used to structure the discussion, although his focus was more on academic achievements, rather than on the accessibility of different segments of schools. This should hence not be seen as an attempt to reconfirm or question the relevance of his theory of reproduction, which is much more sophisticated. Still though, by loosely using the ideas of economic, social and cultural capital, it is easier to understand educational opportunities of poor families. Apart from trying to spatialise each of these forms of capital, as well as to make them applicable to the situations in marginal areas, I add mobility, which is understood broadly as the ability to physically move about in space. Taken together, these resources constitute the power to access different segments of schools¹⁴.

It is obvious that educational problems cannot be properly understood without looking at structural inequalities in society at large; the way these four resources are distributed enables and constrains opportunities of different groups and individuals in different parts of space. Too deterministic interpretations, however, go so far as to totally ignore the responsibility of schools, parents and teachers, while thus also preventing them from being part of the solution (cf. Hutmacher 2001: 12). As noted by UNESCO (2005: 67), for example, "...studies do seem to suggest that school-related factors explain more of the variation in achievement in developing countries than in industrialized countries [and] that the impact of socio-economic factors is less in the

¹³ See, however, Hutmacher (2001). One reason why the reasoning of Bourdieu has not been so influential in the South might well be that most of these studies focus on the accessibility of education in an absolute manner; especially in situations where many children do not attend school at all.

¹⁴ This would also be compatible with how Ilon (1994) - one of the most forceful protagonist of the idea that globalisation will lead to a stratification of education systems - understand what family resources that matters. She suggests that increased "choices" for parents as to where their children go to school "...will mean that those with the resources of time, mobility, connections and money will be able to exercise that 'choice'" (ibid: footnote 14).

former...". This illustrates a room of manoeuvre for schools and for society at large, but it also underscores that it is crucial what kind of schools families can actually access. In order to get around structural determinism, further, there is a need to illuminate how families can mobilise and use resources to achieve their aspirations with education, and to stress that the distribution of resources is not static but changeable¹⁵. Importantly, different types of resources can complement and substitute each other, and although economic capital is likely to be at the root of all of them, the other resources are, in my view, not only its effects. Structures, finally, are constituted by the actions of people, and the very actors that reproduce them can therefore modify or transform them, at least under certain circumstances. I hence assume that all people are endowed with all of these four resources, albeit of different combinations and in different volumes. No individual or family is - in this sense - to be regarded as completely powerless, but as actors, and thus potential authors of their own histories and geographies, albeit not under circumstances of their own choosing.

2.5 Education and development in the South - a look in the mirror

2.5.1 Expansion, disillusionment and structural adjustment

The overall idea with this section (2.5) is to locate the problem of this study in relation to earlier theories and practices of education and development in the South. Due to limitations of space, the discussion will be kept rather short and at times unrealistically general and chronological. The issues presented here as belonging to distinct epochs in time were often overlapping.

As a way of transferring knowledge across generations education was not brought to the South through colonialism. Yet, in many occasions, institutionalised forms of schooling were and any discussion regarding the spread of formal education must hence be wary of the legacy of colonialism. Carnoy (1974) contradicts the perception that Western education operated as a liberating force in the South, by bringing people from ignorance and underdevelopment to enlightenment and civilisation. Rather, he claims, education was used as a means by the colonial powers "...to train the colonised for roles that suited the colonisers" (ibid: 3); it was used to maintain the economic and political control of the colonial people and their countries. In this way, he continues, Western forms of education often brought people out of traditional hierarchies, implying certain elements of liberation (that is, "freedom from bondage"), only to integrate them into new hierarchies with clear elements of alienation and dependency (that is, "social and working conditions set by others"). This is thus a rather conventional Marxist interpretation of the transition from feudalism to

¹⁵ Bourdieu does not consider himself as a determinist, as pointed out in a preface to a new edition of "Reproduction" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1997) but the text which I have found most useful here ("The forms of Capital"; Bourdieu 1986), can in my view only be interpreted as rather deterministic. Equally, Field (2003: 18) argues that "...despite his concern to acknowledge agency, in general [Bourdieu's] theory appears to be rooted in a relatively static model of social hierarchy".

capitalism, with education being an integral part of general processes of imperialism. But Carnoy deviates from classical Marxism in arguing that these processes not necessarily were progressive, placing his interpretation closer to the neo-Marxist Dependency School. It has been shown that regional patterns, stemming from the way colonialism was introduced, tend to be pervasive (Nyström 1985; Närman 1995).

After independence, a major priority in much of the South was rapid modernisation, and for this, formal education was to be spread socially and spatially. Generally, there were great aspirations that the new leaders would compensate for the skewed patterns of colonial education systems. Hopes for what education could deliver were often immense, among policy-makers, donors and the general public alike, in what has been termed the "romantic 60s" by educationists. Access to education was seen as part of the process of liberation and nation building; not only as an investment in the future of the country, but also as crucial to the political legitimacy of its leaders and to social cohesion (Cooksey *et al.* 1994). Consequently, expansion of public education around the South was rapid during the decades after independence, a fact that is often forgotten today when focus has turned towards the corrupt and undemocratic ways in which many of these countries have been governed. Between 1960 and 1975, however, "...there was a fourfold increase in primary enrolments, a ninefold increase in secondary enrolments, and a tenfold increase in tertiary enrolments; expenditure on education per capita quadrupled" (Tomasevski 2003: 69). Yet, there was too little focus on quality during this period of rapid educational expansions, and at least in sub-Saharan Africa, educational policies were often implemented through rather erratic planning processes (Närman 2003). In an early assessment, Coombs (1968) outlines the world crisis facing education systems as rooted in the disparity between these systems and their surrounding environments. One important lesson for today is that education systems cannot be seen in isolation but are rather to be seen as integral parts of societies.

Due to problems of educated unemployment, brain drain, and consistent poverty and inequality problems despite massive educational investments, there was widespread disillusionment with formal education in the 1970s. It was seen that much of the skills provided were irrelevant, as jobs in the modern sector to which formal education was directed did not expand accordingly, and as existing jobs often demanded a different kind of skills than the one provided in schools (Coombs & Ahmed 1974). In addition, and despite massive enrolment expansions, there was a wide gap between the social demand for education - intensified by rapid population growth - and the capacities of education systems to satisfy this demand (Coombs 1968). Nevertheless, educated youths often found themselves unemployed and frustrated, illustrating the tension between ideals of education for all and limited labour markets in poor countries. Radical voices, especially during the 1970s, suggested for alternative education systems, more relevant to the cultural and economic realities of the students. Illich (1971) rejected institutionalised forms of education, which, according to him, lead to

sentiments among those who fail in school that they are not worthy of being part of the development process (see also Reimer 1972). In this way, education not only reproduces but also legitimises existing inequalities. Freire (1972), in turn, problematised the banking character of much learning and called for a critical pedagogy built around a dialogue on issues relevant to the lives of those involved, to increase the awareness among the poor of their own situations. Julius Nyerere (1969) tried to implement an education system integrated with agrarian realities and goals of African Socialism, built around principles of co-operation and equality rather than on competition between individuals. At this time, there were great hopes for students' and parents' attitudes to academic education and labour markets to be changed by changes in curricula. Another line of research (Foster 1965) - suggesting that the poor rationally see practical skills as second-to-best alternatives in relation to the world of work - led donors to be more sceptical than poor governments themselves, as to the scope of vocational training (Neherera 1998).

Apart from this discussion about relevance, another problem facing education sectors is how to finance them, something that became increasingly evident with the debt-crisis in the 1970s. Referring to voices within the UN-administration, Graham-Brown (1991) notes a general budget-conflict in poor countries between what is conceived important and the urgent. There is, it is argued, little policy space for education between the need to provide people with food and the need to pay back loans - between death and debts. With economic recessions, the debt-crisis, and the rise of neo-liberal hegemony, structural adjustment thinking set in from the 1980s under the guidance of the Bretton Woods institutions, with a main ingredient to cut government expenditures. From the 1980s it also became increasingly common to see education as an investment choice, which, "...contributes directly to the growth of national income by improving the skills and productive capacities of the labour force" (Psacharopoulos & Woodhall 1985: 15). Though other concerns were clearly there, the main emphasis was on returns to education and these returns were often measured in strictly economic terms. This human capital thinking was, however, combined with the strict budget frames of structural adjustment, and the idea that parents should carry parts of the costs for education grew strong. The rationale behind these cost-sharing measures was not merely to help finance souring budgets. A main rationale was also to raise efficiency; to get more output from less investment. If people have to contribute - the argument goes - they get the necessary incentives for success. In my view, this forms part of more general, anti-structuralist currents of locating the poverty problem within the realm of the poor themselves, dominating development practice during last decades (cf. Mawdsley & Rigg 2002; 2003; Yapa 2002).

The results of structural adjustment and economic decline on sectors of education have largely been devastating. Not only did it bring the quantitative expansion to a halt; in some countries, former positive trends were even reversed beyond stagnation (UNESCO 1993). Although far from only attributable to structural

adjustment policies, Colclough *et al.* (2003: 27) note for sub-Saharan Africa that "...a majority of countries had a smaller proportion of their children in school, in the late 1990s, than had been the case in 1980". A main reason to why the 1980s is seen as a lost decade for many countries is, however, that the quality of education decreased (Colclough & Levin 1993; Samoff [ed.] 1994; Närman 1995; Tilak 1998). Furthermore, since this time, decision-making in Ministries of Education was strongly influenced by the World Bank (e.g. King 1991; Närman 1995). The World Bank and the IMF are now criticised for having forced countries to cut educational expenditures when they, also from an economic perspective, perhaps should have expanded them the most (e.g. Watkins 2000). Due to the failure to increase growth and reduce poverty, as well as to problems stemming from lack of local ownership of development processes, PRSPs replaced SAPs by the end of the 1990s. An early assessment of these strategy papers shows that education often plays a prominent role, which is linked to the EFA discussion but primarily to the MDGs (Caillods & Hallak 2004). There is much criticism from social movements and researchers regarding both the content and the processes behind PRSPs, as well as regarding their implementation and financing¹⁶. And it is clear that IMF and the World Bank, together with Ministries of Finance, still have the biggest say in determining what they should include (Caillods & Hallak 2004; Hermele 2005). Yet, in my view, many PRSPs are still rooted in a partly new way of thinking about education, poverty and growth, gaining strength during the 1990s.

2.5.2 Education, poverty and growth in times of global transformations

No more than a grown man can suitably wear the clothes that fitted him as a child, can an education system successfully resist the need to change itself when everything around it is changing (Coombs 1968: 5).

Since the late 1990s there has to some extent been a revival of the romanticism of the 1960s. By this I mean that there often is, again, a very optimistic view of the relationship between education and poverty alleviation, on the one hand, and between education and economic growth on the other. It has been argued that there is a coinciding interest for education between governments in the South seeking legitimacy among their populations, and the international community striving to integrate these countries into the world economy and counter social exclusion (Abrahamsson & Nilsson 1996). There is something new to the global development discourse, exemplified by the declaration of EFA (1990), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), and, more recently, initiatives for partial debt-rescheduling, the

¹⁶ One important point is made by Sachs (2005). He suggests that, many times, PRSPs are not even close to reach the MDGs in theory, as governments are asked to be "realistic" and formulate plans in accordance with existing budget situations. Hence, he proposes that plans should be formulated first, in order to see how much resources that are needed to fulfil the MDGs, as well as the resource gaps which will have to be met by such things as genuine debt cancellation and increased aid levels. For a short and critical review of PRSPs, see Hermele (2005).

replacement of SAPs with PRSPs and the Millennium Declaration. Another important factor here, especially with regard to the increasing concern for girl's education, is that all could support the somewhat simplistic idea of "education as contraception" in the strained debate about birth control in the mid-1990s (cf. Heward 1999). Two central themes can thus be seen to dominate the hegemonic discussion of today, namely what will be referred to here as (i) education for poverty alleviation and (ii) education for global competitiveness.

To start with, education forms an essential part of the intensified attack on absolute poverty in the donor community. This is partly due to recurrent findings of high private returns to education (Psacharopoulos & Patrinos 2002), although there are serious methodological problems with these estimates (see Gould 1993: 16-17). Generally, however, "[i]t is well established that the distribution of personal incomes in society is strongly correlated with the amount of education people have had" (UNSECO 2005: 40). In addition to these contributions from education to alleviate income poverty, more recent but influential perspectives see basic education as an end in itself (Sen 1999) and as a "right" (Tomasevski 2003). Furthermore, a number of instrumental values of education are stressed in the debate, such as reductions in child mortality, lower fertility rates, democracy etc (Sen 1999; Tilak 2002). All these benefits - when materialised - are indeed important. But optimism gets problematic if it leads to an uncritical stance regarding *what kind* of education that leads to desirable goals; "...education should not be treated as an independent variable that, if improved, will miraculously lead to development - such views are naïve" (Bowden 2002: 408)¹⁷. The way by which one is included in the education system would clearly affect whether the experience is positive or negative in terms of human capabilities, and the right to education must be interpreted as a right to education of a certain quality. Tomasevski (2003: 2), for example, criticises present optimism by noting that, today, "[g]etting children to school is deemed to be inherently good although they can be brainwashed or raped there". UNESCO (2005) notes that a risk with the prominence given to participation in the Millennium Goals is that the other EFA goals - e.g. regarding quality education - receive less attention:

merely filling spaces called "schools" with children would not address even the quantitative objectives if no real education occurred. (...). In that sense, it could be judged unfortunate that the quantitative aspects of education have become the main focus of attention in recent years for policy makers (and many quantitatively inclined social scientists) (UNESCO 2005: 28-29).

¹⁷ In reality, the various connections between education and "development" are highly contested. Going through a wide range of studies in sociology, demography, economics, political science and anthropology, Hannum and Buchmann (2005: 334) review the empirical foundation for a number of statements that "...portray education as the panacea for a wide range of social ills". They conclude that, there is consistent evidence that educational expansions have beneficial effects on health and demographic change, but argue that there is less consensus regarding in what ways it also contributes to economic growth and democratisation, and whether it serves to decrease social inequalities.

Whether recent initiatives substantially will alter educational landscapes is too early to say and this is also likely to vary between countries¹⁸. Still, it might be possible to discern certain trends with regard to what levels within education system that attracts attention. During structural adjustment, it has generally been primary education that has suffered the most, although less so in Asian countries (Tilak 1998). The negative effects on primary enrolments have, however, generated a shift in emphasis from secondary and higher education, to primary levels (cf. Riddell 1996; Carnoy 1999; Tikly *et al.* 2003). Common suggestions from the donor community – today – is for governments to provide basic education for free or as highly subsidised, and leave higher education levels to the private sector (Lee 2002: 26). In addition, bilateral aid levels to education are increasing in the new millennium after having decreased during much of the 1990s (UNESCO 2005), and increasing resources go to social sectors, including education, in many countries with PRSPs (see Hermele 2005). More than 100 million children of primary school age are still to be enrolled globally, and many of these children are likely to be more difficult to enrol than the ones already participating in education. But in many parts of the South, there has been a rapid expansion of enrolments, especially at primary levels¹⁹. One immediate reason behind this expansion, apart from population growth, is the abolition of fees; fees that formed part of earlier cost-sharing attempts and that have acted as important constraints for enrolments, especially of poor children. Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya are four countries where a removal of fees have had "...dramatic results" (Bentaouet Kattan & Burnett 2004: 8). From one perspective, this is part of a very positive trend. Yet, apart from concerns with deteriorating quality in all of these countries, the demand for secondary education is (unsurprisingly) increasing (*ibid.*). This is likely to stimulate increased competition for quality education, in order to secure opportunities to climb the educational ladder, and it hence

¹⁸ Mine is a somewhat "optimistic" (some would call it naïve) interpretation of the Millennium Declaration. This interpretation is based on the idea that there has been shift in rationale among both donors and southern governments, in relation to the new security concerns and to the reproblematisation of development. There are, however, two general streams of legitimate scepticism towards the MDGs, within civil society, which can be termed *We-have-heard-it-all-before 1 & 2* respectively. The first (1) refers to that the Goals are not new but merely less radical repetitions of what has already been promised during the 1990s (and earlier). The second (2) is concerned with goal number 8, and it is argued that the politics that rich countries promise to pursue closely resembles the kind of free-trade liberalisation agenda that has already been hegemonic since the 1980s.

¹⁹ According to Sachs (2005), primary school completion rates have improved in the world since the 1990s, but many regions are still far off track to meet the second Millennium Goal of universal primary school completion. The situation is most problematic in Sub-Saharan Africa, where average primary completion rates remained around 50 percent between 1990 and 2002. In South Asia, primary school completion rates were increasing between 1990 and 2002, but this increase was from very low levels and the region is still far away from achieving the Goal. UNDP (2005) states that advances in the field of education since 1990 have been impressive, with a significant decrease in the number of primary school-age children out of school and a narrowing of gender gaps in primary school enrolments. At the same time, however, it is pointed out that more than 100 million children are still denied even the most basic primary education. In the developing world as a whole, primary school completion rates are 75 percent for girls and 85 percent for boys and this gender gap is even bigger for secondary and tertiary levels. The gap between rich and poor countries in terms of average years of education is widening (*ibid.*).

provides a rationale for increasingly seeing educational opportunities in relative and relational terms.

In addition to the attempts to fight poverty through expanding basic education, the connections between education and economic growth are stressed with renewed intensity. In an early analysis of the economic miracle in south-east Asia, for example, the World Bank (1993) highlighted the role of education, and especially primary and vocational education, as a crucial factor behind their success. Yet, changing attitudes to education in relation to economic growth, since the 1990s, are also related to the discussion about globalisation, in which highly skilled human resources are considered to be of increasing importance for global competitiveness²⁰. Riddell (1996) suggests that what happened in south-east Asia, was a gradual expansion of education systems from the bottom to the top, and she further argues that demands on education systems for global competitiveness initially were minimal²¹. Yet, she continues, this model is not for other countries in the South to copy:

...whereas primary education may have provided sufficient preparation for some of the jobs sloughed in the direction of the Third World in the late 1970s and 1980s - on the basis of low wages - the 1990s and the 21st century require very different human resources for the new competition. Thus, undue concentration solely on primary education, is likely to disadvantage developing countries and maintain the present gaps between the poorest and the richest among them as well as between them and the already industrialized countries (ibid: 1358).

Poor countries, Riddell concludes, can no longer afford to wait with expanding higher levels of their education systems, and there are many other suggestions with a similar message. Tikly *et al.* (2003), for example, suggests that to achieve long-term structural transformation in countries in the South, they need to invest in the short- to medium-term in human resources, including in ICT skills.

²⁰ At least, this is what many policy-makers believe and act according to. In a discussion on the political rhetoric surrounding globalisation and the proposed need for more education, Green (1997) notes that there is no "consensus" among economists as to how skills actually are linked to economic productivity. But, he continues, it is still important as "...most governments see education and training as the critical factor in national economic performance and competitive advantage" (ibid: 182). For a critical voice on the contribution of education to economic competitiveness, see Wolf (2002).

²¹ In Singapore, for example, the political leaders ensured that, as the industry developed, there would always be a suitable "human capital" in place (see Ashton & Sung 1997). In a first phase, the government sought to attract foreign capital by relying on cheap and disciplined labour and the education system was in much limited to primary level provision. By the late seventies, when the country started to lose its competitive advantage in low-cost labour, the government sought to introduce higher value-added production, which meant that there was a need for a new kind of human resources. Apart from starting up training in vocational skills, secondary education was expanded and there was stronger focus on language acquisition. By the end of the 1980s, the political leaders of Singapore found themselves ready to, "... attract companies planning to invest in the production of high-value added goods and services" (ibid: 211). For this, there was a need to upgrade the education system to the level of the western countries. Focus was on working language and maths, as well as on the production of intermediate-level technical skills and higher education. The Singaporean example shows the development of an education system, which has not been driven primarily by the needs of individuals or employers, but rather by the longer-term needs of the economy as a whole.

At a general level, UNESCO (2005) argues that governments increasingly are concerned with whether their education systems produce the skills necessary for growth in an increasingly competitive environment. The question is, then, what kind of education that is needed for global competitiveness in the South, as derived from the requirements of "new" flows of trade and investments. More research is clearly needed to clarify this (cf. Tikly 2001), but broadly summarised, there are three main elements of the debate²². One thing regards the levels of education, where the call is for *higher levels* to attract the dominant flows of the world economy. Tertiary education is seen as necessary for building the required technological capacities for a knowledge-intensive global economy. A common suggestion is, furthermore, for a general reorientation of education *methods*. Flexible production, it is contended, demands a new kind of workers everywhere, who are multi-skilled, creative and flexible. It is hence proposed that there should be more of critical thinking and problem solving, than content, obedience and rote learning in the curriculum. A final issue is about the need for *particular skills*. English, for example, is said to be of increasing importance, not only for communicating with customers or sellers in increasingly global markets, but also for accessing information on the Internet. Maths, Science and computing skills are other examples in this context.

Yet, many countries cannot afford to provide these "global skills" - let alone higher levels of education - to everyone, partly due to financial restrictions. As noted by Hutmacher (2001), national competition for increasingly mobile capital involves something of a contradiction: "...to reduce taxes on the one hand, and to improve the qualifications of the work force on the other" (ibid: 12). And it would perhaps not be relevant for everyone to learn these "global skills", as only limited areas of many countries are connected to the dominating global networks. Tikly (2001: 162) notes:

In terms of the outputs of education then, the pathetic educational opportunities offered to most children on the [African] subcontinent can actually be perceived to have a positive correspondence with the global division of labour. This may not be the case, however, in relation to education's role in legitimising the global division of labour.

To me, this quotation captures the essence of the dilemma that educational policy-makers are facing today. English, computing skills and university degrees might not be the locally most relevant resources in marginal areas still begging for electrification, and poor governments may not be able to provide it to all areas. But this is not to say that people in these areas do not aspire to much more education than they can get. If countries are to reorient education sectors in order to connect their economies favourably to the global economy, and avoid "Low-skill, Bad-Job" traps (ADB 2003: 8), this might hence lead to different areas and groups of people, within countries,

²² For different contributions to this discussion, see Riddell (1996); Carnoy (1999); Tikly (2001), Tikly *et al.* (2003; 2003b); ADB (2003).

getting increasingly differentiated educational opportunities²³. This is indeed what Ilon (1994) argued, a long time ago. She predicted stratification into global education systems for the wealthy and local systems for the poor, within countries, in country-specific responses to *processes* of structural adjustment.

Two of the poorest countries in the world - Rwanda and Tanzania - are now trying to strike an educational balance between immediate needs for poverty alleviation and calls for increased global competitiveness (Tikly *et al.* 2003; 2003b). These new skills-formation-strategies form part of a broader attempt to end Africa's economic and political marginalisation in the global economy. I am not suggesting such a dualisation of education systems to be a universal trend - more references would be needed to establish this. But it is a trend, which I believe is important due to that it is linked to the way the opportunity structure in the global economy is perceived, to dual economic structures, as well as to the new way of conceptualising security interests and the various threats of exclusion. And it is a trend which makes it worthwhile to ask questions about who, in times of global transformations, can access what kind of educational opportunities, and where. This is where there is a need for much more contextual and empirical studies. Before exploring this dimension of the accessibility of educational opportunities, I will also have to discuss attitudes to education among poor parents, since that dimension is crucial for understanding relationships between educational opportunities, capabilities and social exclusion.

2.6 Attitudes to education among poor parents

A researcher in India, talking to villagers, found that they regarded their children's education as a lottery. You do not really expect to win, but you take a ticket just in case you, or in this case your child, draws a lucky number. The hope has not disappeared, but for many people, experience has taught scepticism (Graham-Brown 1991: 2).

2.6.1 Introduction

This section aims to illuminate the various ways in which education might be valued or not valued among poor families in marginal areas, what factors that are likely to influence this, and how these attitudes might be affected in times of global transformations. I also intend to deepen the discussion from above about possible tensions between how parents and children value education, on the one hand, and how policy makers might see things on the other hand, through the rather complex debate on local relevance. After a short introduction to the concept of attitudes (2.6.2), the discussion will follow the three categories identified to be crucial with regard to the “demand” for education: family-related factors (2.6.3), school-related factors (2.6.4)

²³ The "Low-Skill, Bad-Job" trap refer to the risk of being caught in a cycle of low skills, low wages, depressed productivity and low levels of technology. Cheap, semi-skilled labour, it is argued, might well provide important entry points into global value chains, but poor countries must also quickly upgrade their technology and increase the value added of their production (ADB 2003: 8).

and employment-related factors (2.6.5) (e.g. Mehrotra 1998). To these are added social dimensions behind attitudes to education, such as neighbourhood-effects and the importance of role models. Family-related factors also form part of what will be termed cultural capital below (e.g. parental support), while certain social dimensions of attitudes to education will surface again in the discussion about social capital. High aspirations with education - among parents, relatives or in the local community at large - might well be important resources in the struggle for educational opportunities.

2.6.2 The concept of attitudes

First of all I need to make clear what I mean by the concept of attitudes. Golledge and Stimson (1997: 204) define an attitude as "...a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object, person or spatial environment". Although attitudes are seen to have a certain level of stability (that is, they are relatively invariant over time), an important aspect is that they can change and be changed as the spatial environment, object or person in question changes, or as individuals learn and experience. Focus here is on the perceived role of education in relation to livelihood opportunities. But although this economic perspective is likely to be the most important (that is, to improve employment or income opportunities), other issues might also be highly influential. Baker (1988), for example, shows with a Sri Lankan case study how parents can value education regardless of its potential instrumental values. And in a study of why Indian parents want to send their children to school it is suggested that "...it would be a mistake to think that parents care only for the economic benefits of education" (the Probe Team 1999: 20). Other aspects mentioned by Indian parents in that study regard improved social status, self-confidence and self-esteem (for boys), and that it helps to write letters and keep accounts, as well as that it improves marriage prospects (for girls). Another probable concern of parents is that the education provided should be in accordance with socio-cultural values of the local communities (e.g. Negash 1996).

2.6.3 Family-related factors behind attitudes to education

Frequently heard arguments about the rural poor not being able to appreciate the value of education might be little more than popular myths (Tilak 2002). The Probe Team (1999: 14) similarly suggests the typical pattern, in India, rather to be that parents "...are very keen that their children should receive a good education", and parental interest is found high and rapidly growing (ibid: 19). Other studies about poor people's perceptions of development likewise show that many parents are well aware of what education could mean for the futures of their children (Dahl 1997; Narayan *et al.* 2000; 2000b; 2002). Important for understanding attitudes to education is, however, to distinguish between seeing a potential value with education from expectations with the kind of education that is actually accessible. In other words, having a keen interest in "education" does not necessarily translate into a motivation to send the child - or to

attend - a particular school. As suggested by Furter (1980: 64), attitudes to education among certain groups are "...governed by the relationship between their aspirations - often illusory - and their expectations - often pessimist". In relation to this, Boyle *et al.* (2002) make the following observation:

While there is often a tendency to dismiss the poorest as either blind followers or recalcitrant laggards, (an often quoted phrase being the poorest are "unaware of the importance of education"), our study indicates that neither stereotype is adequate. There is a notable willingness among the poor to pay (though ability is often limited or non-existent), and to make sacrifices for what they perceive to be *good quality education* (ibid: ix, emphasis added).

By aspirations, then, I refer to what parents hope to achieve with their children's education, their desires, while expectations signify what is believed will happen. Many studies fail to make this distinction explicit, which in turn might be linked to what Bernard (2002: 82) discusses as "...the runaway best-seller model for change in our society" - the educational model of social change. By this he means that when a problem is identified - e.g. families with too many children - the way of changing behaviours behind these problems is seen to be to inform people of the advantages of alternatives: in this case, small families. Awareness of alternatives is of course important. But, Bernard continues, "...if people's behaviour is rooted in the structure or infrastructure of society, then forget about changing their behaviour by educating them to have better attitudes" (ibid.). Not only is the educational model of social change likely to confuse dependent and independent variables, which is Bernard's point (his book is one on methodology). When discussing attitudes to education, it risks overemphasising the need to inform parents about the value of education, to increase their aspirations, rather than looking at how factors like school quality and the opportunity structure in the labour market affect parental expectations.

It is widely acknowledged, however, that there is an in-built dynamic whereby education generates its own demand, and people who have been to school generally want their children to get even more and better education than they have themselves (Coombs 1968). Similarly, the Probe Team (1999) suggests that first-generation learners and their parents are more vulnerable to discouragement effects and that they more often than others are, end up blaming themselves for failures of the school system and withdraw from school. Colclough *et al.* (2003) show that education levels of parents are important in determining whether children will attend school or not.

Parental attitudes to education are furthermore likely to be gender-biased. An understanding of gender constraints in education must take note of gender relations in society at large (cf. Heward 1999; Colclough *et al.* 2003). Attitudes and traditions regarding social roles of men and women, gendered divisions of labour, marriage practices, etc., are likely to affect attitudes among parents towards the education of girls and boys (Rose & Tembon 1999). The Probe Team in India (1999) notes that, even

where there are no principled oppositions towards educating girls, there might still be disincentives for parents to invest in it. For example:

In many countries, there remain substantial differences in the wages and salaries earned by men and women with equal human capital and work time-inputs. (...) If such role differences are prominent, they may result in the returns to investments in human capital for girls lagging behind those of boys, which is likely to affect schooling decisions, particularly in poor communities (Colclough *et al.* 2003: 55).

Under such circumstances, informing parents about the value of girls' education is likely to be less effective than changing discriminatory opportunity-structures. The opportunity cost of girls' time is furthermore often higher, due to their obligations to assist in the household, especially where females perform the bulk of reproductive tasks (UNESCO 2003). Large-scale studies from the African continent show that household income, direct costs, parental education and school quality are all influencing differentiated demand for education with regard to boys and girls (Colclough *et al.* 2003). There is, finally, a need to go beyond voices of parents to fully understand gender dimensions. According to Boyle *et al.* (2002), for example, parents from most of the communities in which they have conducted research claim to be equally supportive of both sexes, whereas children, both boys and girls, found parents more supportive of boys. When there is a trade-off, they conclude, girls often suffer. Thus, with regard to gendered attitudes to education, "...economic inability to pay and cultural unwillingness to change are interlinked and mutually reinforcing" (Rose & Tembon 1999: 99).

2.6.4 School-factors and social dimensions of attitudes

A conclusion from the discussion above is that even poor, rural parents tend to see a potential value of education, although their attitudes are likely to be gender-biased and to vary with education levels and earlier experiences. Yet another thing is whether parents see the schools their children can access as capable of providing the kind of education they perceive to be important. This is where expectations with education might differ from what people aspire to in such a way as to make parents who express positive ideas of what education could do for their children end up keeping them away from a particular school. This is indeed one of the dangers with downplaying quality-concerns in the discussion about MDGs, as this might lead to a decrease also in quantitative terms if parents see the education on offer to be of little value²⁴ (UNESCO 2005). The attendance, quality and gender of teachers, as well as school feeding programs, are school-related factors that are likely to affect attitudes to education

²⁴ A complicated matter is how parents determine school quality, i.e. what indicators or proxies they use. Often, it is results at examinations that lay the foundation for how a particular school is perceived by parents, while pupil-teacher ratios might also be important. Another line of research - from debates about parental choice - suggest that the social and ethnic composition of students is a common proxy for quality when parents assess whether a school is good or bad (e.g. Fiske & Ladd 2000).

among parents and students. Again, there might well be gender dimensions and ul Haq and Haq (1998) summarise these to include the absence of schools in convenient locations, inflexible hours, lack of female teachers, lack of single-sex schools, irrelevant curricula, and inadequate school facilities (particularly toilets). To these, Colclough *et al.* (2003) add aspects such as male-biased curricula, gender-blind teacher-training practices, negative teacher attitudes.

This discussion about the importance of school-factors is linked to the social dimensions of attitudes and to the ways that educational supply partly might generate its own demand. This seems to have been the case with the expansion of the Swedish school system (Hoppe 1976), which is theoretically related to Hägerstrand's (1987) ideas about how innovations spread in space. The idea is that proximity to a phenomenon - like schools - gives a bigger and more intensive amount of information about it, making it easier to evaluate and accept it. Both discussion- and demonstration-effects are important, and for education, these are often referred to as neighbourhood-effects and effects of role models. With regard to the former, Bradford (1991) criticises educationists for neglecting social geographies of catchment areas, and suggests that "...where you live, the people you interact with, and attitudes and values you share or to which you aspire, may affect your behaviour" (ibid: 324). Closely related to this is the importance of role models, which often is about some people from the community showing others that "education matters" by getting a good job. Yet, role models might also work the other way around, as could negative attitudes to education in the neighbourhood. This is where the educational model of social change must be rooted in the opportunity structure. If out-of-school activities seem fruitful (increasing opportunity costs), and/or if educated youths in the neighbourhood are unemployed, incentives to send children to school - or for them to attend - might decrease. Social dimensions hence act both as transmission-belts and filters in the diffusion process, if people are given opportunities to discuss (neighbourhood effect) and partly evaluate (role models) education.

Role models is thus one way for parents to get information about linkages between education and different segments of the world of work, but for this to be effective, role models need to be relevant for comparison. Low caste parents might not change their expectations with education if youths from higher caste groups get good jobs after school (the Probe Team 1999). The same would accrue to gender inequalities and stereotyped gender roles as discussed above. The importance of role models is depending, as suggested by Hoppe (1976) for the Swedish case, on the importance of formal competence, that is, the extent to which society is meritocratic and how common it is that livelihood positions are inherited. Importantly, education is neither a sufficient, nor a necessary criterion for job opportunities in all contexts (Gould 1993). In a Kenyan study, for example, personal connections and kinship networks were often found more important requirements than education (Lauglo & Närman 1988). This brings me to a

closer discussion about how parental attitudes to education relate to its local relevance, and to the world of work.

2.6.5 Parental attitudes, local relevance and the world of work

When looking at the accessibility of education, there is a need to take note not only of physical dimensions such as proximity or remoteness to supply points. One must also look at the relationship, "...between this geographical supply and all of the demands for education" (Furter 1980: 61), implying that parents in different geographical contexts might value education for different reasons. Attitudes to education would thus be affected by its local relevance - that is, whether it is adapted to realities and needs in the areas in which parents and children live. This is far from always the case. Abrahamsson and Nilsson (1996), for example, argue that the Mozambican education system to a large extent lost contact with the realities of students, as it was built to match the elite's vision of a new society. Schools, they suggest, "...tried to train people for a society that was as yet inexistent, to people a production structure that is still embryonic" (ibid: 122). It is rather common to hear propositions for rural children, as well as for children of the urban poor, to attend practically oriented schools, better suited for their socio-cultural realities and for the economic opportunities open to them after finishing school (e.g. Negash 1996). And it is suggested that poor parents often see the education on offer to be of low local relevance, mostly because of a "...perceived disconnect between education and securing a livelihood" (Narayan *et al.* 2000: 121). For farmers, educating a child might actually signify a double loss; the child cannot contribute to subsistence while in school, and he or she also cannot - or end up unwilling to - work the land if they remain unemployed after finishing school (Hagberg 2000). This should hold true for many marginal areas of today:

Perhaps more daunting is the notion that the benefits to be derived from the human resource explosion will not benefit all. In fact, the globalisation of the economy will mean that many people become even more marginal. Denying this fact of the global economic system and continuing to train all students as if they had equal non-school resources, equal starting places, equal educational opportunities and equal job and career possibilities means that education will become even less useful for these populations. Serving these populations will mean identifying their particular circumstances and needs and detailing plans that move them forward rather than selling them the myth of their equal chances at global success (Ilon 1994: 105).

This relevance-discussion is important and complex, and its practical implications vary between different societies. The discussions above most often refer to countries where many children are not attending school at all. A key matter relating to equality is what kind of education parents and students themselves are interested in for what kind of futures. Here, the old ideas of Foster (1965; 2002) in his influential "vocational school fallacy thesis" also seem to hold true in many areas. His argument is, basically, that as long as parents and students see that it is academic - not practical -

education that provides access to prestigious occupations, their opposition to practical education is rational and hard to change through changes in the curricula. Hagberg (2002) equally notes, in the case of Burkina Faso, that aspirations with education among parents is strongly linked to dreams about "modern" ways of life, through jobs in the formal sector, and to ambitions to leave traditional ways of life. But, he continues, there are not enough jobs to absorb all educated youths, and the state is disengaging and decreasing public employment. It is therefore important, he concludes, to ask whether children learn to "live" or to "leave", where the latter normally means to move from the village to town. In a poor village in Ghana, it is similarly seen that education is considered a means to leave, not to stay, and that successful education is measured only in terms of "...examination passes and migration out of the rural context" (Pryor *et al.* 2003: 60). The big questions are hence: relevant education for what and where, and defined by whom? Tomasevski (2003: 29) formulates the essence of this problem somewhat provocatively:

There are endless calls to make education relevant. These are routinely interpreted as instrumentalizing schooling to make it useful to children, and this, in turn, is construed as enabling children to do better the work for which they are destined by their family and community. However, both parents and children often see education as the key to rupturing the intergenerational transmission of that pattern as well as the stepping stone for the children's occupational and geographical mobility. The donors may prioritize their definition of relevance (keeping children where they are), the beneficiaries their own (the pass key for mobility).

This is an old dilemma, but it might be that it actually intensifies over time, rather than the reverse, due to socio-spatial permeability and the transformation of rural livelihoods, as well as to increasingly uneven economic geographies. It is suggested by the Probe Team (1999), for example, that poor, rural parents - in India - now mainly aspire to the same kind of education, as do parents from urban elite groups. With support from another Indian study, it is argued that "...aspirations have become so universalized that today it is practically impossible to distinguish between the dreams of an average family anywhere in the country, for their children's future" (SIDH, quoted in *ibid*: 27). The reasons for this are not elaborated, but in my view, it might partly relate to dreams about the future being streamlined through increased physical and medial mobility. Hence, the authors of the report reject calls for more practical education for rural children, although the general importance of making education systems more relevant and practically oriented is acknowledged. The rationale for this, however, rests more in pedagogical gains than in parental demand, and as such, it would apply to all children, not only of the rural poor. This clearly shows a fundamental tension involved in educational planning. If education is to be adjusted locally, there might be a need to convince parents of advantages of such a system, for them not to feel discriminated against. If parents and students would agree - and aspire

to education based on local traditions and economic realities - there is perhaps a need to rethink conceptualisations of equal opportunities (cf. Furter 1980).

It is also important to distinguish between different kinds of jobs *within* formal labour markets; obviously, not all "modern jobs" are equally attractive. Fägerlind and Saha (1989) discuss three different segments of modern work structures. First, there are well-paid jobs, which require high education. Second, there is a unionised segment with internal hierarchies, job security and relatively high wages, albeit not necessarily with job satisfaction. Third, there is a competitive segment, with low wages, poor job security and working conditions, and few opportunities for social mobility. A quest for social mobility through public sector jobs - many of which would accrue to the higher two segments - is common among the poor in many parts of the South. As mentioned, opportunities for public sector jobs are often declining, due much to financial restrictions and anti-statist ideologies. This means changing prospects for social mobility, which in turn might affect attitudes to education.

A majority of the world's poor still works in agriculture. But integral to present forms of global transformations are difficulties in many areas to live from the land. In relation to this, Atchoarena & Gasperini (2003) stress the need for new perspectives:

...the issue of educational development in rural areas cannot be properly addressed without mentioning the upheavals that have occurred in the agricultural milieu. The fact is that this milieu has changed a lot, as reflected for instance by the shift in rural labour markets towards non-farm employment and by the persistence - or deepening - of rural poverty (ibid: 29).

Prospects for peasant farming - especially in areas with high population growth, land fragmentation and deregulated agricultural markets - are decreasing in many areas. This is likely to affect attitudes to education. Furthermore, peasant farming is often not seen as a valid option by someone, who has made it through the education system. Bryceson (1993) suggests that poor parents generally do not want their children to experience the same kind of problems as they do, and therefore do not want them to become farmers. Carron and Châu (1996) show how the educational and occupational aspirations of parents - in China, Mexico, Guinea and India - are "unrealistically high", and that many parents want their children to leave agriculture. In many parts of south-east Asia today, it is seen as a duty of parents to assist their children to acquire the necessary education for them to abandon the land (Rigg 2001).

Carron and Châu (1996) conclude that high educational and occupational aspirations among parents are connected to low levels of social stratification and to good prospects for social mobility. If present transformations of labor-markets led to increased stratification, as suggested by Ilon (1994) and Carnoy (1999), aspirations with education could be expected to go down among some groups (Ilon 1994). With a distinction between aspirations and expectations, another outcome could, however, be a decrease in expected gains from education, but not necessarily in aspirations, and a strengthening of social exclusion if aspirations are linked to substantive capabilities for

leading valuable lives. This is how I interpret Tikly's (2001) addition from above. Poor educational opportunities of most families in Africa might correspond with these families' positions in the global economy, but might not suffice for legitimising it.

2.7 The spatial distribution of the education network

2.7.1 Introduction

This section deals with the spatial distribution of schools and teachers, as well as with the quality of the services they deliver. An important question to be addressed is what makes schools and teachers being distributed the way they are. I start by briefly outlining two broader perspectives on distributional tendencies in education networks (2.7.2), relating to two opposing "meta-theories" of development. After this, I aim to be more in-depth and detailed about the distribution of schools (2.7.3) and teachers (2.7.4) respectively, including more of an actor oriented perspective.

2.7.2 Factors behind the spatial distribution of education networks

There are two broader approaches as to the distributional tendencies within education networks relating to modernisation theory and structuralism (Gould 1993: 80pp.). The modernisation approach postulates that the diffusion process eventually will trickle down through the urban hierarchy from the capital city. This approach is demand-driven, as it largely sees diffusion of educational opportunities to follow upon more and better information among parents of the advantages of education. It is, however, also a matter of balancing the wish for each child to have a school as close as possible to his or her home with the need to economise scarce public resources. Supplying sparsely populated areas with schools is, of course, less efficient economically, and a minimum size population necessary for supporting a school is normally calculated. One important issue, relating to this perspective, is tapering, and the effects of distance for reaching point-specific services (Pinch 1985). Schools need to be located at particular points in space, increasing the cost, time and effort necessary for people living at further distance from these points, possibly also lowering their demand for education through the friction of distance. This could be called a *technical approach* to the understanding of education networks, largely downplaying issues of power.

The provisioning of public services is likely to vary between local government units, especially where there is a degree of local political autonomy (Pinch 1985). Constitutional democracy and the accountability of policy makers to electorates will also affect their proneness to distribute welfare services (Sen 1999). Lee (2002) furthermore notes that regional disparities in education – in Asia – often are related to differences in economic growth, proximity to political centres, and to the historical importance of regions. Thus, adding a more *structuralist approach*, it is of interest to correlate the distribution of the education network not only with population figures and parental "demand", but also with the general distribution of power in society and space. This way of arguing focuses on cumulative processes operating in society, with

tendencies to concentrate resources - like schools and teachers - to already advantaged areas and groups. Lipton (1977) argues, in this tradition, that rural-urban disparities are the biggest class issues in Africa. The urban bias in development processes is partly due to that politicians and other elite groups tend to favour urban areas, where they live, and where their positions of power are most challenged. Collective action and resistance tend to be less forceful in poor, dispersed communities. From a structuralist perspective, then, resources are likely to trickle up rather than down social and spatial hierarchies, largely in correspondence with the overall distribution of power.

Although my own point of departure leans more closely towards structuralist explanations, both technical and structuralist approaches will surface in the discussion regarding the spatial distribution of the education network. Yet, for a deeper understanding, I need to look more in detail at its different components, as well as to add an actor-oriented understanding by including resources and rationales of teachers.

2.7.3 Schools and their catchment areas

Schools are the nodes in the education network in terms of being the most crucial delivery points. In principal, they serve spatially discrete areas of students, catchment areas, although in practice, these are normally overlapping. Factors defining catchment areas are an important part of this study, and although the distance between home and school is likely to be one such factor, many other possibilities will be discussed in section 2.8. Still, catchment areas at lower levels in the hierarchy of schools are generally smaller, as younger children are less mobile, while schools at higher levels might even attract foreign students from the global and macro-regional catchment area. Primary schools are hence more spread spatially than secondary and tertiary institutions, which tend to concentrate higher up in the urban hierarchy and in areas where population density is high (Gould 1993). Many countries in the South have already built sufficient schools to enrol all children at the primary level, while more attention needs to be devoted to school quality and to family-related resources if they want to keep children in school (Bruns *et al.* 2003). The Probe Team (1999) argues similarly, for the vast Indian subcontinent, that it largely is a myth that primary schools are not available. The system has expanded to such an extent in recent decades that most families now live at convenient distance from a school, and the big issue is rather *what kind* of primary school that is close. This is likely to differ widely across regions and my point is merely that primary schools have expanded rapidly in many areas, and that widespread notions that schools are non-existent might in part be misguided. A parallel trend now is, however, to close down small schools in order to concentrate resources for more efficient use, something that might again increase the importance of distance and mobility for educational opportunities (IIEP 2002).

Apart from the different levels of education, many differentiations of educational supply are possible. One regards the division between private and government schools. When discussing the privatisation of education systems it is

important to distinguish private provisioning and private funding from private regulation and accountability (for example through parental choice) (Belfield & Levin 2002). Unaided private schools are likely to be located where there is an effective demand for private education, that is, not in economically poor areas. Privatisation of education has increased worldwide in later years. One reason for this is to be found on the demand side, where there has been an increase in both excess and differentiated demand. Decline in the quality of public schools furthermore tilts parents towards private schools. Important for understanding privatisation trends are, finally, also ideological shifts at the global level and increased influence from global actors such as the World Bank (ibid.). A general trend today is to let the government finance at least primary education, while trying to involve the private sector higher up in the hierarchy, from the secondary level (Carnoy 1999; Lee 2002). Another trend in many areas is to send the child for private, extra tutoring in what has been termed shadow systems of education (Foondun 1992; Bray 1999).

A further line of division in educational supply is between good and bad schools within the education network, although here, the matter of classification turns more subjective. Yet, a guiding assumption is that as education networks fill up, the ability of schools to bring students up the educational hierarchy is likely to increase in importance. This is related to a view of educational qualifications as "positional goods", the value of which partly is depending on how much of the same good that other people have. And it is also related to the size and stratification of labour markets, as well as to the shape of the educational pyramid. Ilon (1994) argues that education networks are likely to further diversify under pressures from globalisation:

...policies and practices formed around a logic of local schooling for local needs is no longer viable. Neither is a system of centrally controlled national schooling. What is needed is a system of schools which serve specific populations with specific resources and talents (ibid: 104).

Whether this is happening and if it is done in accordance with already existing spatial patterns or as partly new opportunity structures, is of course an empirical question.

An interesting and widely debated issue is how the accessibility of different schools is organised politically²⁵. One way of increasing the level of discreteness of catchment areas is through so-called area rules (or area "rights"), that, ideally, have the advantage that children can attend the school closest to their homes. The key principles guiding such a unitary system are mixed-ability teaching and non-selectiveness, and an overall idea is that the educational needs of all children in an area could and should be met by the local neighbourhood school. There are a number of advantages with organising the

²⁵ The following two paragraphs draw from my reading of the academic debate on policies of "parental choice" in Western countries (see for example Bradford 1991; Laudner & Hughes 1999; Blomquist & Rotstein 2000; Fiske & Ladd 2000; Skolverket 2002; and Gewirtz 2003). The intention is merely to show the different perspectives in the debate, rather than to come up with a conclusive opinion. There is, however, a lot to be learnt from this debate also for a study about educational opportunities in the South, especially in areas where competition for educational resources is high and increasing.

system in such a way. One might be that parents and students with superior economic, social or cultural capital, or who are physically very mobile, are less likely to get advantages by attending a better school somewhere else. Other possible advantages with area rules is that it makes students from diverse home backgrounds attend the same schools, and it is furthermore easier for both authorities and schools to plan their activities in advance based on population data.

One critique of the unitary school system is that it does not take differential aspirations among different groups and individuals into account. And it is argued that the unitary ideal of area rules might be egalitarian, but that in practice, the result will more often be the opposite. From this perspective, area rules will only cement existing spatial inequalities (e.g. housing segregation), as it takes away the exit option - or "right" - of parents and students in disadvantaged areas. From a different perspective, it is furthermore claimed that school inefficiency is propelled by centralist - or "democratic" - control, and a discourse stressing competition and choice is hegemonic worldwide at present. Attempts to increase parental choice - and thus efficiency through the exit-threat - however clearly show the segregating potential also of the "education market". Increased elements of choice - when parents and students are seen as consumers of the commodity education - risk leading to "...viscous cumulative processes" (Bradford 1991: 322) for certain schools, especially if resources are distributed per capita. When schools compete, and selection criteria are other than residential area, there is furthermore a risk for "cream-skimming", signifying that children who are expected to have problems in school, and hence to be more costly and to scare off other students, get filtered away. Finally, competition does not necessarily improve efficiency, as the "education market" is very imperfect - a "quasi market" - and as information about school quality is highly contested.

2.7.4 Teachers and their spatial distribution

Of particular interest in this study - with regard to the education network - are pupil-teacher ratios, which are often used as crude proxies for quality at different levels of scales. This goes also for how many parents perceive the quality of education. The rationale is, of course, that the less students per teacher, the more time and energy can be devoted to each one of them. Yet, pupil-teacher ratios suffer from a number of weaknesses, including that they do not take into account the training of teachers, teaching time and methods, or the quality of materials and classrooms (Garrouste Norelius & Mendes 2003). Another problem is that the pupil-teacher ratios can be indicators of both quality and capacity. Low ratios might for example be due to low population density and to a low effective demand for education in certain areas (Colclough *et al.* 2003). Furthermore, pupil-teacher ratios need to be complemented with attendance records - for both students and teachers.

Teachers are normally the most costly part of education networks. This is partly due to the nature of much teaching, which is labour-intensive (Coombs 1968; 1985).

For a five years primary cycle there is a need for at least five teachers, while a secondary school, where they use subject-wise teachers, need more teachers per class (Gould 1993). There is hence no clear correlation between pupil-teacher ratios and class size, although the former is often used as a proxy for the latter (see Bruns *et al.* 2003). Multi-grade teaching is a common solution in areas where population density is low, while areas with many students might introduce multi-shift systems. The former means mixing children of varying ages in one class room, whereas a multi-shift system means that one teacher (or at least one classroom) has more than one class, e.g. one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Both teachers and parents often see multi-grade teaching as a second-to-best alternative, although there are positive experiences (see UNESCO 2005). Multi-shift systems might reduce average class sizes substantially, but it might also shorten the school day, which means that instruction time is lost. Apart from the number of teachers, it is important to take their qualifications into account, and there is a tension involved between these two dimensions. There is often a trade-off between "...a reasonable pupil/teacher ratio and teachers who are sufficiently qualified to ensure that the quality of education is not worsened by measures aimed at improving it" (UNESCO 2003: 97). In relation to this, many countries have recruited large numbers of untrained teachers to sustain rapid enrolment expansions in times of severe financial restrictions. Colclough *et al.* (2003) note that an acute lack of trained teachers to meet the recent increase in "demand" has led to sub-optimal mixtures of trained and untrained teachers, which has affected quality.

In addition to the structuralist and technical perspectives introduced in section 2.7.2, there are important spatial aspects behind the distribution of teachers, which are revealed with a more actor-oriented understanding. Many times, teachers do not want to live in marginal areas; distant from the kind of lives they are accustomed to or strive for, or far away from their homes and families. This might be administrated centrally with transfer policies, but patronage or corruption often infects state-teacher relationships (Gould 1993: 65). Nārman (1995: 217), in turn, argues that "...it is one thing to provide teachers to remote areas, and quite another matter to make them stay", and rather suggests for special quotas for marginal areas in the selection for teacher training. Widmalm (2002) equally argues that recruiting local teachers might remove some opportunities for bribery involved in transferring teachers.

Another factor regards the motivation or commitment of teachers, and here again, an actor-oriented perspective is of help. A proxy for motivation might be attendance rates, how often teachers actually show up for work, but this is likely to be a very rough proxy as reasons behind absenteeism extend well beyond issues of motivation. ADB (2003: 51) notes that "...studies about teacher absenteeism are almost non-existent and the subject is rarely discussed", but the problem is still widely spread in the South. Widmalm (2002) suggests one factor behind absenteeism to be that teachers also work in the private sector, that is, as private teachers. In asking himself why this is so, he comes up with five hypotheses derived from the literature:

- (i) a lack of accountability and commitment among teachers, seen as a function of the subjective distance between them and the local people;
- (ii) salary levels - if these are seen as too low, supplementary incomes might be necessary to obtain even a minimum standard of living;
- (iii) an unclear distinction between public and private spheres;
- (iv) the absence of proper monitoring systems; and
- (v) a low level of "social capital", where a weak civil society and weak social ties in the society will allow absenteeism to happen.

It should be noted, however, that Widmalm sees teacher absenteeism largely as an indicator of corruption, and there might hence be factors that he does not stress as much as he would have, had he entered the discussion from another angle. He does, for example, not discuss the spatial dimensions of teacher absenteeism. In South Asia, attendance problems are often related also to the distances that many teachers have to travel to receive their salaries, and to that they are often assigned to schools far away from their homes (ul Haq & Haq 1998: 80). Teachers in a village in Ghana explain their high absenteeism precisely with these factors: they have to take extra time away to maintain relationships with wives and fiancées, and they have to collect salaries and attend to other matters in towns (Pryor *et al.* 2003).

The organisation Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO 2002), finally, paints a rather dismal picture of the teaching situation in poor countries of today. It is shown how many teachers feel their status and motivation to be in decline and that especially in rural areas, many feel their financial and professional needs to be in constant neglect. Although teachers around the world may many times be better off economically compared to a couple of decades ago, they may feel worse off due to a declining status relative to other professional groups (UNESCO 2005: 61). Traditionally, teachers have often been important and respected persons in society, especially in rural areas. Yet, as Martin (1998) shows with a study from Mexico, a combination of economic and educational reforms, both intended to improve efficiency, can impose strains in relations of educational provision, in which teachers are linked with parents and students. If the incomes of parents are negatively affected by, in this case, economic reforms, children might be kept away from school, either as the direct cost cannot be afforded, or as the opportunity costs of education increases. Teachers, on their part, might either get involved in other, complementary income-generating activities or be less well equipped to teach the children successfully. In the Mexican case, this strain has created a mutual distrust, where teachers blame school-failures on parents' ignorance, while parents consider teachers' apathy to be the cause for deteriorating education. The children's education is now suffering from the resulting lack of school-home co-operation (*ibid.*) and similar tendencies are found in other areas. For example, young teachers in Ghana do not want to stay in rural schools due to a lack of basic social facilities (like electricity and water), but also due to perceived poor attitudes to education in the local community (Pryor *et al.* 2003).

There are, however, contradictory findings. Dachi and Garrett (2003) indicate with cases from Tanzania - a country which also has gone through major economic reforms - that teachers seem quite understanding of problems that students face, at least at the intellectual level. Moreover, Carron and Châu (1996) suggest that parents do not complain much about school quality, although they do find a lot of school personnel largely blaming school-failures on the lack of parental support. Nevertheless, possible tensions in relationships between schools and families need to be acknowledged.

2.8 Family resources for access to educational opportunities

2.8.1 Introduction

In the following sections I discuss family resources that have been identified as important for being entitled to different segments of the education network. Four such family resources are highlighted in-depth: economic (2.8.2), social (2.8.3), and cultural capital (2.8.4), as well as physical mobility (2.8.5). Here, the resources are discussed one by one, but in reality, they often substitute and complement each other and should be seen as integrated. Taken together, however, these four resources are seen to constitute the power to access different segments of schools. The main ideas with the chapter are to present findings from related research, as well as to clearly illustrate what I mean by the different concepts by providing examples. At times, the distinction between social and cultural capital may, for example, seem a bit "arbitrary", which partly is because I attribute the forms of capital largely to families rather than to individuals. The concept of "family" refers to more than the social group (or household) residing in the same place, sharing meals, and making joint decisions about resource allocation. In addition to these aspects, the family-concept ought to be spatially extended to include non-resident family members as well as being disaggregated by gender.

2.8.2 Economic capital and constrained household budgets

Economic capital is about the material resources of the families. It mainly regards income and wealth but includes all resources that readily can be translated into cash (Bourdieu 1986). This form of capital is likely to affect educational opportunities in both direct (e.g. school fees, books, equipment, bribes) and indirect (e.g. transport costs) ways, in addition to opportunity costs. There are more or less apparent spatial dimensions to the relationship between direct costs and educational opportunities. For one, the distribution of income is normally skewed against certain regions and rural areas, making costs more difficult to handle. In relation to this, Boyle *et al.* (2002) note higher costs for education in urban areas, particularly as school fees, where found, are higher and asked for with less flexibility. This is supported by other findings from Asia (Lee 2002). Since the mid-1990s, the World Bank has modified its position on school fees. The elimination of school fees has led to massive increases in enrolments at primary level in many countries (Bentaouet Kattan & Burnett 2004), providing

"...strong evidence that schooling demand in low-income countries is more elastic than previously estimated" (Bruns *et al.* 2003: 45). However, experience shows that if the result is erosion of school quality, enrolment gains might not persist (*ibid.*). Another factor is that school fees only are one part of the many direct and indirect costs facing poor families with regard to education (Bray 1996; Boyle *et al.* 2002).

One way of handling costs with education in families with insufficient economic capital is to sacrifice other necessities, like food, clothing, medicine, capital assets, social duties, etc. What priorities are made when parents have to choose between expenditures is, however, not a clear-cut issue; especially if attitudes to education are changing²⁶. In Pangani district, Tanzania, many poor families view education to be an investment, whereas health expenditures more commonly are seen as emergency expenses that have to be paid. As the returns to the investment are unclear, this could partly explain why children from economically weak families are not sent to school (Ewald 2002). In India - as in most poor countries - costs play a major part in keeping poor children out of school, particularly when the quality of schools is seen to be low (the Probe Team 1999). In many parts of south-east Asia, where there has been a tremendous upsurge in the valuation of education recently, parents seem ready to sacrifice a lot in order to educate their children. The quotation below illustrates a number of such parental strategies:

There is a keen thirst for education and parents are willing to forego most things to ensure their children acquire one. Families uproot and move to urban areas to take advantage of the better schools there; children are packed off to stay with relatives in distant towns; mothers sell their gold jewellery and fathers pawn or sell their land to raise the money for school fees; the economic value of a child is sacrificed; income is diverted from productive agricultural investments to paying for uniforms, school equipment, books and transport; and consumption expenditures are held back (Rigg 2001: 53).

As to opportunity costs - that is, foregone income/labour - these in much depend on whether one lives in an area supplied with electricity and water, on the modes of livelihoods in the area, on whether there are opportunities for children to earn extra money, etc. The opportunity cost for the time spent in school must hence be understood against the need for the child to fetch water and firewood, look after siblings, help out in the field or contribute to the cash income. Decisions to send a child to school or to work are, however, not mutually exclusive; many times, children even work in order to be able to free resources to attend school (Subrahmanian 2002). Having children to do work is of course important for economic reasons, although there might be cultural and educational rationales behind it as well, like when it is seen as preparation for adulthood (Dachi & Garrett 2003). The combination of low pay-off and high opportunity costs often leads to drop outs or to low attendance rates (Lee 2002). Among the main reasons for low attendance in Tanzanian schools - apart from sickness - is that

²⁶ There might also be a need to distinguish between males and females within families, and it is argued in Colclough *et al.* (2003: 21) that women tend to spend more on children's education than men do.

children need to help out at home, especially when parents are sick, and when there is a need to look after younger siblings (Dachi and Garrett 2003). To understand opportunity costs and the effective demand for education, it is important to look at the size and structure of families:

The number of children within a household may affect the level of resources available to each - either negatively, because of the need to share, or positively, because older children can provide support for younger ones. Children may also share household workloads, so that those with larger numbers of children potentially have a reduced average workload (Colclough *et al.* 2003: 84).

Hence, the relationship between family size and educational opportunities might not be as straightforward as is commonly stipulated. Furthermore, boys and girls might be expected to perform different activities and hence be constrained from educational opportunities in different ways. UNESCO (2003) suggests that girls run a risk of attending school less frequently than boys do, and of having less time for homework, due to their obligations to assist in the household and to take care of younger siblings.

2.8.3 Social capital - a double-edged sword

Social capital is a concept that has become both popularised and criticised since the 1990s, and a basic idea in the diverse literature on the topic is that "...social networks are a valuable asset" (Field 2003: 12). The discussion here is confined to how social capital can be used - and abused - for educational opportunities, while the important question of how it arises is not addressed²⁷. Social capital is loosely seen as a form of capital, which is embedded in the network of relations between individuals and groups and in its institutional form, it comes as rights. Put more strictly:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of collectivity-owned capital, a "credential" which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu [1986] 1997: 51).

²⁷ I do not adhere to the idea that social capital always is formed for instrumental purposes but it is still likely to be valuable as a resource and hence important. Social capital is often seen to depend on factors such as gratitude, friendship, respect and trust, obligations, civic engagement, or, in a more institutionalised form, rights. It is furthermore likely to be strengthened by physical proximity and day-to-day interaction, and the geographical anchoring of social capital is reflected in phenomena such as nationalism, regionalism and local identities (Vilhelmson 2002: 54). I will not attempt an evaluation of different approaches to the concept, and this section is merely a way of explicating how the concept is used in this study. For good introductions to - and critiques of - the seminal works of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam on social capital, see Portes (1998), Field (2003), and Schuller *et al.* (2000). In short, while Bourdieu focuses more on how elite groups can use their social capital for continued dominance and for the reproduction of social structures, Coleman extends the scope of the concept to include social networks of non-elite groups (*ibid*: 8). Putnam and Coleman have, in turn, both been criticised for downplaying dimensions of power and conflict in their analyses (*ibid*: 10), and here, Bourdieu's contribution is "...an invaluable corrective..." (Field 2003: 19). Apart from downplaying the importance of social ties for less privileged groups, Bourdieu's understanding of social capital - largely ignored by most social capitalists - is criticised for its gender-blindness.

In ordinary language, this is often referred to as "connections" (Bourdieu 1993: 32), and two distinctions are important for the following. One is between bridging and bonding kinds of social capital (Narayan 1999). The latter is seen as a type of social capital, which helps members within a group, who in turn might be excluded from other groups, with whom they lack bridging social capital in terms of dense crosscutting ties. When power is asymmetrically distributed between groups, it is bridging capital that is most important for connecting the poor to mainstream resources. One example of bridging social capital, in its institutionalised sense, might be area rules, *if* it works to give all children the right to attend the school closest to their homes although they might otherwise lack the relevant informal connections for entrance to that school²⁸. Second, Portes (1998) distinguishes between three basic functions of social capital: (i) as a source of social control; (ii) as a source of family support; and (iii) as a source of benefits through extrafamilial networks. Here, social capital will be treated as a resource that families can mobilise mainly through extrafamilial networks. Family support will rather be treated as cultural capital.

In general, "...the schooling literature has rarely acknowledged the effects of inequalities in the distribution of social capital" (Field *et al.* 2000: 245). However, social capital is important for accessibility of educational opportunities in various ways. One important aspect with the concept as such is that social relations are seen as dynamic resources, which can enable access to other resources, while excluding others from the same resources. In this sense, it can be seen as a double-edged sword (Szreter 2000). Seen from one side of the coin then, people with influential connections may gain access to prestigious schools, and thus exclude others from access, even when these other groups live nearby, and the school in question is free of charge. As education networks fill up, competition for educational resources intensifies, and the relative qualities of schools gain in importance. The more parents exercise choice in selecting schools for their children, "...the less choices are available, because popular schools, which cannot grow infinitely and remain effective and popular, have to start selecting the pupils" (Green 1997: 20). Parental choice might thus turn into school choice. When schools get to choose between students, and selection criteria are other than residence area, there is a risk for "cream-skimming". In this context, this means that some children, who lack influential connections or requested socio-cultural background, get filtered away in selection processes.

Lack of important documents for demanding one's institutionalised right to education - like birth certificates - is another factor of importance in many contexts, together with different forms of discrimination even among those who have the required documents. The Probe Team (1999) mentions caste as a factor inhibiting students from entering some Indian schools, and ethnicity remains very important in

²⁸ It is a bit unusual to include formal rules in a discussion about social capital but Harriss and de Renzio (1997) equally discuss that the set of formal rules and norms regulating public life in a society "...represents in itself a resource that facilitates co-ordinated action by citizens" (ibid: 933).

many areas (see Lee 2002). "Cream skimming" and other more subtle ways in which social networks can work as resources for exclusion are not commonly elaborated in the literature on education in the South. This is probably because educational opportunities normally are not analysed in relational terms, while another reason might be the lack of official, quantitative data (Tomasevski 2003: 57). Yet, as competition for educational opportunities increases, these dimensions are likely to gain in importance, and even when quantitative data are unavailable, it might still be fruitful to illuminate mechanisms through which this kind of discrimination occurs.

It has been suggested here that bonding social capital - among certain groups - might be used to exclude others from access to schools, if these other groups lack bridging social capital, such as enforceable rights. But this is - fortunately - only one side of the "social-capital-coin". There is no place in the theory of Bourdieu for "... the possibility that other, less privileged individuals and groups might also benefit in their social ties" (Field 2003: 20). Yet, recent studies on perceptions of development of the world's poor show how many of them highlight the importance of kin, friends and neighbours for their various coping-strategies (Narayan *et al.* 2002). Commonly, this is, however, about meeting daily needs, rather than longer-term projects of leaving poverty behind, and these relationships hence rarely translate into agents of transformation (Narayan 1999). This might partly be due to that the social capital of poor people often is geographically restricted, not extending beyond the local community (Narayan *et al.* 2000: 56). Typically, it also includes mainly people in similar difficult economic situations. But poor families might nevertheless use their social capital in order to handle economic costs, or, if possible, to get children into schools in better served areas. Pryor *et al.* (2003), in their study from Ghana, note that distant relatives might make great sacrifices in this regard, but add that, to many poor, accommodating children of distant relatives might feel like quite a burden.

Social capital can, finally, also fill the function of social control. Narayan (1999) exemplifies the importance of social control with how families in some areas fight for their children to do well in school, so as not to bring shame on the family, or even on the community at large. Such forms of social capital might also work the other way around, like if there are negative attitudes to educating girls in the local community. If social control is too strong it might also be detrimental to both the health and the education of the children, and thus no longer a positive resource.

2.8.4 Cultural capital - a partial perspective

Cultural capital refers to that students who come from certain home environments are privileged beyond what they may gain from advantages in social and economic capital, as well as from physical mobility. As a whole section has been devoted to parental attitudes to education (2.6), this part will primarily discuss other cultural dispositions of importance. Yet, due to my focus on the accessibility of schools, rather than on learning processes and actual classroom practices, several of the deeper dimensions of the

concept will not be dealt with. To Bourdieu (1986), however, cultural capital can exist in both embodied, objectified and institutionalised (educational qualifications) forms, and together with investments in time, cultural capital is in much what generates ability and talent. Objectified forms are exemplified with pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc. For the accessibility of educational opportunities, embodied forms might be most crucial, because...

...education systems are culturally not neutral, but privilege the standards of human excellence of dominant social groups and classes. Dispositions and attitudes (language and behaviour styles, work ethos, relationship to school, knowledge and learning, etc.), which students have acquired in different family and community environments, are therefore more or less akin to those valued at school, and more or less rewarded (Hutmacher 2001: 8).

Apart from influencing attitudes to education, embodied forms of cultural capital might for example be about the ability of parents and older siblings to support children with homework, while if help is acquired for free from non-family members, it is to be seen as the result of social capital. If parents are illiterate, or if they have merely passed through the early stages of education, it might soon become very difficult for them to understand what the children's textbooks are all about. Inability to fill forms to ascertain the child's right to education is also seen as a lack of cultural capital, although the result might be lack of bridging social capital. The intra-family distribution of opportunities between boys and girls - as well as between different children for other reasons - relates to embodied cultural capital, even though it might be lack of economic capital that forces families into trade-off situations. Disabled children might furthermore belong to the most vulnerable in families that need to prioritise in how to "invest" scarce resources (UNESCO 2005).

Languages controlled by parents, in relation to dominant languages in school, on the labour market, and in the community at large, are relevant in this context. Clearly, this relates to a discussion about the appropriate medium of instruction:

The language of instruction, the language of educational formation, in any society is also the language of hegemony and power. It is the language in which basic skills and knowledge are imparted to the population, and the medium in which the production and reproduction of knowledge is taught (Prah 2003: 17).

Old colonial languages – especially English - are often used as mediums of instruction, even in areas where most children have great difficulties in handling that language (Brock-Utne 2000; 2004; Brock-Utne *et al.* [Eds.] 2003). The Ugandan policy illustrates one spatial dimension of the language issue (see Okoni 2004). In Uganda, children in rural schools are to be taught in local languages up to grade 4, and after that in English, while children in urban schools are taught in English from grade 1. Where English is not a source of wealth, power and prestige and/or if the policy suits parental and student aspirations, this might well be a case of spatial differentiation. In other cases, it would rather be classified as stratification of the school system (see 2.9.4). As

to objectified forms of cultural capital, finally, Carron and Ch au (1996) stress the importance of available written communication - other than school textbooks - for children to practice what they have picked up at school.

2.8.5 Physical mobility and the importance of time

Apart from contextualising the three forms of capital, I add a fourth resource important for the accessibility of educational opportunities: physical mobility. The broader concept of spatial mobility can be seen to have physical, virtual and medial dimensions, and to be about either a realised behaviour or a potential resource (or both) (Vilhelmson 2002). In this study, mobility is about the ability to physically move about in space, even though both virtual and medial mobility relate to educational opportunities in direct or indirect ways. Medial mobility - in its realised form - has the potential to affect what kinds of education people aspire to, for example by spreading information about alternative ways of life. It could furthermore be a form of objectified cultural capital. Virtual mobility additionally has the potential to substitute, or complement, locally available educational opportunities, as with distance education. There is great hope that, eventually, new ICTs will substantially increase educational opportunities of rural people. Yet, as noted by Spohr (2002), it might also do the opposite, if it is concentrated in urban, elite institutions.

Where you live, how you can travel and how long time it takes, as well as the organisation of the household in terms of who works with what, where, and how you travel there, is particularly important in families with lower income. In research about parental choice in New Zealand, it is shown that the higher the income of parents, the bigger is the importance of the status of schools for what "choices" are made. The lower the income, the bigger is the importance of the school's geographical location, although all parents tend to rank schools in a similar manner under the assumption that money and distance were of no importance (Lauder & Hughes 1999). Where schools are widespread in space, distances are not always considered a problem in the first instance. It is, however, still crucial *what kind* of school that is close, bringing distance and the various means of overcoming it back into the picture. If transport arrangements, time-restrictions, or family economy do not allow commuting, the choice of school is limited to the nearest one, unless there are possibilities for boarding. These problems are generally aggravated at secondary and tertiary levels:

Rural secondary schools are far fewer and even less well distributed than rural primary schools. Very few have hostels or other boarding arrangements, so unless families can find suitable accommodation for their child in proximity to a secondary school (an expensive and worrisome solution, especially for girls), distance selects out many potential students (Lakin with Gasperini 2003: 88).

Also to physical mobility there are obvious and less obvious gender dimensions. Colclough *et al.* (2003: 247) suggest that, in general terms, "...the greater is the distance from home to school, the less likely it is that a child will attend", and add that,

in their cases, this is more so for girls than for boys. One of the reasons mentioned is that girls are considered weaker than boys, and thus less able to walk the long distance. But a main factor is also the fear among parents that something would happen to the girls on the way to school (e.g. sexual harassment). In addition, increased distance to school would increase the opportunity cost of education if children have to stay away for a longer time, or if parents need to accompany them to school, which is common with younger children. Gender dimensions of opportunity costs have been mentioned above. It is furthermore reported that Indian parents often show reluctance towards letting their daughters study outside the village, drastically reducing the number of schools to select from (the Probe Team 1999). The relationship between educational opportunities and mobility is, hence, about more than distance, time and costs. Available means of transport, roads, and the character of distances to be covered are also important. Small children might, for example, be restricted from walking alone even if the school is close, if there is a risk of confronting dangerous animals on the way to school (ibid.).

One possible strategy to improve access to educational opportunities is to move to another area, where the quality of the school is perceived to be better. Especially where catchment areas are still governed by area rules, this might well be a sought for strategy. In a recent report from Mongolia (CHIP 2005) it is seen that giving the children a better education figures among the most important reasons for migration in nearly one-third of interviewed migrant families. It is, however, crucial whether it is possible to leave the piece of land, which might be the short-term security of food supplies, although education might be better in other areas, inducing hopes for long-term security and possibilities to leave poverty behind. There are different ways for policy makers to either increase the mobility of the poor or to reduce the importance of mobility to access educational opportunities. Apart from the construction of schools and roads, as well as distance education, other attempts include subsidised transports, scholarships to cover transport costs, boarding schools where children do not have to commute to school on a daily basis, etc.

2.9 Analytical framework

2.9.1 Introduction

Much recent development literature on education focuses on its contribution to global competitiveness through the creation of a highly skilled work force, its contribution to poverty alleviation through access to basic education, or both. However, these are not the only concerns that policy-makers have to keep in mind when formulating education policies in order to obtain both accumulation and legitimacy. In the following section, the first aim is to put across my own understanding of a general dilemma facing governments when formulating educational policies (2.9.2). Second, I elaborate how this dilemma of educational planning might be affected in times of global transformations (2.9.3). Finally, I propose a possible way of making sense of, and

distinguishing between, different possible scenarios regarding educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka (2.9.4).

2.9.2 An educational planning dilemma

A number of important concerns together form what I see as an educational planning dilemma. All educational planning in parliamentary, open economies will have to take all of these concerns into account, but they will be of different importance in different time-space contexts. Although carrying universal elements, a number of issues call for a distinction between dilemmas facing governments in the North and the South. The most important, in this context, are stronger resource constraints and the dual characters - in particular the rural-urban duality - of countries in the South. The different concerns include global competitiveness, poverty alleviation, local relevance, and social and spatial equality, and these have to be met within financial restrictions. All these concerns are important, but they are not necessarily mutually supportive. In fact, one main point of this chapter is that there is increasing tension between these concerns. The discussion takes its point of departure in a general understanding of the need for the state to obtain both accumulation and legitimacy, although the outcome of the dilemma is also partly a result of and contextual factors. This underscores the importance of geography for understanding how governments are handling the dilemma, as well as the results of their endeavours. An understanding of vested interests and of who is likely to gain and lose from educational policies needs to be grounded in both theoretical and contextual considerations. Formulating and implementing educational policies is a political struggle between various actors, within and outside the state, over the distribution of power and other resources in society and space.

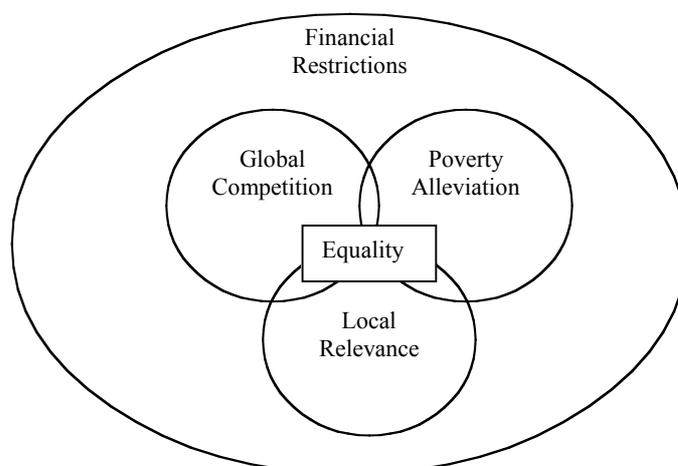
The first concern of policy makers regards the contribution of education to the competitiveness of the economy. In general, it is about both being attractive to foreign investors and the ability of local companies to compete in world markets. Without economic growth it is difficult to finance a modern education system, and an educated labour force is seen to be important for competitiveness and thus for growth. The second concern is about poverty alleviation. Basic education is considered to be a human right, and access to it could therefore be seen as poverty alleviating in itself. But in a more instrumental sense, it is about the provision of basic skills and qualifications for people to make a living, as well as to achieve other social benefits like lower infant mortality rates. The third concern regards the local relevance of education. This concern adds a more explicit spatial dimension to the dilemma, in that education systems need to relate to local contexts, customs and livelihoods. A fundamental problem in many countries in the South is their dual economic characters, which opens up for a possible spatial mismatch between employment- and educational opportunities. The skills considered economically relevant might differ widely, for instance between rural and urban areas, and to retain local relevance would often require a differentiation

of educational opportunities across geographical contexts. There is otherwise a risk of wasting resources or of facing other problems, such as "brain drain" or frustrated youths with educational attainments but nowhere to make use of them by way of getting a job. If the outcome of educational investments is migration, unemployment, or both, there might be little impact on either growth or poverty alleviation. This might, in turn, strengthen processes of social exclusion, and in the long run lead to social unrest among those who remain, especially as formal education systems are normally geared precisely towards qualifying for a job and a life in the modern sectors of society.

All of these concerns must be handled within the limits of the budget. If governments spend more than they earn they have to increase their income, raise loans, hope for outside aid, or cut expenditure. Naturally, education has to compete with other types of government expenditure, and within the formal system there is a need to strike a balance between primary, secondary and tertiary levels, quantity and quality, recurrent and capital expenditures, general and vocational skills, and so on. With low rates of economic growth, many governments in the South face major financial restrictions for meeting the aspirations of their populations, especially as extensive resources are used for debt servicing. Even when there is a genuine will to distribute resources equally, it might still be difficult to translate this will into practice.

In the midst of all of this are the concerns of social and spatial equality, that is, people's capabilities of leading lives they value, and have reason to value, should not be determined by social or spatial belonging. In a quest for legitimacy, it is not possible for a government to pursue policies that cause too much increase in perceived social and spatial inequalities, and here it is important that educational opportunities to a large extent are positional and hence relational "goods". This means that education for poverty alleviation as it is understood here - important in its own right - is not the same as education for equal opportunities. The various ingredients in the dilemma of educational planning are illustrated in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 The dilemma of educational planning



Source: Author's elaboration

In light of the above, it should be easy to understand the dilemmas involved in achieving equality in the accessibility of educational opportunities. In a dual economy, the government could try to provide equal opportunities to all, regardless of where they live, although this would possibly lead to a lack of local relevance in certain places and/or face serious financial restrictions. But if opportunities are differentiated to suit diverse geographical contexts, people's aspirations with education also need to be differentiated for them not to be excluded from important life chances enjoyed by others. Differentiation is not necessarily unequal, but it has to reflect people's aspirations with education and their ideas of what kind of education leads to what kind of futures. It might also be that the genuine will to achieve equality is simply missing, depending on how influential actors perceive their interests. Keeping these draw-backs in mind, I think that the educational planning dilemma, as formulated here, can provide important insights about geographies of education in general, as well as about educational opportunities are affected in Sri Lanka in times of global transformations in particular. The next step is to reflect on how this dilemma is being further complicated in times of global transformations.

2.9.3 The educational planning dilemma in times of global transformations

The dimensions of quality and local relevance were much neglected in the post-independence expansion of formal education systems. This was followed by a period of disillusionment in the 1970s, when more critical views of the actual role of formal education frequented the debate, together with calls for increased local relevance. With the first generation of structural adjustment thinking in the 1980s, financial restrictions were set in forcefully, with detrimental effects on both equality and poverty alleviation. Since the late-1990s, new policies seem to lead to further expansion of basic education, perhaps especially since the formulation of the Millennium Declaration. An optimistic stance towards the role of education for both global competitiveness and poverty

alleviation is growing stronger, but a tension between these goals is increasingly acknowledged. There has been a shift towards functionalism in development strategies where the role of the state is partially transformed to one of a competitor. Education is declared a key tool for avoiding aggregate exclusion from global flows of investments, as well as for avoiding individual exclusion from development processes. Financial restrictions and demands for local relevance, in the economic sense of the term, increase calls for a differentiation of education systems, due to a continuous need to withhold government expenditures and to uneven economic geographies within countries. Consequently, there might be a tendency towards more differentiated education systems, with education for global competitiveness confined to urban, elite institutions, and perceived locally relevant education for poverty alleviation in rural schools. The equality concern might be lost from the equation, in attempts to achieve global competitiveness and poverty alleviation at the same time.

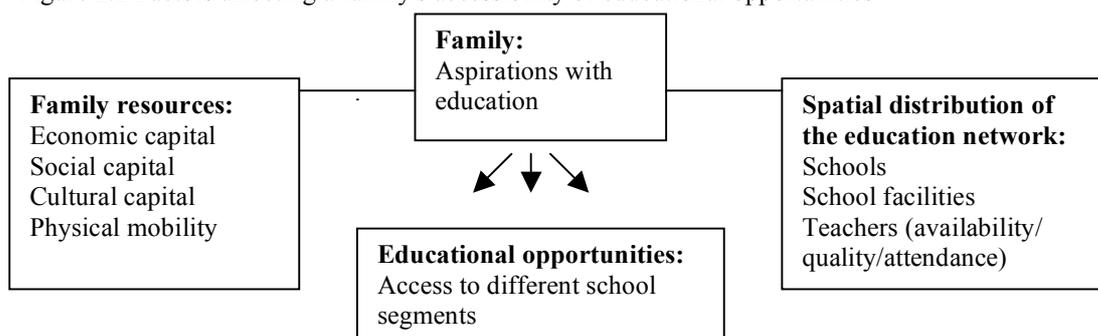
If trends of increasing primary level enrolments continue, in line with the Millennium Declaration, competition for quality education is likely to rise almost worldwide, in attempts to secure a place higher up the education ladder. Competition for educational resources suggests that educational opportunities must increasingly be seen in relative, relational and contextual terms. Simultaneously, there are other processes in operation, which might affect aspirations with education and make them more homogeneous across society and space. One is increasing difficulties in peasant farming, which might act as a further push factor away from agriculture. Conversely, decreasing prospects for government employment might affect attitudes to education negatively. A final important factor regarding the transformation of rural livelihoods concerns the various new kinds of emerging employment opportunities, the effects of which will have to be determined contextually depending on their character and educational requirements. Furthermore, increased socio-spatial permeability is likely to streamline dreams about the future of the children, and thus possibly affect aspirations with education in a universalising direction. Even poor families in marginal areas might be well aware of life opportunities open for others, both within their own borders and abroad. It is hence important to see what factors are affecting the accessibility of educational opportunities, that is, the access to different segments of schools for different groups in different geographical contexts.

2.9.4 Factors affecting the accessibility of educational opportunities

The discussion above illustrates the more general dilemma faced by policy-makers at the macro-level. Achieving equality of educational opportunities is problematic for other reasons too, and there are a number of socio-economic, spatial and institutional factors that add to the picture provided above. Educational opportunities are understood to be about the accessibility of different segments of schools. Accessibility is seen to have two broader dimensions: distributions and entitlements. As to the distributional aspects it is important to look at the geographical distribution of different kinds of

schools and what kind of facilities these schools have, as well as at the distribution of teachers. Schools are surrounded by catchment areas - from which they attract and accept students - and in line with the above, competition for access to good segments of schools is likely to increase. There are also reasons to believe that education systems are becoming more differentiated, to provide special kinds of skills required in different geographical contexts. In this political geography of catchment areas, four kinds of resources have been identified as important in affecting who will be entitled to what kind of education and where. The identified resources are economic, social and cultural capital, and physical mobility, and these are by no means new in themselves. But the relative importance of these resources is likely to be affected by increased competition as well as by the possible changes in the education network, such as if there are increasing quality differences between different kinds of schools. All families are endowed with all four of these resources - in different volumes and combinations - and they may also substitute or complement each other. This discussion is summarised in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 Factors affecting a family's accessibility of educational opportunities



Source: Author's elaboration

One aim of this study is to understand how the educational opportunities are affected for poor families in marginal areas in times of global transformations. To distinguish between different scenarios for educational opportunities, there are mainly two aspects that are deemed crucial in this study: quality differences between segments of schools (education network) and family resources necessary for being entitled to segments of different quality. Four possible scenarios are identified in the analytical model proposed here, and these processes are not mutually exclusive. In this context, polarisation means that quality differences between superior and inferior segments of schools increase in such a way as to make inferior segments absolutely worse off and superior segments absolutely better off. Stratification, in turn, can occur with and without polarisation, as it merely signifies that accessibility of superior segments is increasingly restrictive. Hence, polarisation regards changes in the education network while stratification concerns family resources necessary for being entitled to different parts of this network. Increased prospects for educational mobility, further, means that it is easier for families

who live in, or start out in, areas endowed with inferior segments to enter superior segments of schools, while it says nothing about quality differences between these segments. Again, it is family resources that are in focus and in this model, increased prospects for educational mobility is hence fully compatible with a process of polarisation. Equalisation means that differences in quality between inferior and superior segments of schools decrease, and equalisation is therefore the opposite of polarisation.

In order to gain an understanding of how all this relates to patterns of social inclusion and exclusion, it is important to let students and parents participate in deciding contextual indicators for what are to be regarded as superior versus inferior segments of schools. This discussion will take its point of departure in what kind of education families identify as important for leading lives they value, that is, their aspirations with education, as well as include what kind of opportunities they deem to be accessible to them. Three aspects will be addressed in this discussion about how educational opportunities are related to processes of social inclusion and exclusion: relativity, agency and dynamics.

3. SRI LANKA: A POOR, WAR-TORN WELFARE STATE

3.1 Introduction and a comment about the material used

This chapter introduces the contexts where field research has been carried out in order to link these specific circumstances back to the analytical framework. It starts with an introduction to the physical features and the population of Sri Lanka (3.2). Following this, there is a presentation of socio-economic policies and structural transformations since the colonial era, with special attention devoted to the transition from a territorial to a functionalistic development strategy since 1977. This section also includes a discussion about the different violent conflicts that the country has suffered from in recent times (3.3). The local areas in focus for this study are presented in section 3.4, starting off with Hambantota District and continuing with Sooriyawewa Division. In 3.5, finally, I return to the tendencies relating to globalisation. A main argument is that policy-makers feel threatened by a "Low-skill, Bad-Job" trap, while many people, especially in rural areas, feel excluded from life chances enjoyed by others. The latter is related to regional inequalities, precarious employment, and generally increasing life aspirations. In 2002, the government hence identified a twofold challenge, called "connecting to growth", which both included to connect the country more favourably to the global economy, and to connect regions and groups outside the western province to economic growth. This challenge has had major implications for the education policies, discussed in Chapter 4.

To write a chapter like this is necessarily a matter of selecting between what sources to refer and what kind of issues to bring forward. The chapter draws on a lot of secondary material and the research of others²⁹, but I have also included some statistics from the ADB, from UN sources, and from the government. An important aspect is that the chapter is also an attempt to capture how policy-makers have understood the challenges ahead of them. In this regard, the poverty reduction strategy (GOSL 2002) plays a predominant role. The reason for relying so heavily on this document is both that it is a comprehensive attempt to analyse and come up with solutions to a wide range of challenges facing the country, and that it is a document that allegedly has broad political support. There have been changes in government since its publication, after the general elections in 2004, and the parties in power since this time are less likely to pursue all components of the strategy than was the earlier alliance. Yet, when

²⁹ My main sources of inspiration regarding social, political and economic developments in Sri Lanka are Herring (1994), Hettige (1998), Dunham (2000), Uyangoda (2000; 2003), and Lakshman (1995; 2002).

writing this thesis in mid-2005, there has still been no new, equally comprehensive strategy document formulated by the "new" ruling alliance.

3.2 Physical conditions and characteristics of the population

The island is situated just north of the equator and agriculture remains a main activity for many of its inhabitants. Around 5/6 of the land area are plains, while rugged mountains cover the south-central parts. The climate is tropical with considerable internal variations. Most importantly, the island is divided in a dry (64 percent of the land area), a wet (23 percent) and an intermediary zone (13 percent), due to the interaction between monsoonal air streams and surface topology. The north-east monsoon generally lasts between December and February and brings rain to most parts of the island. The south-west monsoon starts in May and lasts until September, and affects mainly the wet zone in the south-west. There are two major cropping seasons in relation to this monsoon pattern. *Maha* - the great crop - is normally grown between September and March. *Yala* - the smaller crop - is cultivated between April and August. Only the wet zone has adequate water supply for paddy cultivation in *Yala*. This region has effective rain throughout the year - in relation to evapotranspiration - and much of the agricultural activities can thus be rain-fed. The rest of the country is shaded from rain by the mountainous inland, and remains below the threshold of effective rain for several months a year, with marked wet and dry seasons (Peiris 1996).

Sri Lanka is a small island, considering that it hosts around 19 million people³⁰. With a total area of 65,610 km², of which around 57 percent is available for agricultural use (Somasekaram 1997), population density is high and average landholdings are small. 72 percent of farmers cultivate less than two acres, 60 percent less than one acre, and 34 percent less than half an acre (ADB 2001b). There has been a steady decline in average farm size over the last three decades, and it has been contended that the upper-limits for expanding paddy-land in an economically feasible way are being approached (Peiris 1996). According to Jerve *et al.* (2003), paddy farming on about two acres can give a small surplus above subsistence needs, provided irrigation is assured. However, many of the landholdings in Sri Lanka are significantly smaller, "...and acute land scarcity prevalent in many parts of the country has manifested itself in a rapidly expanding rural proletariat, the widespread occurrence of share tenancy, fragmentation of farm units and general poverty in the countryside" (ibid: 38). Rice is cultivated all over the country but it is in need of substantial amounts of water. Plantation crops -

³⁰ According to the 2001 census (DCS 2001), there is an estimated population of 18.7 million. There has been no island-wide census since 1981 so all population data should be treated with caution. The census for 2001 is based on information collected in 18 out of 25 districts, excluding Jaffna, Mullaitivu, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Trincomalee and Batticaloa. The reason for excluding these north-east districts is that enumerators perceived it too difficult or too dangerous a task to go there. The population density is set at 342 per km² for 2001, compared to 258 in 1981, although the figure for 2001 would have been considerably lower had all districts been covered by the Census (the ones not covered are predominately rural). Dividing the estimated population with the total *land* area (62,705 km²) gives a figure of 299. For 2002, the Central Bank (2004) gives a population of 19,007 thousands.

coconuts, rubber and tea - are mainly grown in wet and intermediary zones and altitude is, in addition to water, an important factor behind their spatial distribution (Swan 1987). The dry zone is sparsely populated, and a large part of its swidden and irrigated agriculture is oriented towards subsistence (Hollup & Stokke 1997). This is where most livestock rearing - cattle, poultry, buffalo and goats – is found.

The population is unevenly distributed. Coastal districts of the wet zone - from Colombo to Matara - have high densities, together with Kandy in the hill country and Gampaha just north of Colombo.

Map 3.1 Population density according to district, Sri Lanka



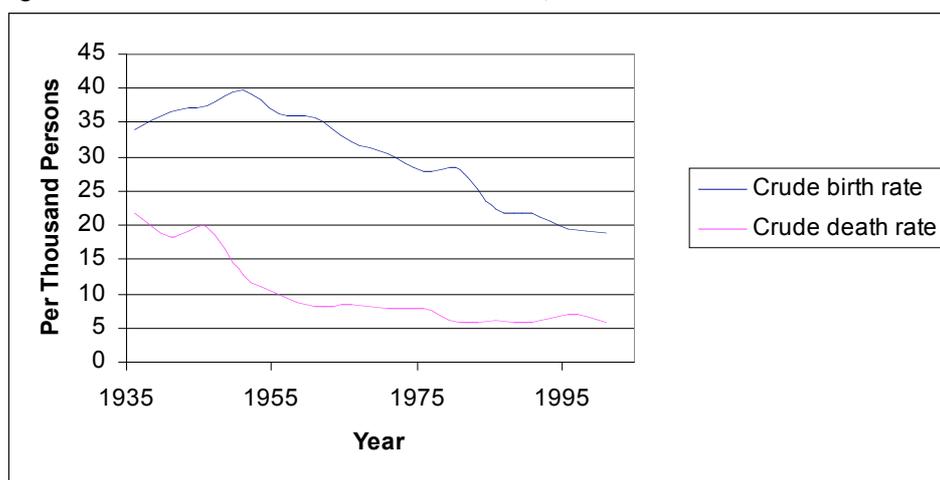
Source: Authors elaboration, data is from DCS (2001)

As can be seen on Map 3.1, districts in the dry zone in the east and in the north generally show much lower figures than districts in the south-west, but densities have

increased in all districts since 1981. Only 14.6 percent lived in urban areas in 2001, while 5.3 percent were counted as estate population³¹. The Colombo Metropolitan Region (CMR) - with the primate city of Colombo - dominates the settlement pattern. This is the administrative, commercial and industrial nexus, and the place where major railways and highways connect. Other urban areas are much smaller and functionally much less diverse. The low level of urbanisation is seen as a problem, and many rural areas are so stagnant economically that the government has proposed a strategy of "pro-poor urbanisation" (GOSL 2002). At the same time, there are many new areas emerging with urban characteristics and some of what is today classified as rural poverty might hence be better represented by the term peri-urban poverty (ADB 2001b: 9).

Sri Lanka has a rather low population growth considering its moderate per capita GDP level of 3,570 USD (2002, adjusted for purchasing parity) (UNDP 2004). In 1981, the population pyramid still had the typical broad-based shape, but since then, the apex has broadened significantly.

Figure 3.1 Crude birth and death rates in Sri Lanka, 1936-2001



Source: Department of Census and Statistics, 2004

Looking at changes in crude birth and death rates over the last 65 years in Figure 3.1 reveals the major reason behind this transformation. Birth rates in Sri Lanka have gone down drastically since the 1950s whilst death rates have remained at a low but rather stable level since the 1960s. The average annual population growth rate for districts included in the census has been 1.2 percent between 1981 and 2001, and growth rates do not show much spatial variation. Most districts in the wet zone have growth rates

³¹ These figures are from the census in 2001. Swan (1987) attributes the relatively low level of urbanisation in Sri Lanka to colonisation schemes in former malaria-ridden, forest-covered parts of the dry zone. The big push for these colonisation schemes came in the 1940s when DDT was used to eradicate malaria. The low level of urbanisation is, however, open for some qualification, as there have been definitional changes in what is counted as urban areas due to administrative reforms in the late 1980s. What were earlier referred to as Town Councils are now included in *Pradeshiya Sabas* and their population is counted as rural, while the term "urban" is restricted for people living under Municipal and Urban Councils. In addition, there are large numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), due to the civil war and the recent Tsunami catastrophe in late 2004.

below one percent but Gampaha and Colombo have higher rates due to in-migration, particularly to Export Processing Zones (EPZ) in the former. The country is now facing problems of an ageing population (Sanderatne 2000). In the latest census, it is revealed that the percentage of the population below 18 years of age decreased from 42 percent in 1981 to 33 percent in 2001 (DCS 2001). According to the World Bank (2002: 43), the proportion of elderly is expected to double by 2025. This has led to a decrease of school-aged children during the last decade, something which is sometimes presented as a window of opportunity for increasing the quality of education without increasing aggregate costs (GOSL 2003). Yet, the effects of the decrease of school-aged children are likely to vary significantly over space and many of the positive effects of a decrease would depend on the implementation of a politically sensitive rationalisation of the school structure (see Chapter 4).

Ethnicity, religion and languages are complicated issues, and this brief introduction will necessarily conceal important complexities³². The majority group is the Sinhalese (74 percent), predominantly Sinhala-speaking Buddhists populating the southern, western and central parts of the island. The biggest minority group is the Tamils (18 percent), largely Hinduists with Tamil as their mother tongue. There are minorities of Sinhalese and Tamils that are Christian by religion. The Tamils are furthermore categorised in Sri Lanka Tamils (13 percent) and so-called Indian Tamils (henceforth Estate Tamils) (six percent). The former traditionally populates northern and eastern parts of the country, although many today reside either in Colombo or overseas. The Estate Tamils are to a large extent still confined to tea-estates in the mountain areas, to which their ancestors were brought from India by the British in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, there are some seven percent Muslims, predominantly Tamil speaking. Many Muslims live in the eastern and north-eastern parts, but it is the most evenly distributed ethnic group, often populating cities and towns. Among the Muslims there are both Moors and Malays. Much of the Moor settlement dates back to Arab maritime activities during medieval times, whereas the Malays are Javanese immigrants. There are furthermore small communities of Burgers - mainly English-speaking-Christians, of mixed European descent - and Veddahs, often referred to as aboriginal inhabitants. As to languages, finally, this is a highly politicised issue. A policy of *Sinhala Only* was introduced in 1956, causing frustration and exclusion, especially of Tamils. Tamil was made a national language in the constitution in 1978 and Sinhalese and Tamil are both official languages since 1987, that is, languages of legislation, administration, and courts. Yet, many problems remain with effectively implementing this bilingual policy (Tiruchelvam 1999). Decades of social

³² The figures presented in this section come from the last island-wide census in 1981 and the percentage of Muslims is likely to be slightly higher today (Meyer 2003). See Orjuela (1999) for an analysis of how ethnicity has been categorised in censuses over the years, and Winslow & West (2004: 4-5) for an elaboration and a critique of ethnicity in Sri Lanka. Furthermore, caste is an issue that is rarely acknowledged in texts on Sri Lanka and it is not recognised by Buddhist ideology. Yet, it is still a factor of importance for matters of marriage, influence and mutual help (Baker 1998; Meyer 2003).

and spatial segregation, and a virtual neglect of English, have caused a situation in terms of languages, where most Sinhalese people do not speak Tamil, few Tamils speak Sinhala, and few people at all speak English.

3.3 From plantation economy to industrialisation and open economic policies

3.3.1 A colonial history

Upon Portuguese arrival in Sri Lanka - in the early 16th century - the island was basically ruled through three kingdoms: a Tamil kingdom in the north, centred on Jaffna, the Kandyan kingdom (Udarata) in the central and eastern parts, and the Kotte Kingdom in the west. The Sinhalese kingdom in Kandy remained independent throughout Portuguese and Dutch rule until it was conquered by the British in 1815.

The location between the Middle East and East Africa on the one hand, and south-east Asia on the other, resulted in Sri Lanka being used from early on as a port of call on trade journeys across the Indian Ocean. With the opening of the Suez Canal and expansion of British imperial interests, the strategic importance of its location increased further (Johnson & Scrivenor 1981). The island has been exploited by three different colonial powers: Portugal (16th and 17th century), the Dutch (17th and 18th century) and Great Britain (1796-1948). Education was a key resource in the attempts to spread new religions by all colonial parties. Neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch introduced any major structural changes to the economy (Peiris 1996), and they basically remained in coastal areas from where they shipped off what they were interested in (e.g. cinnamon, cardamom, areca nuts and pepper). The Portuguese mainly controlled strategic points along the coast from where to conduct commerce, and tried to introduce Roman Catholicism. The Dutch also aimed for areas where spices were grown, encouraged settlement, and supported the spread of Protestantism.

A unified administrative apparatus materialised only with the British, following the elimination of the highly resistant Kandyan Kingdom. It was also during British rule that Ceylon was fully incorporated into the international division of labour as a plantation economy, based on coffee - to be replaced by tea in the 1880s - rubber and coconuts. As it was difficult for the British to get local inhabitants to work on plantations - despite attempts to dissolve the subsistence economy through taxes - there was a need to import labour from the Indian subcontinent (that is, the Estate Tamils). Much of the revenues from plantations were used to develop the infrastructure required for plantations, like roads, railways and port facilities, and there were few linkages from plantations to local economies (Bruton *et al.* 1992). Of importance here is that although many peasant farmers suffered from the establishment of plantations, they could still stick to farming. Importantly, the preservation of a Sinhalese peasantry since became a central national goal, and landlessness was for long kept at relatively low

levels, although with few attempts to develop the productive forces of peasants³³ (Stokke *et al.* 1991).

3.3.2 The rise and fall of import-substitution and democratic socialism

In 1931 Ceylon was given partial independence while full independence was reached in 1948 without any military struggle. The island was called Ceylon until it became the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972. Importantly, parliamentarism has prevailed since independence. In fact, during the first decades, the ruling party lost power in just about every general election. On the positive side, politicians have to consider how the electorate perceives their various policies, as they will be held accountable, and party politics mean a lot in villages around the country (Warnapala *et al.* 1987; Baker 1998). There is, however, a wide-spread politicisation of the bureaucracy, opening up for hidden alliances when there is a vacancy to be filled in the administration, as applicants to be successful ought to secure recommendations from a ruling party politician³⁴ (Ranugge 2000). The extreme politicisation of society has served "...to polarise civil society at all levels, giving rise to the belief that members of the ruling party and their supporters have the exclusive right to all the rewards and benefits that society has to offer" (NYC 1990: 1).

The first eight years after independence did not witness any substantial break with colonial policies and essentially, the country remained a plantation economy. Abeyratne (2000: 26) summarises the conditions prevailing in Sri Lanka at the time of independence, that is, parts of the colonial inheritance, under three major headlines:

1. An economic prosperity based largely on favourable world market conditions for the country's primary exports enabling the state to maintain a relatively high living standard,
2. An extensive welfare system largely in the form of free health, free education and consumer subsidies among many others covering the whole population, and
3. Pluralistic and competitive democratic political system enabling a high degree of popular political participation in decision-making.

At independence, 90 percent of the export value came from tea, coconuts and rubber, exported as agricultural commodities, while the country imported a lot of finished goods and around half of the rice consumed. After a period of favourable export conditions in the beginning of the 1950s, it was found difficult to finance both imports - of medicine, fuel, rice, spare parts, etc. - and the welfare sector. Attempts to withdraw food subsidies in the early 1950s met with riots of such scale that proposals were

³³ A contradictory aspect is that the government has worked for the preservation of the paddy-growing peasantry, at the same time as it supported a Green Revolution based on high yielding varieties, which made it difficult for small peasants to remain in farming (Stokke *et al.* 1991).

³⁴ The idea was that with the demise of import-substitution, possibilities for political patronage would decrease, as there would be fewer quotas, etc., for politicians to distribute among different groups. Yet, this possibility for corruption was in much substituted for by large infrastructural projects in the beginning of the liberalisation period, with individual concessions of patron-client character in relation to these, as well as by the privatisation of public enterprises (Stokke 1997).

withdrawn (Herring 1994). It is important to note that popular perceptions still are that the state is responsible for providing welfare to the citizens, often negatively described as a state of "welfare-dependency" (e.g. World Bank 2002).

If consumer subsidies and essential imports could not be cut, there were few options left for the government (Athukorala & Jayasuriya 1990). To get away from the colonial production pattern and fluctuating and relatively falling prices on exported goods, extensive attempts to industrialise were made from around the 1960s. The post-1956 Sinhalese-nationalist government regulated trade and investments in both agriculture and industry, and expanded the economic role of the state due to a perceived lack of an industrial capitalist class. Quantitative restrictions were set on most imports, the exchange rate was artificially overvalued, domestic industries were protected by tariffs, and exchange controls were stringent (Central Bank 1998). In the 1970s, goods were produced primarily for domestic markets and the government prioritised new ventures with a high indigenous raw material content, in order to increase value addition in domestic industries and ensure spread effects. These goods included chemicals and rubber products, electrical goods, textiles and garments, footwear and food products, etc (Swan 1987). This period is important because it intensified the role of the state as the main distributor of life chances:

The state became the dominant source of almost everything that the citizens desired (e.g. land, education, health facilities, credit consumer goods, business opportunities, foreign exchange, employment, funds for grassroots level development, agricultural inputs, permits, electricity, transport, telecommunications, etc.). While politicians became the main benefactors, state officials became the key gatekeepers (Hettige 2000b: 10).

Due to internal restrictions, like saturated markets and continuous lack of international competitiveness, as well as deteriorating terms of trade, the first JVP-uprising (1970-71), draught (1973-74), and the oil crisis (1973-74), results were not impressive in economic terms and unemployment remained high (Herring 1994; Lakshman 1995). The right-of-centre UNP won a landslide victory in the 1977 elections with an explicit agenda of opening up the economy. Important factors behind the defeat of the social-democratic SLFP, and its alliance, were shortages of essential goods and a politicised system for distributing existing goods and employment. Hence, an ideologically motivated government enjoying a clear mandate and initial popular support initiated the economic liberalisation program in Sri Lanka (Herring 1994; Lakshman 1995).

3.3.3 The open economic policy and economic diversification

From 1977 Sri Lankan politics was radically altered. Trade was liberalised, the currency devalued, and a lot of market regulations were done away with, thus allowing for the private sector to play a much greater role in the economy (Central Bank 1998). Local and foreign industrialists were encouraged to grow in Export Processing Zones (EPZ). A conventional open-economy-package would include external boundary

liberalisation, internal deregulation, and state shrinkage. Yet, while the new government in 1977 opened up for trade and investments and deregulated much of the economy, it did not cut public expenditures although there was a shift away from social sectors to investments in irrigation and hydropower (Herring 1994). Total government expenditures even increased in the first few years of the post-1977 regime, which was made possible through large inflows of grants and loans from foreign donors³⁵. The government was able to resist some of the conventional ingredients in the prescriptions of the Bretton Woods institutions by having done away with large budget deficits during the course of the 1970s (Lakshman 1995). However, by late 1980s, there was a balance of payment crisis, which meant that "...the [International Financial Institutions] could introduce a more rigorously typical package of SAPs after 1989" (ibid: 25; see also Shastri 1997). At around this time, these institutions started to re-evaluate their earlier education policies (see chapter 2).

Partly as a result of the new policies, economic growth has steadily been kept at higher rates than in the 1970s. Growth rates at around 6.5 percent were obtained during the first four years of open economic policies (Central Bank 1998: 179) while GDP grew at around 4.2 percent between 1980-1989 and 5.1 percent between 1990-1999. In 2001, the growth rate was negative due to an LTTE-attack on the international airport, but year 2000 and 2002 experienced growth rates at 6.0 and 4.0 respectively (Central Bank 2004). In addition to this growth performance, there has been a diversification of the Sri Lankan economy. Looking at the structure of output between 1985 and 2003 in Table 3.1., agriculture has decreased its share while the share of services has increased. Industry, however, remains at around 26 percent:

Table 3.1 Structure of output (% of GDP at current prices), 1985-2003

	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003
Agriculture	24.4	22.9	18.7	19.9	19.0
Industry	26.8	27.3	28.1	27.3	26.3
Services ³⁶	48.8	49.8	53.1	52.8	54.7

Source: ADB (2003b: 272-278)

The GDP excludes the income received in remittances from workers abroad. Exports, further, have diversified away from a predominance of agricultural products. The share of agriculture in the export value was at 81 percent in 1977, while in 2002, it was down at 21 percent. In 2002, the share of manufactured goods was 72 percent, up from 14 percent in 1977, due mainly to the growth of the textiles and garment sector:

³⁵ According to Herring (1994), Sri Lanka received four times as much aid between 1977 and 1982 as it did between 1970 and 1977, and as a substantial part of this was as grants, the country managed to avoid the most serious debt-traps. The debt-service, as percentage of exports of goods and services, declined further from 13.8 in 1990 to 9.8 in 2002 (UNDP 2004). Giving slightly higher figures than the UNDP above, the government still contends that, "External debt service has remained manageable because of the concessionary terms of external assistance" (GOSL 2002: 24). However, the *total* central government debt, as a percentage of GDP, was above 100 in 2002 (ibid: 37) and the government warns for a mounting debt crisis in the PRSP (ibid.).

³⁶ Within services, it is banking, insurance and real estate that have experienced the largest growth (Shastri 2004).

Table 3.2 Exports of goods by industrial origin (% of total value), 1977-2002

	1977	1985	1990	1995	2002
Agriculture	80.9	64.1	52.3	21.2	21.1
Mining/Quarry	4.9	3.4	3.3	7.1	6.5
Manufacturing	14.2	32.5	44.4	71.7	72.4
• <i>Textiles</i>	2.4	10.8	23.7	54.1	54.8

Source: UN, International Trade Statistics Yearbook, Volume 1 (Various Issues)

Importantly, table 3.2 does not capture two of the big export "products" since 1977, tourism and migrant workers to the Middle East. The government estimates that "[o]verseas employment generates official foreign remittances of more than US\$1 Billion per annum" (GOSL 2002: 71). Yet, the boom in foreign direct investments (FDI) has not been realised as expected. In comparison, gross inflows of private remittances from workers abroad is estimated to have been 7 1/2 times bigger than gross inflows of FDI during the period between 1997-2001 (IPS 2003: 15).

Although impressed by the post-1977 export performance, Pieris (1997) cautions that the marginal utilisation of local raw materials for industrial export items limits both their contribution to the balance of trade, as well as their spread effects in the domestic economy. In the garment industry, for example, over 65 percent of material inputs are imported (Kelegama & Foley 1999). In a recent review of the economy (IPS 2003b: 5), it is noted that the country "...has not been able to achieve even a small trade surplus in a single year since the liberalisation of the economy in 1977". This disappointing trade performance, it is concluded, indicates that production capacities and competitiveness suffer from fundamental weaknesses (ibid.). In a critical review of the economy, ADB (2001b) stresses the threats from tighter immigration policies in the Middle East and the vulnerable tourism sector. ADB furthermore questions whether the goal of poverty reduction is "...compatible with a system of plantation agriculture, inherited from the colonial regime, which is based on the availability of a captive labor force" (ibid: x). Furthermore, the removal of the Multi-Fiber Agreement (MFA) and a regionalisation of the global garment industry challenge a large part of the garment factories³⁷. This is especially so for factories located in rural areas, convinced to establish there through access to MFA-quotas, but where lead-times are likely to be higher than in urban areas and in EPZs.

³⁷ Sri Lanka became an attractive location for garment production due to the availability of cheap and abundant labour, as well as to the MFA through which it could benefit from quota hopping. Today, the garment industry is not sufficiently competitive (see Kelegama & Foley 1999; Weerakoon & Wijayasiri 2000; Kelegama & Epaarachchi 2001; IPS 2003b; Knutsen 2003), and the high dependency on quota-items - more than 60 percent of all exports - might well cause considerable problems in a near future. There is a high lead-time, a lack of backward linkages, a high import-dependency, a high product- and market concentration, etc, and low-cost producing countries, like China, put the sector under stress. Sri Lankan garment suppliers are successful in products which are "...relatively simple to produce, expensive to import, and not related to fashion trends" (Kelegama & Foley 1999: 1449). It is now argued that there is a need to "...move to the top end of the market as a reputable and dependable supplier of quality apparel in Asia" (Kelegama & Epaarachchi 2001: 8).

In the new strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction from 2002³⁸, there is a big focus on ways to increase the level of value addition in the economy and on the need to move people "...from low-productivity to high-productivity jobs with higher incomes" (GOSL 2002: 2). Sri Lanka is to emerge as a regional service and banking centre, a "...financial hub in the South Asian region" (ibid: 23). An e-Sri Lanka initiative is launched, and a rapid growth of the ICT-sector is meant to stimulate all other sectors of the economy to perform better. Importantly, India is today referred to as a success story due to its ability to attract large flows of FDI and export its human capital (see Chapter 4). In summary, the government stresses the need of "connecting to growth", both in the aggregate sense of connecting the country as a whole more favourably to the global economy, and in the sense of "[b]ringing poor communities into the mainstream of a dynamic market economy..." (ibid: 24).

3.3.4 Regional concentration of economic activities

There are wide spatial imbalances in the socio-economic landscape of Sri Lanka (see Dangalle 2002). Disparities are big between the western province and the hinterland; within the western province (e.g. Colombo and Gampaha Districts vs. Kalutara); and within the periphery (e.g. war-areas in the North East, estate areas in the mountains, etc) (Karunanayake 2001). When it comes to manufacturing and services, core-periphery patterns seem to strengthen over time, although the earlier primacy of Colombo city has turned into regional primacy for parts of the western province. This latter region accounts for 72 percent of the manufacturing sector and 46 percent of the service sector (Gooneratne 2001). Between 1970 and 1997, the concentration of large-scale economic activities to the western province increased in absolute terms, albeit only moderately as a percentage of the total (Central Bank 1998). Closeness to the Colombo port can motivate both material - and market orientation, due to that much of the inputs is imported while a lot of production is for export. The infrastructure around Colombo is furthermore widely superior to the rest of the country (ADB 2001b), and the concentration of middle- and upper income receivers to that area provides an internal market for final products (Central Bank 1998).

There have been attempts to handle regional disparities in economic activities and development. These are summarised by Gooneratne (2001) to include large public sector investments in so-called lead projects (e.g. river valley development projects), integrated rural development programs (IRDPs) in areas not covered by lead projects, and attempts to decentralise industrial activities. To handle the uneven spatial distribution of garment industries, for example, a 200-garment factory programme was

³⁸ The poverty reduction strategy rests on six major (and very general) pillars: building a supportive macroeconomic environment; reducing conflict-related poverty; creating opportunities for the poor to participate in economic growth; investing in people; empowering the poor and strengthening governance; and implementing an effective monitoring and evaluation system (GOSL 2002). It is not relevant to go through all of these different pillars in detail here.

commenced in 1992. This was an attempt to provide incentives for location of export-oriented factories in rural areas that had been excluded from other lead projects. With some result, spatial dispersion of garment factories was attempted through the distribution of MFA-quotas to larger companies paying a set minimum salary. In 1999, however, 72 percent of the 891 establishments were still located in the western province, generating 65 percent of total employment in the sector (Kelegama & Epaarachchi 2001). Other projects for diffusing industrial locations in space have been the establishment of industrial estates and parks, while EPZs rather have been concentrated in districts around Colombo. Many commentators have painted a pessimistic picture of rural, especially paddy-cultivating areas (e.g. Dunham & Edwards 1997; Dunham & Jayasuriya 1998; 2000). Families in these areas are extremely dependent on external transfers for their livelihoods; from migrant workers in the Middle East, from garment workers in and around greater Colombo, from army soldiers, and partly from poverty alleviation schemes.

3.3.5 Employment, unemployment and precarious employment

The inward-oriented development strategy did not manage to decrease the share of the population engaged in agriculture and related industries. In 1953, 53 percent of the employed population worked in agriculture, hunting, forestry or fishing (agricultural group), a figure that was still at 47 percent in the beginning of the 1980s. Furthermore, the share employed in the manufacturing sector increased very slowly during the same period, from ten to twelve percent (Nanayakkara 2004: 12). Since 1990, however, there has been a quicker change in the composition of employment:

Table 3.3 Distribution of employed population by major industrial group (%), 1990-2001

Year	Total	Agriculture	Manufacturing	Services	Other
1990	100.0	46.8	13.3	29.2	10.7
1995	100.0	36.7	14.7	34.8	13.8
2001	100.0	32.6	17.0	36.7	13.7

Source: Nanayakkara (2004: 14)

In Table 3.3, it can be seen that the share of the employed population confined to the agricultural group has decreased substantially, while the share in manufacturing has increased, albeit more modestly. The latter is partly explained by the large proportion of workers in EPZs, which are excluded from labour force surveys if they live in boarding houses or lodging places. Of importance is also that these figures exclude many people who have gone for work in the armed forces or abroad (ibid.), but they are still interesting for illustrating what has happened over time.

Official unemployment rates decreased from around 20 percent of the labour force in 1975 to around 9 percent in 2003 (Kiribanda 1997; Central Bank 2004). Yet, these figures hide significant "underemployment", as well as a substantial number of "unpaid family workers" and people who have left the country to work in the Middle East. According to Lakshman (2002), there are three structural characteristics to the

unemployment problem in Sri Lanka. One is that women are unemployed to a greater extent than men; another is that the bulk of the unemployed are found in rural areas. The third structural characteristic is the heavy, and increasingly so, concentration of unemployment among youth, with 83 percent of the unemployed being between 15-29 years in the year 2000. Whereas the open economic policy partly has been successful in obtaining structural transformation, increasing economic growth rates, and decreasing unemployment rates, the quality of the new jobs is often challenged. Furthermore, many "old" livelihoods are considered of inferior status and very difficult to live from (farming), or almost unobtainable (public sector employment).

Paddy production continues to form the economic backbone of many rural areas, but average paddy farm size has decreased over the years. It is increasingly difficult to live from paddy cultivation, as the domestic price on paddy has not increased in correspondence with the costs of production (IPS 2003: 43). Paddy cultivation is, however, not only a means of livelihood, it is also the "known devil" and a way of life, which means that many farmers have been reluctant to switch to higher value crops (Swan 1987). At the same time, as suggested by Marzano (2002: 824), villagers "...perceive livelihood strategies on a hierarchical scale with agricultural labourers at the bottom". Prospects for cultivating paddy differ widely between the dry and the wet zone. In the former, land is abundant whilst there is shortage of water and rainfalls are unreliable; in the latter, moisture is sufficient but there is a shortage of land. A controversial issue today regards land entitlements. A problem with present arrangements is that, as people cannot sell their land (the state is the biggest landowner), resources are not allocated efficiently, and the land cannot be used as collateral (World Bank 2002; GOSL 2002). Yet, many farmers would probably be forced to sell, would harvests fail, and the question is where these families would get their income and food security, if they had to leave their lands.

A nation-wide youth survey shows that a large part of the youths still want to have public sector jobs (Hettige 2000). Mayer (2000: 161), however, adds that it might not be so much government jobs *per se* that they are hoping for, but rather, "...certain criteria, which mainly guarantee security (e.g. through a pension or a stable work environment)". Yet, government jobs are not likely to expand in a foreseeable future, and according to the ADB (2001b), Sri Lanka already has the highest ratio of public sector employees in Asia. The number of public sector employees decreased from 1,352,200 in 1990 to 1,061,399 in 2002 (Central Bank 2004). Further, Hettige (2000c) notes the following with regard to public sector employment:

With the increasing integration of the Sri Lankan economy with the outside world over the last two decades, such attributes as computer literacy and knowledge of English have become widely accepted, additional criteria for recruitment even in the public sector. So, those who possess such attributes have a much greater chance of obtaining certain jobs even in the state sector. This does not apply to lower-rung positions in state institutions as they are often allocated on the basis of political patronage (ibid: 331).

Rather than trying to expand the public sector, there is now increased attention paid to small-scale industries and skills for self-employment. Mayer (2000) suggests, quite logically, that there either have to be a change in attitudes to vocational training in order to train more youths to available jobs or a reorientation of the economy to suit the aspirations of the labour force.

Despite the reluctance for switching from paddy cultivation, there has been a diversification of rural livelihoods, and a lot of women have entered the labour market. Yet, many of the "new" job opportunities, in EPZs, in the army, and as migrant workers overseas, are considered to be very risky, of inferior status, and to give few prospects for upward social mobility (see Shanmugaratnam 1999; Lakshman 2002). Apart from low salaries and job insecurity, jobs in garment factories imply additional risks to young women, as the social status of workers deteriorates, together with their marriage prospects (see Oxfam 2004). Lynch (2004) furthermore claims that there is a form of "moral panic" surrounding jobs in the garment sector, especially in urban factories, allegedly associated with prostitution, premarital sex, rape, unwanted pregnancies, sexual harassment, etc. This situation contributes to the large number of vacancies in garment factories, particularly those located in EPZs (ibid: 12). Work in the Middle East, especially for women working as housemaids, is also on very insecure terms; not seldom at the expense of marriages and children's wellbeing (e.g. Gamburd 2000). Shanmugaratnam (1999), finally, has noted that not even the poorest people want their children to join the army, as they consider the risks to be too high. The picture provided here is, however, not uncontroversial. Silva (1998), for example, argues that working in the Middle East, in the security forces, or in garment factories, are seen as key avenues for *escaping* poverty, while "...self-employment, casual wage labor and farming in general are not seen as secure means of crossing the threshold of poverty" (ibid: 12). For many rural men, further, employment in the armed forces might be the only available job "opportunity", at least the only one bringing with it some form of social status (Gamburd 2004).

Hence, government jobs are prestigious but difficult to get and many of the existing jobs are not seen as ways out of poverty. For obtaining other prestigious jobs, in the private sector, knowledge in English is becoming increasingly important (Raheem & Gunasekara 1994; Hettige 2000c; 2004). In relation to this, there has been a rise of an English-speaking new urban middle-class, which is a non-homogeneous strata comprised of various social groups, including workers in NGOs and managers in the export industry, defined by a shared, "westernised" life style (Hettige 1998).

3.3.6 Social welfare, poverty and social exclusion

Sri Lanka is often referred to, in order to illustrate that a high level of human development can be obtained even with a moderate per capita GDP (e.g. Sen 1999). A widespread distribution of welfare facilities dates back to the end of the colonial era. It

was developed further after independence and much of it was preserved even with the opening up of the economy through provisions of free education and health care, etc (Alailima & Sanderatne 1998). Other direct attempts to alleviate poverty include income support systems and area-based interventions such as integrated rural development programs (Karunatileke 2001). Sri Lanka differs from other countries in South Asia in that a relatively small percentage of the population lives in extreme income poverty. Yet, although "only" some seven percent of the population survive from less than one-PPP-dollar-a-day (1990-2002), some 45 percent are estimated to live from below two-PPP-dollars-a-day (UNDP 2004)³⁹. All income statistics are unreliable, but these figures indicate that the country has been quite successful in eradicating destitution. Yet, it also means that "...a significant percentage of the nonpoor are hovering marginally above a subsistence level and that they are highly vulnerable to poverty" (ADB 2001b: 3). Further, inequality in consumption expenditure, measured by a Gini coefficient, has grown sharply since the mid-1990s; perhaps more sharply than ever before in the country's history (World Bank 2005: 14).

Over time, income figures become even more unreliable, but long-term trends show slowly decreasing absolute, consumption poverty and "...large and growing disparities in the incidence, depth, and severity of poverty across regions" (World Bank 2002: 8). Indeed, the World Bank (2005: 9) notes that "[d]istricts and provinces appear to become progressively poorer the further they are located from the hub of economic activities in Colombo". In the most recent Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES 2002), it can be seen that *only* Colombo and Gampaha districts have monthly per capita incomes above the national average of 3,056 Rs⁴⁰; the figures for Colombo and Gampaha are 4,923 and 4,013 respectively. In comparison, per capita income in Hambantota District is 2,165 Rs (ibid.).

Yet, in terms of human development in a wider sense, the country has been extremely successful. It is, for example, claimed that more than 90 percent of the poor, have completed at least primary education and around half of them at least secondary education (World Bank 2002). Average life expectancy at birth is set at 72.5 years (2002), 76 for women and 70 for men, and literacy rates are set as high as at 90 percent for women and 95 percent for men (UNDP 2004). These indicators have continued to improve, even with the war and the opening up of the economy.

One should, however, not romanticise the Sri Lankan welfare state, and it has to be acknowledged that the favourable social statistics often exclude the situation in areas directly affected by the war. Much of the statistical information should also be interpreted with caution⁴¹. Furthermore, as noted by Shanmugaratnam (2002: 112),

³⁹ These figures refer to the percentage of people having incomes below one or two dollars a day, at 1985 international prices and adjusted for purchasing parity.

⁴⁰ The value of the Sri Lankan Rupy is set at around 0.01 USD.

⁴¹ With regard to the literacy rate, for example, there are two main problems. One is that it builds on a system of self-reporting, which means that it is never really tested. Another problem is one of definitions. It is now calculated from the claims of individuals as to whether or not they can read or write, which is

continuous improvements in macro indicators of well being "...say nothing about the distribution of progress in qualitative terms or the sense of exclusion and deprivation felt and suffered by people from different classes, ethnic communities, age and gender groups, and regions and localities". A large part of the rural population feels excluded from new and visible, but perceived-to-be-illegitimate consumption patterns enjoyed by the elite (Silva 1998). There is a Sinhala proverb saying *Colombata kiri, gamata kakiri*, which illustrates popular perceptions of the spatial distribution of socio-economic benefits, between Colombo and the rest of the country. This proverb means that "...market-based economic processes have provided *kiri* (meaning milk implying superior things) to Colombo and only *kakiri* (a cheap vegetable meaning, in this context, inferior things) to the village" (Lakshman 2002: 63).

Dunham (2000) suggests that "...divergent views of poverty (absolute, material views on the part of many politicians or policy-makers and relative deprivation and exclusion on the part of the poor themselves) are an intrinsic part of the problem" (ibid: 17; see also Silva 1998; Yapa 2002). This is also related to the fact that people in rural parts of the island seem to have drastically changed their definitions of "a decent life" (GOSL 2002). It is virtually impossible to understand processes of social exclusion and relative deprivation in Sri Lanka without taking into account these rising aspirations (cf. Dunham 2000). It might come as no surprise that aspirations have risen, but "...the speed at which this has happened has been grossly underestimated" (ibid: 20). This rise in general life aspirations is at least partly due to increased mobility, as well as to an inflow into the local cultural economy of imported symbolic goods, like Tele-dramas and advertisements (Hettige 2000b). TV was introduced to Sri Lanka at around 1980, and is now an integral part of life for many people, even in marginal areas lacking electricity. Mayer and Salih (2003) reflect as follows upon the fact that youths have formed the backbone of anti-systemic insurgencies, despite that Sri Lanka so often is quoted as a progressive welfare state:

It is, therefore, important to ask how and in which areas human needs are not being properly fulfilled, why, and what are the actual and perceived reasons. By doing so the focus of analysis has to shift from questions of basic survival to understanding contradictions between social expectations, social aspirations and human needs, and on the available means to achieve different life perspectives (ibid: 225).

3.3.7 Violent conflicts and youth unrest

The location as an island has contributed to a sense of uniqueness and isolation, especially regarding the Buddhist inheritance and the Sinhala language⁴². Sri Lanka is

not the same as saying that they are functionally literate (Gunawardena 1994). Furthermore, a great flaw in the human development record of Sri Lanka is the nutritional status of children, with a high (albeit decreasing) percentage of underweight children. Indeed, contrary to the general picture of human development in the country, "...Sri Lanka has a significantly higher child underweight rate than would be expected on the basis of its per capita GDP" (World Bank 2005: 22).

⁴² However, across the Palk Strait, the southern tip of India is only 40 km away from Sri Lanka. Geographical proximity to India has been of great importance and this is not only because the regional

seen as one of the last outposts for the orthodox *Therawada* tradition, with the Sinhalese set to guard and defend it (de Silva 1981). Furthermore, the Sinhala language is spoken only in Sri Lanka and the preservation of Buddhism and Sinhala has been high on the political agenda since the demise of colonial rule. Uyangoda (1999: 169) even suggests that, "...the democratic political culture with which Sri Lanka has been so intimately associated excludes power-sharing based on ethnicity". This dilemma is rooted in two competing forms of nationalist struggles. Sinhalese nationalists have blamed colonial rule for disadvantaging the Sinhalese, and their culture, while Tamil nationalists have seen the Sinhalese political leadership as the key problem, without engaging with colonialism (Uyangoda 2000). Soon after independence, several policies in favour of the major ethnic group were introduced. This quest to correct colonial discrimination and what was seen as a British divide-and-rule policy favouring Tamils, was interpreted by others as conspicuously anti-Tamil. Orjuela (2004: 90-91) summarises the main material and symbolic elements of this "Sinhalesation" of the Sri Lankan state:

- Disenfranchising Indian Tamils in 1948 on the basis that they were Indian. Only in the 1990s most of them gained full citizenship.
- The Sinhala Only Act of 1956. Tamil has since been given the status as official language, but there are still problems of implementation.
- Buddhism being given a foremost place of religions in the constitution of 1972, a phrasing which is still active.
- The introduction of a quota system for university admissions disadvantaging students from major cities, including Jaffna.
- Colonisation of "traditional Tamil areas" in the north-east by Sinhalese settlers, tilting the ethnic balance of many electorates to the advantage of the Sinhalese;
- The Sri Lankan flag and national anthem. Both are considered more Sinhalese-Buddhist than Sri Lankan, while rituals around state affairs and government development projects often have been Sinhalese-Buddhist in orientation.

These factors form the basis of what is known as the Tamil grievances. In the 1970s, the struggle for self-determination was radicalised into demands for a separate state⁴³ (Tamil Eelam). A militant youth movement formed in the North under the leadership of Velupillai Prabhakaran - the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). After decades of failed attempts to understand and handle grievances and reactions of minorities, the conflict escalated to open war in 1983. The highly authoritarian movement of LTTE has dominated the military struggle, claiming status as the sole representatives of the Tamil population. LTTE also controls large land areas in the north. A key difficulty for

superpower intervened militarily in the Sri Lankan conflict in the mid-1980s. The state of Tamil Nadu, with around 65 million Tamils, is situated just across the Palk Strait. The Sinhalese might thus well be conceived of as a majority ethnic group in the country, but they tend to see themselves as a minority in the larger region; i.e. they are often described as a majority group with minority complex.

⁴³ Tamil nationalists claim that the whole of the north-east provinces - around 28 percent of the island, and approximately 60 percent of the coastline of Sri Lanka - constitutes the traditional Tamil homeland (Shanmugaratnam 2002).

negotiating a solution is the apparent irreconcilability of secessionist claims of the LTTE and the governments' concern for the territorial integrity of the country⁴⁴ (Perera 2000). The military conflict between LTTE and the government has disrupted peaceful coexistence between different communities and even generated new lines of conflicts (e.g. between Muslims and Tamils in the east). Diverging partisan interests is a key factor behind the seeming unreformability of the Sri Lankan state; a state of desire, which is "...subjected to pressures from a variety of social and ethnic groups seeking to control it" (Uyangoda 2000).

LTTE is one of two recent anti-systemic movements in Sri Lanka. There have also been major uprisings of largely rural Sinhalese youths, organised by the *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP) and aiming for state power. JVP is normally translated as "People's Liberation Front" and the movement has always been strongest in the south, like in the marginal districts of Moneragala and Hambantota⁴⁵. Many stress the similarities between these groups in their fight for autonomy, one from the Sinhalese majority (LTTE) and the other from capitalism and imperialism (JVP). Claiming to represent distinct, culturally defined communities, they mobilise around them, "...upwardly mobile, yet less privileged, swabasha [own language] educated youths alienated from the national centre dominated by the elite" (Hettige 2000b: 199). Mainstream politics has failed to accommodate both of these groups:

...the JVP's political space - and that of the LTTE too - is located in a social expression of systematic despair and anti-systemic anger that no political formation of the mainstream seems to even comprehend, let alone represent (Uyangoda 2003: 52).

With the opening up of the economy, and new demands for skills by the private sector, these youths were at risk of alienation, and many felt betrayed by the rhetoric of equal life opportunities prevailing since independence. This has opened up for a politicisation of identities and ethnic scapegoating.

The civil war is of course diverting a substantial amount of resources that could have been used for other purposes, inducing hopes for a substantial peace dividend would the war eventually come to an end. Tourist arrivals are periodically stopped

⁴⁴ With the presently ongoing "peace process" (Cease-fire Agreement), formalised in 2002, certain steps were taken to address this particular issue, with a joint statement in the Memorandum of Understanding about finding a peaceful solution which allows for substantial self-determination within the framework of a unified state. For analysis of the most recent "peace process" in Sri Lanka, see e.g. Uyangoda & Perera (Eds.) (2003) and Orjuela (2004).

⁴⁵ The first of the JVP-uprisings, in 1971, was of left-radical orientation, articulating the frustration of peasants and rural youths, as well as that of other groups at the margins of society. In this way, JVP distinguished itself from Trotskyist- (LSSP) and Stalinist- (CP) movements, by way of applying Marxist-Leninist analysis on the specific situation in Sri Lanka, and by "indigenising" the class concept. The second JVP-uprising came after a period of parliamentary politics following the demise of the first insurrection. This attempt was bloodier and lasted between 1987 and 1989, and the ideological orientation had turned more nationalistic in trying to exploit the political space opened up by the Indian intervention in the Sri Lankan conflict. Since the mid-1990s, JVP has once again re-emerged in mainstream politics, now enjoying substantial support also from more urban constituencies. See Uyangoda (2003) and Hettige (1998) for analyses of the political space exploited by the JVP.

altogether and foreign direct investments have been diverted by the risk factor (see Shastri 2004). Each year between 1977 and 2001, the government spent more on defence than on all social sectors combined (Shanmugaratnam 2002). This is the most common way of looking at the relationship between education and the war, suggesting that educational problems are difficult to solve without an end to the war and to excessive military expenditures. In addition, educational opportunities in areas directly affected by the war are substantially worse than in other areas of the country, although data are likely to be inaccurate (de Silva 1999; UNICEF 2003). Yet, as pointed out by Shanmugaratnam (2001), arguments about war being counter-development might possibly have gone too far, to the extent that it has "...obscured the inherent shortcomings of the development policies and practices of the past two decades or more" (ibid: 14-15). Further, Uyangoda (2003: 37) notes that social conflicts have not received the attention they might deserve from the conflict resolution community. The rapid expansion of the education sector, without equally expanding formal sector jobs, is important in this context (NYC 1990; Hettige 2004). The following section is devoted to a closer description of Hambantota District, which provided a stronghold for the JVP during the two uprisings. Hambantota is also the district that has been selected as a case in my attempt to better understand the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas in times of globalisation.

3.4 Marginal areas: Hambantota District and Sooriyawewa Division

3.4.1 Hambantota⁴⁶: A marginal district in the south-east of Sri Lanka

This thesis is concerned with educational opportunities of poor families in *marginal* parts of Sri Lanka. By "marginal", I mean areas, which are physically distant from the capital and from main centres of economic activity, as well as generally being left behind national aggregates in terms of socio-economic development indicators. Sri Lanka consists of 9 provinces divided into 25 administrative districts, which are further divided into a large number of Divisional Secretariat (D.S.) divisions. Hambantota District is located in the south-eastern corner of the southern province.

The district mainly consists of plains, except for a few hills and small highland areas. In 1981, there were 424,344 people living in Hambantota, giving a population density per km² of 164. According to the latest census, there were 525,370 people in 2001, which means that the population density had increased to 210 persons per km² - still far below the national average. On average, the district population increased by as little as 1.1 percent per year between 1981 and 2001. Thirty-six percent of the population was below 18 years in 2001 - a figure that was considerably higher in the

⁴⁶ Early on, Hambantota formed part of the Kingdom of Ruhuna. The name Hambantota comes from the two Sinhala words of Hamban and Tota, where the former means a special kind of sailing craft built by joining two boats together, while Tota means ports – the port for Hambans. From the 14th century Malays started to visit Sri Lanka frequently and Hambantota earned a reputation as a port of safety from raging waves and currents (see Samaranayake 1985).

1981 census (45 percent) - and almost 96 percent of the population lived in rural areas in 2001. Ninety-seven percent was categorised as Sinhalese, the highest percentage noted for the whole country, while 97 percent of the population were Buddhists. The second largest ethnic group in Hambantota is the Muslims (Sri Lankan Moors and Malays), followed by Sri Lankan Tamils and a small number of Estate Tamils (DCS 2001). Hence, for studying ethnic dimensions of educational opportunities, Hambantota is not the best choice due to its high level of ethnic homogeneity.

The intermediate area between the wet and the dry zone cuts across the district, which means that water availability is uncertain in many parts, and over two-thirds of the district are affected by, "...the vagaries of weather and prolonged drought" (Jerve *et al.* 2003: 37). In 2001, a serious drought affected big parts of the district and the last time I visited Sooriyawewa Division, in 2004, many families were still receiving water from the government through weekly tank-deliveries. The district is furthermore divided into 12 DS Divisions⁴⁷ and there is a large concentration of people in the wet, western parts as compared to the dry, central and eastern parts.

Map 3.2 Population density according to D.S. Division, Hambantota District



Source: Authors elaboration, data is from DCS 2001

⁴⁷ The twelfth division - Walasmulla - was established recently and it is hence not demarcated in the maps, nor is it mentioned separately in the census from 2001.

Yet, there is migration from the western to the eastern parts of the district, of people in search for cultivable land. For the same reason, there is an inflow of migrants to the eastern parts also from districts like Matara, Galle and Ratnapura (Jerve *et al.* 2003).

There is a big resource base in fishing. People in areas along the coastline generally engage in fisheries, trade and tourism, apart from agriculture, while villagers in the interior largely engage in paddy or chena cultivation⁴⁸, coconut, cinnamon, pepper and cashew nut cultivation, or inland fisheries (ADB 2001). Forty-four percent of the employed were estimated to work in agriculture, forestry or fisheries in 2001, whereas as much as 18 percent worked in manufacturing and 38 percent in services. Altogether, the economy of Hambantota is still heavily dependent on primary sector activities, like agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry and fishery. There has been some agricultural diversification, away from paddy, perhaps most notably to banana (plantain) cultivation. Further, goat farming is now conducted by around 400-500 households in the district (Jerve *et al.* 2003). The Census of Industries for 2003/2004⁴⁹ shows that there are 3,893 small industries (less than 10 employees) located in Hambantota District, engaging 7,318 persons. In addition, there are 84 enterprises employing more than 10 persons each, in which 12,674 persons are employed. Salt production - through old methods of seawater evaporation in shallow salt pans - and rice milling, are two important manufacturing activities in the area. Many industrial activities are concentrated in cottage- and small-scale industries, like carpentry, textile weaving, and pottery, apart from a few garment factories. The district also attracts a large number of tourists. These are mostly pilgrims of various religions on their way to Kataragama in Moneragala District, but also foreign tourists, attracted by the big national parks in Yala and by the Bundala wet land sanctuary.

As suggested above, the district is lagging considerably in terms of income per capita and UNDP (1998) mentions a number of reasons contributing to its marginality. One is the geographical distance from the main centres of economic activity, in Colombo and Gampaha. The planned construction of an international harbour, a highway from Colombo to Matara (possibly to be extended to Hambantota), as well as an extension of the railway between Colombo and Matara to reach Hambantota, would significantly improve the physical accessibility of the district. The second reason mentioned by the UNDP regards the comparatively weak physical infrastructure, especially in terms of the road network and electricity. Third, UNDP notes the absence of any lead development project in the district. In a poverty appraisal conducted for the

⁴⁸ Chena is a kind of swidden cultivation where trees and scrub jungle are cut down and burnt, before cultivation commences in the ash-enriched soil. As in many parts of the country, chena as shifting cultivation has been replaced by non-shifting rain-fed cultivation as land has become scarcer (Marzano 2002). The time left for recovery of the natural vegetation has progressively declined with an increasing population, seriously affecting also the ecological sustainability of chena cultivation.

⁴⁹ This Census of Industries was compiled during latter parts of 2003 and it is available at http://www.statistics.gov.lk/industry/2003_04census_of_industry.htm (downloaded 19/7 - 2005)

ADB in 2000, focusing on the poorest of the poor in four poor districts in Sri Lanka, lack of income, employment and water were pointed out as the main concerns of the poor in Hambantota District. Inadequate housing and health services were mentioned as well, and there was low confidence expressed for activities conducted to improve the poverty situation, whether by the government or by NGOs (ADB 2001). To this can be added high educational aspirations expressed by villagers in Hambantota District, which will be addressed in subsequent chapters (see also Närman 2001; Karunanayake & Närman 2002).

I have not been able to find spatially disaggregate figures for youth unemployment, but these are commonly suggested to be particularly high in the district. According to Lakshman (2002), youth unemployment is higher in Hambantota than in any other district outside the war-affected regions in the north-east. This reinforces feelings of exclusion among youths in the area. Mayer (2000), finally, notes a widespread perception among Hambantota youths of being dominated by, and dependent on, decision-makers in Colombo. This means, he continues, "...that youth are defining their problems only in structural terms and, therefore, are likely to join violent movements *against* the system" (ibid: 162, emphasis in original). The JVP still has a stronghold in the district, although now in its reincarnation as a mainstream political party.

3.4.2 Sooriyawewa: A marginal division in Hambantota District

Sooriyawewa is a clearly disadvantaged, dry division of Hambantota District, bordering Hambantota Division just to the north, with a total population of 35,620 (DCS 2001). Sooriyawewa was selected to represent a marginal, dry division within the district, because the original intention was to compare several dry and wet divisions. The population in the division is increasing, and there seems to be a considerable number of people coming from more densely populated districts in the west, like Matara, opting for land. Another reason for in-migration, apart from the availability of land, is the several irrigation projects that have started up in the division lately, for example the Udawalawe left bank irrigation project and the Mau Ara diversion project. Sooriyawewa Division is extremely homogeneous ethnically, with some 99.9 percent being Sinhalese and hence only a few individuals being either Tamil or Muslim. Thirty-one percent of the population is under 18 years of age, a figure that has come down from 43 percent since 1996. The illiteracy rate of 16.2 percent is high in a national perspective but it is decreasing slowly, although there are pockets of illiterate people remaining rather stable in behind (Resource Profile 2002).

A major problem in the division, together with the main problem of water scarcity, is how to increase the opportunities for employment. A great majority of the population conduct farming and many do it as casual labourers on a day-to-day basis. As indicated in Table 3.4 below, however, the percentage of farmers is decreasing, although the trend might well be exaggerated. The figures presented in the table are

from yearly resource profiles published by the Divisional Secretariat, and their reliability is highly uncertain. Still, the private sector seems to be increasing rapidly together with a modest sector of self-employed. Contradicting official rhetoric, the public sector is increasing its share, which might be due to the employment of Samurdhi (Poverty Alleviation Program) officials:

Table 3.4 Employment by sector in Sooriyawewa Division, 1995-2001 (%)

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Government	2.4	2.7	2.7	3.8	3.5	4.4	4.7
Private	4.2	4.8	4.2	7.8	11.5	14.2	15.7
Farming	89.3	87.8	88.6	81.7	77.6	75.4	71.6
Self-employment	3.1	3.4	2.9	5.2	5.8	4.8	6.7
Others (abroad)	1.0	1.3	1.6	1.5	-	-	1.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Resource profiles of Sooriyawewa Division, various years, Sooriyawewa Divisional Secretariat

Among the private employers there is a garment factory located in Sooriyawewa town, engaging 400 people when visited in 2004, although the manager says that they have capacity for 500 workers (Key Informant, KI26). The reason why they only have 400 workers is that they get too few orders; it is not difficult to find workers. As a lot of the production is under the MFA-quotas, the factory might have to close after 2005, the manager says; production costs are too high and so is the lead-time.

3.5 Summary: Sri Lanka in times of global transformations

In this chapter, I have shown how Sri Lanka has transformed itself from a colonial plantation economy to a much more industrialised economy, with a situation regarding social welfare that is very impressive given its moderate level of per capita GDP. However, despite attempts to disperse economic development in space, most economic factors point towards location of economic activities, especially in industries and services, in or around the Colombo region. At the same time, the absolute majority of the population remains in rural areas. As it seems then, the country serves well as an example of an essentially dual economy, with the western province enjoying a significantly different situation in terms of economic activities and job opportunities than do most other areas. The government is facing a two-fold challenge of connecting the country more favourably to the global economy. There is a need to improve the balance of payments record and avoid a "Low-Skill, Bad-Job" Trap relying to heavily on the textile sector, as well as on the plantation sector and remittances from unskilled workers abroad. Simultaneously, there is a need to connect regions and groups outside the western province to economic development processes. An important part of the new growth policy is to build up an ICT-sector.

Although economic development to a large extent has been concentrated regionally, life aspirations of people have increased even in rural areas, leading to processes of social exclusion, especially among youths, which at times lead to violent unrest and conflicts. As a remnant of old development policies, the state is seen as the

main distributor of life chances and the public sector is the preferred employer despite the decreasing number of public sector jobs. There has been a diversification of rural livelihoods. New opportunities have emerged, but the quality of many of these is contested, at the same time as it is increasingly difficult to live from peasant farming. Many see English-skills but increasingly also computer skills, as the key to remunerative employment, and this is the case also for a growing number of the jobs in the public sector. In the following, I will look in more detail at what implications the challenges identified by the government have for the education sector.

4. EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA: CLOSING THE CIRCLE?

4.1 Introduction and a comment about the material used

In this chapter I provide a general picture of the national education system. I start with a brief history of the education system, as well as with crucial policy elements behind the Sri Lankan "success story" (4.2). Following this, I introduce key characteristics of the education system of today (4.3), before the main achievements and some of the most crucial problems identified in the literature are discussed (4.4). In 4.5, I present a few of the reforms that have been attempted since the mid-1990s and which are of particular importance for this thesis. In 4.6, finally, I return to the dilemma of educational planning in order to analyse the achievements, drawbacks and new reform proposals. Important aims of the chapter are, apart from providing the necessary background understanding for the empirical chapters, to introduce some of the reform attempts since the mid-1990s, in relation to some of the challenges discussed in Chapter 3. The analysis of the "success story" also aims to provide a point of reference against which the empirical findings can be compared in the final analysis.

This chapter draws a lot on secondary material, mainly provided by Sri Lankan researchers, a few of whom I have also interviewed,⁵⁰ and it should be acknowledged that I reinterpret their interpretations through my own theory-laden concepts. Most of the statistics used come from "government" sources such as the Ministry of Education, the University Grants Commission, and the Central Bank, but I have also used statistics from the World Bank. When discussing recent trends and reform attempts, I have gone through all available official documentation behind the reforms (which unfortunately is not collected in one "education-policy-document"). In addition to this, I have made interviews with high officials at the Ministry of Education, both at the National and at the Provincial level, as well as with key persons at the National Education Commission (NEC). Finally, I also base my argumentation on information obtained in interviews with political representatives that have been influential behind the reform proposals. These representatives are the Minister of Education during the UNP-government in 2001-2004, Mr Kodhituwakku, and the secretary to the Ministry of Education during the subsequent government (2004-), Ms. Tara de Mel. This means that I have attempted to capture the views of representatives of the two major political parties in Sri Lanka, that is, the SLFP and the UNP.

⁵⁰ As to the education sector in Sri Lanka I have gained most insights and inspirations from the writings of Jayaweera (1998), Little (1997; 2000c), Gunawardena (2002), Jayasuriya (1969), and Baker (1988; 1998), as well as from the many texts coming from the National Education Commission (e.g. 2003).

4.2 A brief history of education in Sri Lanka

4.2.1 Pre-colonial and colonial modes of education

Before any of the Europeans colonised Sri Lanka, religious and basic secular education was provided to both boys and girls in the Buddhist village schools or Gurugedere, in Hindu temple schools, and in Muslim Maktabas. Secular primary education focused mainly on reading and writing in the child's own language. The majority of students ended their education after the primary level and continued with a period of apprenticeship, often determined by the occupation of the father. Those who continued for post-primary education did so either to become priests, monks or leaders in their respective religions or to learn professions such as medicine, astrology or teaching. For Buddhists, monks in temple schools conducted this post-primary education free of charge, and also higher education, in so-called Pirivenas, was free of charge. Rubero (1962: 13) has described this three-stage system as "...a fully organized and complete school system, which was quite sufficient to provide for the educational needs of the time". With the arrival of the colonial powers, these systems were gradually replaced by the schools of missionaries.

Both the Portuguese and the Dutch saw education primarily as a means for promoting their respective branches of Christianity, but while the former largely left education in the hands of the Church, the latter saw a greater role for government authorities⁵¹. In the Dutch territory, each province or district was divided into parishes and even very marginal villages had a protestant Parish-school (Rubero 1962). Under the Portuguese, girls were denied entry to secondary schools and seminars providing higher education, while under the Dutch, large numbers of girls started to attend school as well (Sirisena 1969). Still, it was during the British that the present system of education started to take shape. In addition to missionary aspirations and a wish to acculturate elite groups, the British wanted to train personnel for the administration (Jayasuriya 1969). The system they introduced was essentially dual, with...

...a minority of English medium, fee levying schools for the elite and the emerging middle class, and free "vernacular" schools in Sinhalese and Tamil with an attenuated curriculum for the "masses". Imbued with the social class bias of the contemporary English education system, they created through education a dual society rooted in invidious distinction *based on language and economic status* (NEC 2003: 2, emphasis added).

There were mainly two reasons for not conducting all education in English in the British period. Partly, it was because of the difficulties for the majority of people to be educated in an alien medium. Partly, it was because of a lack of teachers with sufficient skills in English. To this can be added, perhaps, that it was not in the interest of the

⁵¹ This historical review is by necessity kept very short and sketchy. For deeper insights into the pre-colonial and colonial modes of education, see e.g. Rubero (1962), Sumathipala (1968), Jayasuriya (1969), Jayaweera (1998), NEC (2003). For the special situation in plantation areas, see Little (1997b).

British for everyone in the colonies to know English. In the last decades of the 19th century, there was a revival of local religions, when Buddhist and Hindu schools challenged the Christian dominance of education (Peiris 1996: 299).

The nationalist policies introduced after independence were not only meant to break out of economic dependency. They were equally a reaction to the dominance of an English-educated elite, who constituted little more than ten percent of the population, but enjoyed the best-paying, most influential occupations. Swan (1987) claims that entry to this privileged group was possible through learning the English language. However, opportunities to learn English were restricted to a few, because schools that were able to conduct English-medium education were confined to urban areas (Jayasuriya 1969). Hence, the education system left behind by the British was one in which children were separated in an unevenly distributed network of good and bad segments of schools, in accordance with area of residence (urban or rural), as well as with family resources of economic and cultural (mainly English language) capital.

4.2.2 The post-independence “success story”

An early expansion of education formed a backbone of the remarkable overall achievements in human development. Much of this “success story” is, in turn, attributed to policies introduced already around independence, when the first Minister of Education, Dr Kannangara, aimed to counter the duality of the colonial system⁵². Since this time, education was seen as “...above all a channel of social mobility, a single-peaked pyramid which everybody could climb” (Dore 1976: 64). These achievements relate to the introduction of universal franchise in 1931 and full independence in 1948. More specifically, most commentators would agree that the "success story" builds on three innovations: the introduction of free education, the dethroning of English as medium of instruction, and the abolition of denominationalism in education. There was, it has been argued, "...a fortunate congruence of interest between [English educated] politicians of a nationalist orientation and politicians of a socialist orientation, and when they combined force they constituted very powerful agents of change" (Jayasuriya 1969: 83). These elite groups were, in turn, seen to be supported by...

...a second layer elite (namely Buddhist Monks, ayurvedic physicians, Swabasha [own language] teachers and the editors of the Swabasha newspapers, educated in the best vernacular schools) as well as the masses (which were activated by the second layer elite using the public platform and the Swabasha newspapers). The combined forces of these two elite groups and the masses was overwhelming (Jayasuriya 1969: 84).

A number of key reforms hence laid the foundation for the "success story". Perhaps most importantly, free education from kindergarten through to the university was introduced in 1945. Its immediate effect was, however, “...a bonanza to the well-to-do

⁵² Still today, Dr Kannangara enjoys the status of a national hero, with annual memorial lectures held to his honour. These memorial lectures are collected in NIE [Eds.] (2001).

by giving them without payment the good education that had hitherto been paid for by them” (Jayasuriya 1969: 85). From 1947, further, primary education was to be conducted in local languages – Sinhala and Tamil – and a similar change was soon to follow for the secondary level. During the 1950s, English disappeared as medium of instruction also in universities and the beginning of the sixties saw the first batch of Swabasha (own language) educated students reach the university. The prestigious denominational schools, assisted disproportionately by the government, were taken over by the state in 1961, and a national school system under public control and management was introduced. The entire education sector became a virtual state monopoly and since this time, there has been considerable political resistance to privatisation of education in Sri Lanka, although there are now increasing tendencies towards diversity in the system (Hettige 2004; see below).

Another important foundation of the "success story" was to introduce so-called Central Schools around the country, to increase possibilities of “able” rural children to climb educational and social ladders. One idea behind these schools was to provide a more practical and locally relevant education. Another idea was to "...collect together the pupils who have passed the primary stage from all schools within a certain radius and provide education to them in a Central School staffed with the best teachers obtainable" (Jayasuriya 1969: 97). In terms of providing a practical and more relevant education, these schools were failures, as they had the same academic orientation as urban schools (ibid: 99). Still though, between 1940 and 1947, 54 Central Schools were established to extend secondary education to rural areas. A scholarship program, introduced in 1952, aimed to help successful students from poor families attend these schools. In the 1980s, some of the Central Schools were reclassified as National Schools, reinforcing their privileged status. The total number of schools in the country increased from 2,395 in 1945 to 4,334 in 1960 and to 9,550 in 1965. In 2003 there were 9,790 schools and the education network had hence come a long way already in the 1960s. Participation rates among children aged 5-14 "...increased sharply from 57.3 % at the 1946 Census to 71.7 % at the 1953 Census and more slowly to 74.4 % at the 1963 Census" (Jayaweera 1998: 312). Jayaweera (1998) summarises the main achievements of the post-independence policies thus:

While the earliest beneficiaries of free education were middle class professionals and trading families, it is apparent that both free education and the change in medium of instruction did open avenues of advancement for two decades to a substantial proportion of the population who had been outside the ambit of the education structure that had links with the occupational ladder and social prestige. Free education raised the aspirations of parents for both sons and daughters. It enabled the less affluent urban families to send their bright children to large schools. Most importantly, the Central Schools opened in the 1940s functioned as effective agents of social mobility, drawing able children from rural primary schools through scholarships and facilitating their access to University and professional education and subsequently to the highest positions in the professions and the administration (ibid: 323).

Several other reforms of importance to complete the “success story” were introduced subsequently. To the more important belong policies of free school-meals (1989; now abandoned), subsidised school transport and free textbooks (1981), free school-uniforms (1993), and district-based quotas for university admission, introduced in 1974 and restructured in 1991. According to the latter, a certain percentage of the university places are filled by “merit”, while the rest are distributed according to district quotas, with special provisions for poor districts. In the rest of this chapter, I discuss both the positive aspects of the "success story", in terms of poverty alleviation and social mobility, but also some of the problems that have been identified in the literature (regarding equality, quality, local relevance and global competitiveness). But first, I need to outline some key characteristics of the Sri Lankan education system, to make it possible to better follow the discussion below.

4.3 The education system today: An introduction

The compulsory education age in Sri Lanka is between 5-14, corresponding with grades 1-9. The first five years constitute primary education, but unlike in many other countries, Sri Lanka has not encouraged the establishment of primary schools with distinct institutional identities (Little 2000b). After a five year primary cycle, there is a grade 5 scholarship examination, allowing a small number of successful students a means-tested bursary and access to the prestigious National Schools⁵³. Following this primary level, there is a four-year period of junior secondary education, before preparation starts for the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) O-level examination after grade 11, through two years of senior secondary education. These first three levels (5+4+2) basically have free access, while there is a need to have passed the O-level examination (including First Language and Maths), to continue for A-level education in grade 12 and 13. This unitary collegiate cycle of two years is diversified into streams – Science, Commerce or Arts – and ends with the G.C.E. A-level examination, serving a dual purpose of attainment and selection to universities.

There is an area rule stipulating that children have the right to go to the school closest to their home. In addition, there has to be a primary school within a radius of three kilometres (2 miles) of all students; a secondary school within six km and a school with A-level classes within eight km. According to the Ministry of Education (2000: 25) itself, “Sri Lanka has a nearly adequate number of schools to ensure the

⁵³ There are several problems relating to these scholarship examinations. The NEC notes in an early report (NEC 1992: 86), that it is questionable whether the identification of “a pool of ability” is done at the most appropriate age for these young children. In addition, they note that there are problems with moving children of such young ages away from their home areas. Finally, grade 5 examinations stimulates an increased demand for Private Tuition at young ages, possibly distorting the childhood of many children and increasing economic burdens of their parents. There are hence proposals for restructuring of this examination, at least to make it less “tutor-friendly”. The NEC (2003) proposes that these scholarships should be restructured to comprise two different papers – a general paper to test ability and a paper to assess essential learning competencies, instead of one paper testing knowledge of the content of subjects in primary grades. This is intended to be less stressful for children.

availability of primary schools within two kilometres of the home of any primary child". It is important to note that government schools are classified in accordance both with the terminal grade and with curriculum streams offered at A-level. There are four types of schools in the system: Type 3 schools – with classes up to grade 5 or 9; Type 2 schools – with classes up to grade 11; 1C schools – with A-level streams in Arts and Commerce; and 1AB schools – with all streams for A-level. There is an in-built hierarchy to this, with 1AB schools generally being more popular than 1C schools, which in turn are more popular than the other two categories. Competition for enrolment in a good quality school already at an early age is stiff:

The motor of educational selection drives the competition to enter grade 1 classes in good schools, the competition surrounding the Grade 5 scholarship examination, the pressure for schools to constantly upgrade themselves, and the tendency for 'good' schools to grow into extremely large institutions (Little 2000b: 26).

A crucial aspect of the system is "...a winner take-all competitiveness among students beginning from the most tender age" (Säfström *et al.* 2001: 15).

There is a strong correlation between type of school and its size, and 1AB schools are commonly the largest, followed by, in due order, 1C schools, Type 2 and Type 3 schools. Spatially, 1AB schools are mostly located in towns and serve wide catchment areas. A great majority of students in the other types of schools live within walking distance, although 1C schools are found in both rural and urban areas. Socially, strong correlation has been found between school type on the one hand, and parental occupation, family size and education level of parents on the other, with the 1C schools presenting a position between extremes (Rupasinghe 1990; Karunasekara & Rupasinghe 1991). During the last ten years or so, there has been a "bipolarisation" of the system, due to a combination of low population growth and high demand for big schools. Schools with less than 50 students increased from 10 percent (1992) to almost 14 percent (2002) of the total, while schools with more than 2,000 students increased from 1.7 percent (1992) to 2.7 percent (2002) (GOSL 2003: 109). These big and growing schools are normally located in urban areas, which means that spatially, processes of "bipolarisation" equals an urbanisation of the education system.

Since the end of the 1980s, the Provincial Councils run all four types of schools mentioned above. In addition to these, there are the very popular and generally more resourceful National Schools operating under the central government⁵⁴. Mainly 1AB

⁵⁴ Dr Parakrama at the University of Peradeniya (KI43) sees three reasons to why it is better to go to a National School than to other government schools. First, it is easier for these schools to access resources and this is where the high-quality teachers are. National schools are prioritised in funding, he says – not in theory but in practice. Second, there are the non-state benefits, where old boys and old girls associations provide huge amounts of additional resources that other schools do not get. The third factor regards the sociological effects, the pride of wearing a National School tie, and the fact that, *ceteris paribus*, the chances of securing a good job is greater if you are from a National School. Important is, however, that there are many different National Schools, and here, there has been a change in relation to what social groups that are in power in the society. Today, Dr Parakrama says, it is not the old Central School educated elite - who often were proud to come from rural Central Schools - that are in power, but

schools are promoted to this category. According to the School Census in 2003, there were 298 National Schools in Sri Lanka, of which 263 are 1AB schools, 34 are 1C schools and one is a Type 2 school⁵⁵.

In line with the population patterns introduced in Chapter 3, an important aspect of the system at present, is the decreasing number of students (Table 4.1.). This is due to a decreasing intake in primary education since the mid-1990s (Table 4.2.):

Table 4.1 Number of pupils in the education system (thousands), 1992-2002

1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
4,289	4,304	4,329	4,351	4,254	4,261	4,136	4,134	4,194	4,187	4,027

Source: University Grants Commission, UGC (2003)

Table 4.2 New Admissions to the education system (thousands), 1980-2002

1980	1985	1990	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002
365	372	387	342	323	354	353	343	332	330

Source: UGC (2003) (the figure for 2002 is provisional)

This situation naturally affects the demand for teachers in the system. As of May 2003, there was an identified excess of 6,704 Sinhala-medium teachers, and a shortage of 10,121 Tamil-medium teachers⁵⁶ (GOSL 2003). Still, although there was an overall excess in the Sinhala-medium, there was a shortage in particular subjects, such as English, Aesthetics and Technical subjects. The government notes the drop in pupil enrolments and estimates an annual drop in enrolment of between 25,000 and 40,000 students for the coming years, which is believed to generate an excess of 1,000 teachers in the system. This excess will, however, only materialise if the school system is rationalised successfully (see below). Importantly, it is stated that, "...it is not possible to expect any expansion in the teacher cadre within the next 10 years" (GOSL 2003: 108). Furthermore, the system of teacher transferring is not functioning well, cementing spatial imbalances in the distribution of teachers (NEC 2003). In 2003, however, there was a sharp increase of teacher trainees admitted to Colleges of Education from marginal districts like Hambantota (GOSL 2003).

Up to the late 1980s, the education system was centralised, but since then, there have been attempts to decentralise the establishment and management of primary and secondary education to Provincial Councils. Provincial Ministries of Education were established in 1988, and although it would take a long time for provincial authorities to realise their powers, they are supposed to handle the provision of facilities to

people from Colombo National Schools and International Schools. As far as I am aware, there is no study regarding the actual differences between National and Provincial Schools, nor any one comparing different National Schools.

⁵⁵ According to the Deputy Director at the National Schools Branch, Ministry of Education, there were as many as 324 National Schools in 2004 (KI44), but I use the figure from the School Census for matters of comparison.

⁵⁶ There is some controversy or confusion here, however. The World Bank (2004) notes that in 2002, there was an excess of 5,546 Sinhala-medium teachers, while in 2003, this figure had decreased to 3,219. Yet, it is stated that the lack of Tamil-medium teachers remains basically the same; it even increased from the required 9,674 in 2002 to 9,901 in 2003.

government schools, preparation of plans, the supervision of schools, etc (Little 2003: 13). Under each province, there are a number of Education Zones, each consisting of several D.S. Divisions. In Hambantota District, for example, there are three Education Zones: Walasmulla, Tangalle and Hambantota. In the Hambantota Zone, in turn, there are five D.S. Divisions: Hambantota, Ambalantota, Tissemaharama, Lunugahamwehera and Sooriyawewa. Education Zonal Offices are mainly taking care of teacher salaries, organising quality development programs and developing zonal plans. At the school level, principals co-ordinate and plan, but they have no control over teacher recruitment, salaries or the amount of school facilities enjoyed by the school. There is some disagreement as to the relative influence of principals and the Ministries in admission processes, which is related to widespread malpractices. The only financial resources available at school level are the ones raised through small facility fees and by the School Development Society. Parents are represented in School Development Societies, together with representatives of the schools. The amount of money raised through these societies varies greatly between schools. The government maintains schools, pays teachers, holds public examinations and provides textbooks also in the north-east, although both the availability and the quality of these services remain major concerns⁵⁷ (de Silva 1999; Selvarajah 2003; UNISEF 2003).

Apart from government schools, there are a number of non-government institutions providing education, including aided and non-aided private schools, International Schools, Pirivenas, and a few special schools for disabled children⁵⁸. Pirivenas are attached to Buddhist temples, and caters primarily for male students who want to become Buddhist monks, but they also provide general education for male lay students. In 2002, there were 54,968 students in Pirivena (School Census 2002). International Schools register under the Board of Investment and teach in the English-medium for foreign - mainly British - examinations. They grew strong in the country since 1981, due to an increasing demand for high-quality English-medium education. International Schools charge high fees and cater mainly for rich and ex-patriot children, as well as for children from the new urban middle class, forming new layers of privilege (Jayaweera 1998). The Ministry of Education estimates that there are around 100 International Schools in the country but admits that their exact numbers are not

⁵⁷ The educational situation in the north-east – the worst war-affected parts of Sri Lanka - is problematic for various reasons, and the findings from this study should in no way be generalised to the situation in these areas, as they are operating under specific structural circumstances. A large number of children in the north-east are internally displaced persons (IDPs). Almost 50 percent of the children are estimated to be malnourished and war-related psychosocial distress and trauma is widespread. In addition, the situation regarding facilities for schools and for transport seems considerably more difficult than even in the most difficult areas in the South. It is also suggested that many poor parents in the north-east show little interest in educating their children, and if this is correct, it is in sharp contrast to my experiences with attitudes to education in the South (see Chapter 6). The information here is obtained from the Rapid Needs Assessment Survey conducted in war-affected areas (UNICEF 2003).

⁵⁸ There are 25 assisted special schools, with altogether 2,789 students, and 852 mainstream schools providing special classes for another 9,618 students (see World Bank 2005: 52).

known⁵⁹ (MEHE 2000: 12). There are, finally, also other private schools - fee levying and non-fee levying – teaching in local languages for local examinations, but the absolute majority of students attend the government schools. According to figures from the Central Bank (2005) there were 85 private schools in Sri Lanka in 2003, which is quite a big increase from a number of 61 in 1990. The number of students in private education has increased from 82,593 to 101,047 during the same period.

A more recent phenomenon is that many parents send their children to *extra* Private Tuition but little is known about the actual number of tutors or tutorials (Little 2000b). Baker (1998), comparing her two fieldwork periods in Moneragala District (in 1984-85 and 1994-95), notes that a new phenomena during the latter period was that economically well-endowed parents could give their children educational advantages through International Schools and Private Tuition in urban centres. It is commonly argued that the Private Tuition industry grew strong during the 1990s, and that it now is “...making a mockery of free education” (de Silva 2003: 10). Furthermore, Madarasas (Islam), Kovils (Hinduism), Churches (Christianity) and Daham Pasalas (Buddhism) provide religious education in evenings or weekends.

There are 13 universities in Sri Lanka, including the Open University, and they are all public universities. Importantly, less than 2.5 percent of the relevant age group is enrolled in university education, which is a low figure even among equally poor countries. In recent years, this percentage is, however, increasing steadily:

Table 4.3 Student enrolment, eligibility and admission to university in Sri Lanka, 1980-2002

	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002
Age-specific enrolment ratios (per 100) (Age 20-24)	1.2	1.1	1.6	1.7	2.3	2.4
New admissions	4,959	5,630	7,152	9,245	9,787	10,450
Percentage eligible for university admission after GCE (A/L)	43.1	43.7	45.2	44.9	49.7	50.7
Admission to university as percentage of eligible	16.4	31.6	20.7	15.6	16.1	13.3

Source: UGC (2003) (2002, provisional)

Table 4.3 suggests that the apex of the education pyramid is very narrow, and that a lot of students qualify for university entrance without ever being admitted.

For the academic year of 2001/2002, 418 of the students admitted to the university came from Hambantota District (3.4 percent), while 2,055 were from Colombo District (16.9 percent), out of a total of 12,144 admitted students. In addition, there were wide differences between the different A-level streams when it comes to university admissions, as a percentage of those who qualify, with a much lower

⁵⁹ Hettige (2004) notes that the number of students enrolled in International Schools has increased dramatically "...from a few hundred in the late 1980's to nearly ten thousand by 2001" (ibid: 21), and adds that the actual number is likely to be even higher. Interestingly, he also claims that only a few of the International Schools cater for the expatriate community, and that many of them cater mostly for middle class, rather than upper class families.

percentage for students in Arts and Commerce. The absolute numbers of students from the Arts stream is, however, almost the double that of any other stream:

Table 4.4 Candidates qualified for and admitted to university, divided by stream, 2001/2002

A-level Stream		No Qualified	No Admitted	% Admitted
Arts	Total	50,756	4,283	8.44
	Female	36,247	3,134	8.65
Commerce	Total	24,497	2,372	9.68
	Female	13,711	1,278	9.32
Physical Science	Total	5,594	2,819	50.39
	Female	1,560	698	44.74
Biological Science	Total	10,829	2,670	24.66
	Female	6,436	1,418	22.03
Total	Total	91,676	12,144	13.25
	Female	57,954	6,528	11.26

Source: UGC (2003),

Note: Year of GCE (A/L) - 2000

Partly as a result of the narrow apex of the system, but also due to a perceived low quality of universities, around 10 percent of tertiary students studied abroad by the end of the 1990s. According to ul Haq & Haq (1998), this was a significantly higher percentage than in other countries in South Asia. There has been a lot of pressure to privatise, or at least to allow for private universities, but a shift in government policy has not been possible, primarily due to strong student protests (Hettige 2004). Other post-secondary educational options for students are Colleges of Education for teacher trainees, Technical Colleges, the Law College, as well as several private institutions oriented towards management, accountancy, etc., and a mushrooming of institutions at all levels providing skills in English, computing and ICTs (*ibid.*).

The district quotas to universities have been among the main sources for Tamil grievances, as they disproportionately hit against "urban" districts, including Jaffna, Galle, Kandy and Colombo, and decreased opportunities of Jaffna Tamils to enter the popular Science faculties (de Silva 1999). In their report on education in South Asia, ul Haq and Haq (1998: 41) use the district quotas in Sri Lanka as examples of "education policies that divide", as they narrowed the education pyramid for Tamils (although they did serve to help some Tamils outside Jaffna District). Many of the policies introduced to increase equality of educational opportunity actually seem to have had negative repercussions in terms of ethnic tensions. The abolition of English as medium of instruction, for example, while essential for a great majority of children in rural areas, has served to enforce the lack of communication between Sinhala- and Tamil-speaking children. Recent attempts to reintroduce English-medium education might hence be motivated by its potential to act as a bridge between communities through a common "neutral" language (Selvarajay 2003: 290). However, critiques of this argument assert that it will only serve to bridge elite groups of the two communities, and that learning the other groups' language would be a more realistic way of closing the language gap (Punchi 2001). Finally, an important point made by Säfström *et al.* (2001), is that the

tendency in Sri Lanka to divide schools in line with ethnic categorisations, that is, Sinhalese, Tamil or Muslim, means that unequal funding between schools often is seen as ethnic discrimination, regardless of the actual reason. There is strong need for the system to be reoriented to better suit a plural society, and to foster tolerance and respect for cultural diversities (de Silva 1999; Säfstöm *et al.* 2001; NEC 2003).

4.4 Achievements and problems in Sri Lankan education

4.4.1 Poverty alleviation, social mobility and regional inequalities

Sri Lanka is enjoying high literacy figures for both women and men. This is an enormous achievement and although there are regional differences, with plantation areas lagging considerably, almost all districts have high rates in comparative perspective (UNDP 1998). Achievements in enrolment in, and completion of, primary education have also been massive although accurate figures are difficult to obtain. Excluding the north-east, the World Bank (2005: 49) gives a net primary school enrolment, for 2002, of 96 percent for both boys and girls, and estimates that these figures have increased slightly from 95 percent for both sexes in 1990/91. This is compared with rough estimates of net primary school enrolments in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, ranging between 49-65 percent (*ibid.*: 50). Given that there are 1.7 million children enrolled in primary education (grades 1-5) in Sri Lanka, this means that around 68,000 children between the ages of 6-10 are not enrolled, although some of these are likely to attend institutions outside the government system. There are small regional variations and it is also estimated that as much as 95 percent from the lowest consumption quintile of the country was enrolled in 2002 (*ibid.*: 49). Further, the net primary school *completion* rate for Sri Lanka, in 2002, is set at 95 percent (for both sexes). This situation means that donors preoccupied with the Millennium Development Goals for education will not prioritise Sri Lanka within the next decade.

Policies of compulsory education (5-14) have been implemented since the late 1990s, together with a call upon principals to enrol children lacking birth certificates. This is part of an attempt to universalise basic education and the goal is to have universal secondary school enrolment by 2010 (GOSL 2002). Overall, there are more girls than boys enrolled in the Sri Lankan education system, and Jayaweera (1999) suggests the high proportion of girls largely to be due to the policy of free education, where parents do not have to choose which of the children to invest in. Gunawardena (2002) suggests that social class and geographical residence - rather than gender and ethnicity - seem to be the important variables in Sri Lankan education. In terms of accessibility of educational opportunities, as defined here, this is probably largely correct at the aggregate level, unless the difficult situation in war-affected parts of the country are interpreted from an ethnic rather than geographical perspective. Regarding gender, however, Jayaweera (1999; 2000: 144) argues that although the system has been successful in getting girls enrolled in school, there have been few efforts to

counter gendered socialisation processes and gender role stereotypes in educational materials and curricula⁶⁰.

However, the system has been far from egalitarian, in the sense of schools belonging to different segments providing education of comparable quality. In fact, from the very outset, "[f]ree education has meant a good free education in the schools attended by the privileged social classes and a bad free education in the schools attended by the masses" (Jayasuriya 1969: 181). The most important aspects of the "success story" was hence to increase enrolment in basic education (education for poverty alleviation) and to ensure that there were opportunities for educational advancement for "able" students from poor families and rural areas. Together with the expansion of the public sector - including factories, banks, and infrastructure projects - the expansion of the education sector increased opportunities of many of the rural poor to climb the social ladder (Hettige 2000c). Yet, the system has remained with segments of good and bad quality schools and there are important spatial dimensions to this segmentation. Jayaweera (1998) notes that the government used intervention programs to compensate for socio-economic differences at point of entry to secondary schools and to universities, instead of trying to eliminate disparities by also reducing regional inequalities in the provision of educational facilities. Both scholarship programs for broadening access to Central/National Schools, and district quotas increasing opportunities for university admission, can be interpreted as attempts to handle regional imbalances in the distribution of facilities, without really attempting to solve them. An increasing number of students from disadvantaged districts have entered universities, but at the same time, "...these districts have continued to be impoverished with respect to adequate facilities for senior secondary education, to the extent that some quotas cannot be filled even at low cut-off marks" (ibid: 314-315).

National Schools are thus one way of giving opportunities for social mobility also to poor children in marginal areas. Yet, according to the Deputy Director at the National Schools Branch (KI44), the upgrading to National Schools has been very politicised for a long period of time, with a growth of National Schools around the areas from which the sitting Minister of Education comes. Another issue is the division between different kinds of National Schools. In 1984 there were 18 National Schools and today, when there are 298 around the country, not all of them fulfil the necessary criteria⁶¹. Most National Schools ask for donations (bribes) when they admit students, although they are not allowed to, as government education officially should be free of

⁶⁰ There are other important issues regarding curricula that cannot be included in this study. Of interest could, for example, be the way problems are contextualised in textbooks - e.g. from where examples are taken to illustrate something - and if there are ethnic biases in educational materials (see Säfström *et al.* 2001, for a discussion about these dimensions in Sri Lanka).

⁶¹ There should, for example, be more than 1,000 students in a National School, and there should be possibilities to do the Science Stream at A-level, but this is not the case in all National Schools.

charge. Yet, there is immense competition for admission and parents are ready to pay⁶² (KI44). According to the Secretary to the Ministry of Education – Ms Tara de Mel (KI46) – there were around 40-45 *popular* National Schools in the country in 2004, to which competition for admission in grade 1 is particularly stiff. According to Ms de Mel, Sri Lanka needs more than the present number of very popular schools, otherwise it is impossible not to make parents disappointed every year when their children are unable to gain admission.

4.4.2 Low quality and a mismatch with the world of work

Acknowledging the impressive achievements in terms of education for poverty alleviation and social mobility, a number of problems have been shown to remain. Two of these, though interrelated, have to do with a low quality of government education and limited relevance of education in relation to existing job opportunities.

A low and decreasing quality of education is often referred to in the Sri Lankan context. The NEC (1997) argues, for example, that there has been a sharp decline in the standard and quality of education at all levels. These comments are, however, rarely substantiated quantitatively with time-series indicators showing downward trends, although there are obvious problems of quantifying many quality dimensions. If quality is interpreted broadly, as is the case in the document referred to above, such as personality development, respect for “others”, relevance to the world of work, or even “meeting educational aspirations of the people”, then it may well be true that quality has decreased. Defined narrowly, in terms of pupil-teacher ratios, examination results or even learning achievements, the issue is, however, more complicated. Low levels of learning achievement in areas such as basic numeracy and literacy are often referred to, to substantiate arguments of a decreasing quality, but the lack of earlier studies using similar assessment methodologies makes it difficult to see trends over time (MEHE 2000). Further, pass rates at O- and A-level examinations are very low (Chapter 7), but there is no persistent downward trend; at least not for the country as a whole (GOSL 2003). Pupil-teacher ratios will be discussed in detail in Chapter 7, but aggregate figures are also “improving” (that is, decreasing). A convincing example of decreasing quality is found in the research of Baker (1988; 1998). Baker wrote her Ph.D. thesis about formal education in Moneragala District in the mid-1980s, and on return ten years later, she noted a decreasing quality of education in the area, with poorly motivated teachers and a lack of educational input, as well as deteriorating school-community relationships. Still though, countrywide, it is not possible to conclude that the quality of education is going down in an absolute sense. Signs of a low quality, on

⁶² The existing policy for admission to “popular schools” builds on two issues: how far away the parent’s residence is from the school as well as the parents’ relationship to the school. The latter regard, for example, if the parents have been enrolled in the school, if there are other siblings enrolled, whether parents are government servants on transfer or working in difficult areas, etc.

the other hand, regarding both educational inputs as well as outputs of the system, are well documented (e.g. NEC 2003; 2003b; World Bank 2005).

There is, furthermore, a prevailing mismatch with the world of work, as indicated by persistently high levels of youth unemployment (Lakshman 2002; Gunawardena 2002). In fact the higher the level of education in Sri Lanka, the higher the tendency of being unemployed, with the highest unemployment figures noted for the group with A-level education and above (Central Bank 2004). This is to some extent explained by the poorest people, with lowest educational attainments, not having the "option" of being unemployed. Yet, the mismatch with available job opportunities, and an academic bias of the curricula, has been a cause for concern and reforms for quite some time (e.g. ILO 1971; NEC 2003). Furthermore, with increasing levels of education among the population, there has been an upgrading of qualification requirements for existing jobs:

It is evident that some upgrading of the educational qualifications for existing jobs is taking place. Jobs earlier held by the unskilled and the Grade 1-4 educated are being filled by those with a Grade 5-10 education with little or no upgrading of technology or productivity possibly leading to severe frustration among the new recruits. Areas which traditionally absorbed the 'O' level graduate e.g. teaching and parts of the public administration are upgrading their minimum qualification requirement to GCE 'A' level. The GCE 'O' level graduate is caught in the middle between these forces and remains unemployed for a very long period (Alailima 1991: 48).

Hence, passing the O-level examination after eleven years in school is not sufficient for many of the popular public sector jobs. This is not surprising but it has important implications for what kind of education that is aspired for among families and it relates to a widespread "diploma-disease" in Sri Lankan education (Dore 1976; Little 1997).

In Sri Lanka, education has often been blamed for causing unemployment, but blaming the education system alone for the unemployment situation is likely to be too simplistic (cf. Jayaweera 1998). The population increased rapidly until the 1960s and all students graduating from secondary and higher education since the 1960s "...could not be absorbed by an economy beset by adverse terms of trade and slow economic growth" (NEC 2003: 9). Today, there is much mentioning of English and computing skills to meet the needs of a changing economy, but importantly, these might not be seen as the most relevant resources for all groups in all areas:

...the most recent shifts in government policy with respect to English and IT reflect a widely held belief among policy-makers that school leavers in the country in general will find it easier to fit into the changing economy if they are computer literate and have a good knowledge of English. In other words, the high rate of unemployment among educated youth is at least partly attributed to deficiencies in these fields. It is true that today, people with such competencies find employment in the expanding private sector. In fact, the demand for such people has been more than fulfilled by privileged state schools, private schools and international schools. It is, however, difficult to comprehend how several hundred thousands school leavers could find such employment even if they

possess IT and English language skills, unless the economy expands rapidly within a short period of time (Hettige 2004: 17).

4.4.3 Financial restrictions and the perceived need for global competitiveness

Since the mid-1990s, Sri Lanka is a lower middle-income country in the World Bank statistics, but in terms of resources available for education, financial restrictions are still severe. The Sri Lankan government spent a large share of its budget on education in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, with a general economic downturn, these levels started to decrease, and this tendency was intensified during the structural adjustment programs of the 1980s, with an all-time-low of around 2.3 percent of GDP in the mid-1980s (Jayaweera 1998: 315). In the 1990s, however, expenditures were kept at somewhat higher levels, but they remain low by international standards:

Table 4.5 Government expenditures on education in Sri Lanka⁶³, 1992-2002

Year	As % of Total Government Expenditures	As % of GNP
1992	8.89	3.30
1993	8.65	3.00
1994	8.39	2.87
1995	8.03	3.11
1996	8.76	3.06
1997	8.76	2.90
1998	8.28	2.98
1999	9.23	3.07
2000	7.23	2.89
2001	7.99	3.06
2002	6.75	2.86

Source: GOSL (2003: 120)

Hence, despite thorough attempts to reform the education system since the mid-1990s (see below), its share of the government budget is actually *decreasing* in the new millennium. This decrease as a percentage of government expenditures "...has a direct impact on all development approaches in education" (GOSL 2003: 121).

Aturupane and Abeygunawardena (2000) see mainly two reasons for why educational expenditures have been so low in recent decades, by international standards⁶⁴. The first has to do with the high expenditures on education during the 1950s and 1960s, when educational expenditures averaged 5 percent of GDP and 15

⁶³ These expenditures are divided into recurrent and capital expenditures. Recurrent expenditures are defined as items that can be consumed within one year while capital expenditure have a longer duration. In the end of the 1990s, a lion's share - 93 percent - of all recurrent expenditures were for teacher salaries, textbooks and uniforms (Aturupane & Abeygunawardena 2000: 147). In addition, government spending on education are spatially progressive in the sense that there are "...higher public expenditures per student (...) in provinces where learning levels are poor and lower public expenditures per student in areas where learning levels are high" (World Bank 2005: 56).

⁶⁴ They give figures of government expenditures on education in Sri Lanka during the 1990s at 3.0 percent of GDP and 9.6 of the government budget, while corresponding mean figures for Asia during the same period were 3.5 and 13.9. The world means during this period are set at 3.9 percent of GDP and 15.1 percent of the government budget (Aturupane & Abeygunawardena (2000: 136).

percent of the government budget. In the early 1970s, they contend, the construction of school facilities was basically already completed, and attention was thus shifted to other sectors, with negative implications on quality inputs, teacher education, curriculum development, maintenance, and managerial improvements. The second reason is the civil war that has cost the government a lot of money since the mid-1980s. However, the NEC (2003) notes that, the expenditure decline started before the escalation of the conflict. In fact, the downturn started already in the 1970s.

The Presidential Task Force on General Education (GER 1997) suggests that the overall expenditure for education must increase to above 4.5 percent of GDP within six years. The NEC (2003) recommends an increase from 3 to 4 percent, in order to meet the long-term target of 5 percent. It is also added that there is a need for substantial inputs of better co-ordinated foreign funding, to carry out the required education reforms. In the poverty reduction strategy (GOSL 2002), there is no indication that the share of GDP or GNP devoted to education would increase substantially in a foreseeable future, and a prioritisation of educational expenditure is rather found to be necessary⁶⁵. The government, it is stated, should concentrate its resources on rural schools and on the education of the poor, while private education "...will need to play a growing role in catering to the demands of those who are relatively well off" (ibid: 75). This statement comes from the now-in-opposition UNP, but there has been, already since the early 1980s, a tendency towards increased private sector involvement and enrolment in private schools, after a decline in the 1960s and 70s (Hettige 2004). Further, the Central Bank (2004) notes the following, in a critique of the policy recommendations of the National Education Commission (NEC 2003), aiming, among other things, to enhance educational opportunities:

As budgetary resources for the development of education are insufficient, successful implementation of the aforesaid reforms depends on the identification of alternative sources of resources, promoting private sector participation and accepting it explicitly as a policy of the country (Central Bank 2004: 114).

The small percentage of people in the relevant age group with tertiary education in the country is often highlighted as a further weakness of the broad-based education system. Exceptionally high numbers of Sri Lankans leave for higher education abroad and competition for access to the narrow apex of the education pyramid is high. In the poverty reduction strategy (GOSL 2002), it is argued that there is a need to strengthen and expand the tertiary sector (university and vocational training), through allowing for a greater role to be played by the private sector. The goal, it was stated, is to have 15 percent of the relevant age group (20-24) enrolled in tertiary education by 2005. In

⁶⁵ However, in a more recent government review of progress in education (GOSL 2003: 121), it is stated that "...the Ministry has decided to come to an agreement with the Treasury to increase [the percentage of GNP devoted to education] to 5 % during the next four years". This document is produced by the UNP-government (2001-2004). Equally, in a discussion with the secretary to the Ministry of Education (KI46) under the subsequent PA-government, in mid-2004, she claims to have asked for 4 percent of GDP that year, but she did not think that it would be possible to get this.

relation to this, finally, there is considerable stress on the lack of contribution from the education sector to the competitiveness of the economy. It is argued that, although successful in other regards, the country has failed in developing skills necessary for global competitiveness. The following is a quotation from the former Minister of Education (2001-2004):

We have failed to continuously keep abreast with developments and make available to our younger generations the skills most needed in terms of developments taking place globally. The failure to teach English and impart Information Communication Technology Skills in our schools and universities is unpardonable. (...). It is sad to note that we have been able to provide only with unskilled labour to the global market. Our neighbouring countries have been far more successful in providing higher levels of expertise to the global market, though they cannot claim such high literacy rates or widely spread education facilities (Mr. Kodithuwakku, Daily News, 5/12-2002).

This quotation is highly significant. Today, India is presented as the "success story", contrasting a rather sceptical attitude towards an elitist philosophy of education, prevailing in the past. The Sri Lankan education system, in my interpretation, is seen to mainly generate human capital export in the form of migrant workers to the Middle East and to attract "Low-Skill, Bad-Job" investments, such as many of those in the garment sector. In an interview (KI38), Mr Kodithuwakku explains that, one important difference between India and Sri Lanka is that in the former, they have given more attention to quality than to equality, while in Sri Lanka, it has rather been the other way around. Now, he continues, Sri Lanka has got to do both, something that he sees to be possible because of the small size of the country and because of the comparatively low percentage of people employed in the primary sector. In the poverty reduction strategy (GOSL 2002: 60), the idea is, for example, to improve "...computer facilities in the secondary schools, with at least one secondary school in each division fully equipped". Furthermore, the goal is for nearly half of the students to be exposed to computers by 2005, in comparison with 5 percent in 2000 (ibid: 73).

4.5 Attempts to reform the education system since the mid-1990s

Policies for compulsory education and efforts to strengthen education in the north-east and in the plantation sector aim to finalise the "success story" in terms of education for poverty alleviation. There are also other children left to enrol in primary education or alternative educational arrangements, such as street children and physically and intellectually disabled children, and an estimated number of 57,100 children between 5-14 years of age remain to be enrolled (see World Bank 2005). Generally though, the focus today has shifted from participation rates and "access" to education, towards learning achievements beyond basic literacy (Little 2000) and to more general notions of personality development and a holistic approach to education (see NEC 1995; GER 1997; NEC 1997). There are several attempts to improve the quality of education;

dimensions that were often neglected during the rapid quantitative expansion⁶⁶. The basic idea is to meet "the needs of the people", "the demands of an expanding economy", and "the challenges of an emerging 21st century" (GER 1997). Reforms are intended to stimulate the quality of education through a switch from rote learning and teacher-centrism, to more of problem-orientation and pupil-centred, activity-based learning. As one way of getting away from the extreme orientation towards examinations, school-based assessments - of projects, field tours, group activities, etc - are added to the examination sheet together with results from examinations.

Quality of learning and personality development, are thus key concepts today. Several recent reforms can, however, also be seen as largely finance- and/or competitiveness-driven - some of them parallel to the actual reform program. I have chosen to focus on three issues of relevance for what follows in the empirical chapters: school rationalisation, teacher deployment, and the role of English. The first of these aims to rationalise the school structure in order to prevent wastage of resources⁶⁷. According to the Director of Planning, at the Ministry of Education, rationalisation was intended to handle the bipolarisation of the education system, with a simultaneous growth of the number of too small and too big schools (KI39). This was initially done by asking three basic questions: what is the need for new schools?; what schools can be amalgamated?; what schools can be closed down because they are economically under-utilised⁶⁸? Around 353 schools are estimated to have been closed, but in 2003, this closing down of schools was stopped, at least in rural areas:

Providing conditions are right, rationalisation is the best thing. But the problem of distances could create a situation where the students cannot go to the new locations. If it is 5 kilometres away, especially primary school children cannot go; there is no van service, and no public transport. So the mother or the father would have to take the child to school. But if they are earning on a day-to-day basis, taking the child to school would mean that you had to sacrifice that

⁶⁶ It is impossible to include all dimensions of these reform proposals and it is not really necessary for my purpose here. For an updated review of the new policies and their implementation, see NEC (2003).

⁶⁷ School rationalisation was one out of six components in the World Bank sponsored General Education Project (GEP1 & 2, 1996-2001, to be extended).

⁶⁸ There was a circular mandated to the Provincial Councils in which it was stated that small schools should not be closed unless a number of criteria are fulfilled. For one, there had to be another school within the compulsory radius. Second, there could not be any grave geographical barriers, like mountains, canals or rivers, on the way to the new school, and there had to be a proper transport system in place. Finally, there should be no important social hindrances - e.g. caste issues - for entering the new school (KI39). In a critical review of the rationalisation program (NEC 2003b; Jayaweera 2003), 351 of the 353 closed schools were visited. Most of them, it is reported, were Type 3 schools (82.3 percent), while 15 percent were Type 2 schools and 1.4 percent (5 schools) were 1C schools. Around half of the schools that were closed had less than 10 students at the time of closure, and their enrolment levels had been declining over the years. However: "There is evidence also that some administrators, through blind adherence to computation of teacher-student ratios without the investigation of contextual factors, have encouraged transfer of teachers out of these schools to urban schools or to schools in better locations, thereby further accelerating decline in student numbers and stymieing the potential development of these schools" (ibid: 6). There were signs of dropouts in 76 schools, with no disaggregation for gender, but it is difficult to know the total effects of closures and in many areas the reform had not been followed up. Yet, despite the lack of quantitative data "...the study surfaced information that belies the image of a smooth and successful programme of rationalisation" (ibid: 18).

service. So this is a very complicated matter. Unlike in Western countries, rural settlements are very scattered here. Therefore I had to suspend two of the circulars and allow them to be implemented only in urban areas, where distances are shorter and where there is public transport. In districts like Hambantota, it is very difficult to do it (KI38, Mr Kodithuwakku, Minister of Education, UNP-Government, 2001-2004).

Another ambition today - in relation to the rationalisation of the school structure - is to limit the number of students in National Schools to a maximum of 3,000, as well as to keep these classes below 40 students. This is part of an effort to enhance the quality of National Schools, many of which have grown too big to be fully efficient (KI39).

A second reform regards teacher recruitment and deployment, which forms part of a World Bank financed project of rationalisation of teacher deployment...

...the objective of which is to improve the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of staffing schools. Particular attention has been given to activities designed to: (i) relating teacher demand to teacher supply to achieve an overall student:teacher ratio (STR) of 26:1 for primary grades and 22:1 for secondary; (ii) decrease the excess of Sinhala medium teachers and reduce the deficit of Tamil medium teachers⁶⁹; and (iii) ensure a more equitable distribution of teachers to schools in difficult areas (World Bank 2004: 17).

The Secretary to the Ministry of Education says there are enough teachers in the system, it is a matter of deployment rather than employment, although there is a shortage in particular subjects, such as English and Tamil (KI46). From another perspective, NEC (2003: ix) recommends that “[t]he provisions of the circular pertaining to the deployment of teachers on the basis of a uniform student-teacher ratio should be amended to suit the requirements of small schools”. NEC furthermore mentions “...superficial assessments of 'decreasing demand' for teachers in a country with critical teacher shortages” (NEC 2003: 60). To this comes an ambition to increase intake from difficult districts to Colleges of Education, in order to handle the uneven spatial distribution of teachers (GOSL 2003).

Finally, since a few years back, there are concerted efforts to strengthen the role of English in all parts of the education system⁷⁰:

⁶⁹ In a recent draft report (World Bank 2004), a firm disapproval is expressed towards decisions to appoint more than 3,000 Sinhala-medium teacher librarians nationally, and 450 teachers to the UVA province "...outside the required approval framework" (ibid: 3). An understanding of the need for more Tamil-medium teachers is expressed. The reason behind the disapproval of the World Bank is that employment of new Sinhala-medium teachers would increase the excess of teachers in a time when the student population is decreasing, and it would hence jeopardise attempts to achieve "...the agreed STR [Student-Teacher Ratio] (ibid: 7).

⁷⁰ DFID and the World Bank (2000: 24) identify nine specific reforms in the new reform proposals, designed to meet the needs of an expanding economy through the strengthening of English: Introduction of oral English in grade 1 alongside the mother tongue; Improvement of materials used at grade 3, the point at which formal instruction in English begins; Improvement of the curriculum and materials available from grade 6; Introduction of English as a core subject at the GCE O level; Introduction of General English at GCE A level; Training programmes for teachers of English at GCE o and A level; Recruitment schemes for retired English teachers; Requirement for English proficiency among future teacher trainees; and Special pre- and in-service teacher training programme for English teachers at all levels. They argue against the introduction of English as medium of instruction at grade 1 - as that would

Since employers are already favouring youth with computing skills and English language ability, the position that many have almost fatalistically taken is that more and more opportunities should be created within the school system to provide such training. It did not take long before the government adopted it as state policy (Hettige 2004: 15).

For one, there is now an attempt to strengthen English as a subject, by introducing it as a means of communication already from grade one (playing/singing), while the formal teaching of English is started in grade 3 as earlier. Second, English has been reintroduced as an *eligible* medium of instruction, in A-level Science classes from 2001, as well as for certain subjects already from grade 6 since 2002⁷¹. In a number of schools with “adequate facilities”, four subjects are taught in English medium from grade 6, with more subjects added in higher grades. For this matter, 500 graduates were to be employed to teach in the English Medium (GOSL 2003).

In key documents behind the new education reforms, there is no mentioning of the reintroduction of English as a medium of instruction. In the public debate, however, a number of supportive arguments are heard. One is that the number of people in the country who can manage English is too small, which is seen to be detrimental to the competitiveness of the economy. Sinhala being such a small language it is also seen to be expensive and inefficient as medium of instruction at higher education levels. A second idea is that English should form a link language, to increase the possibilities to communicate across ethnic boundaries. This, however, presupposes that more than elite groups can manage it. A third argument is that this policy change will enhance equality. The reason is that today, mainly affluent children in International Schools get English-medium education, giving them advantages when competing for remunerative employment⁷². According to one of the main architects of this English-medium reform, the Secretary to the Ministry of Education, there were more than 300 government schools providing English-medium education by mid-2004 (KI46). The reason for introducing it at this moment, she says, is that subsequent attempts to teach English as a subject has failed during the last decades. It has not given what was expected in terms of a group of people who can effectively communicate and function in English. The government, she continues, could not wait anymore; it had to be provided *both* as an optional medium of instruction *and* as a subject. It was time, she adds finally, for parents to choose medium of instruction for their children, rather than the government.

be socially divisive - but suggest it to be the language of instruction at all A-level courses, as part of an attempt to meet the twin goals of economic development and social harmony.

⁷¹ Punchi (2001) sees the reintroduction of English-medium education as a result of external influence by primarily the World Bank and the ADB.

⁷² Interestingly, it is exactly the same discussion coming up again as it was when English was abolished as a medium of instruction after independence. According to Sirisena (1969), those who objected to abolishing English as medium of instruction argued that education in local languages would divide ethnic groups having different languages, another was that English was an international language opening the doors to the outside world and a third was that English was the language of a minority with power and influence, who would be alone in determining what was good for the country.

In the Southern Province, the English-medium program has largely been unsuccessful so far, due both to a lack of skilled teachers as well as to a lack of trainers for English-medium teachers (KI28). Yet, it is likely that the policy will continue, as there is consensus among the big political parties - UNP and SLFP - on its necessity. This is the voice of the Minister of Education in the former UNP-government (KI38):

The enthusiasm among parents and students is very encouraging. The only challenge is that there are not [enough] teachers. I think that in 5-10 years, this bilingual option will not be an option anymore. The vast majority will be doing bilingual education. I predict that within 10 years almost all schools will want to do their A-levels in the English Medium (Mr Kodithuwakku, Minister of Education, UNP government, 2001-2004).

4.6 The dilemma of educational planning in Sri Lanka

The dilemma of educational planning is about reconciling goals for global competitiveness, poverty alleviation and local relevance, within financial restrictions, without jeopardising ideals of equality. How, then, can the Sri Lankan “success story” be interpreted using the concepts introduced in the analytical framework, and in relation to the discussion about "global" trends in education sector policies?

In the decades after independence, the government increased opportunities for all children to go to school as well as the prospects for educational mobility for successful students enrolled in inferior segments of schools, by reducing the importance of economic and cultural capital, as well as of physical mobility. The abolition of English-medium education aimed to decrease the importance of cultural capital in terms of language acquisition, for educational advancement, while policies of free education, together with the introduction of free school meals, uniforms and textbooks all aimed to decrease the importance of economic capital. Furthermore, subsidised transport and a widespread distribution of schools - including Central/National Schools - decreased the importance of physical mobility and the friction of distance for accessibility of educational opportunities. District quotas further decreased the importance of area of residence for access to university. However, the government never really attempted to equalise educational opportunities by reducing quality differences between segments of schools. As commented by Nesiya (1974: 116): “Free education and Swabasha began to change the composition and character of the elite, but it was still Elitism”. This serves as a reminder that the Sri Lankan “success story” – though in many ways admirable in its achievements – should not be romanticised or confused for an egalitarian system with equal opportunities. Still though, there were opportunities for educational, and thus social, advancement in rural areas during the decades after independence.

During the last decade, a number of reforms have been introduced to handle remaining and new problems facing the education sector. The problems identified here - largely with the help of existing literature - have included a bipolarisation of the education system, a mismatch with the world of work, a lack of learning quality and global competitiveness, and persistent social and spatial inequalities in educational

opportunities. Although there are attempts to enrol the remaining children in basic education, focus since the mid-1990s is turning towards the quality of learning and personality development. Within continuously strict financial restrictions, however, there are attempts to decrease the wastage of resources by rationalising the school structure and the deployment of teachers, in order to improve both the equality and the efficiency of the system. There is a lot of pressure for privatisation of universities but also resistance making it difficult to go through with. There are, furthermore, ambitions to improve English- and ICT-skills for increased global competitiveness and employment opportunities. Yet, the local relevance of this for many groups and areas, is questionable unless there are major changes in the economy in line with the second challenge identified in Chapter 3 of connecting regions and groups outside the western province to economic development.

Several segmentations are hence re-emerging in the Sri Lankan education system - between the government sector and a growing private sector, as well as between education in local languages and education in English. In this sense, it can be argued that Sri Lanka is on its way to close the circle and return to many of the dualities of the pre-independence period. There are also segments within the government sector - such as between Provincial and National Schools and between different National Schools. The information given here opens up for questions about to what extent aspirations of parents and students correspond with this segmentations, and the ongoing changes within it, and about what resources that are necessary for being entitled to these different segments. In the chapters following the methodological discussion in Chapter 5, I will be more detailed about what educational opportunities poor families in marginal areas can access and how these opportunities are perceived. Chapter 6 provides a picture of aspirations and expectations with education. Chapter 7 outlines main characteristics of, and recent tendencies in, the education network. In Chapter 8, I look at family resources necessary for entitlements to different segments of this network. Finally, in Chapter 9, I return to the dilemma of educational planning. In this final chapter of the thesis, I discuss how educational opportunities of poor families in marginal parts of the country are affected in times of globalisation, and what this means in terms of processes of inclusion and exclusion.

5. FIELD METHODS, MATERIAL AND INTERPRETATION

However carefully you plan, research follows a crooked path, taking unexpected turns, even looping back on itself (Booth *et al.* 2003: 5).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive picture of what material has been used in this thesis, as well as of how it has been collected and interpreted. In section 5.2, I highlight a few important aspects about conducting field studies, the role of "outsiders", and what it means to work with field assistants. Subsequent sections focus more directly on the particular methods and material that have been used - semistructured interviews and observations (5.3), student essays (5.4), and the statistics collected to understand the spatial distribution of the education network (5.5). The chapter ends by discussing how the material has been interpreted and the results validated (5.6).

5.2 Going to the field

5.2.1 The role of outsiders in fieldwork⁷³

A main idea with doing fieldwork is to bring out experiences from the ground, by meeting people and discuss the issues with them, as well as to observe. When conducting fieldwork in the South, it is hardly possible to ignore the work by Chambers (1983; 1997). Two of his points are of extra importance in this section, namely the distinction between, and characteristics of, insiders and outsiders, and the practice of rural development tourism, which tend to conceal the realities of the poorest groups in the most marginal areas. I carry no illusions of solving these problems; they are more fruitfully seen as dilemmas that can be handled to different degrees and at different levels of explicitness. My role as an "informed outsider" is problematised below, after introducing six potential biases of fieldwork.

Regarding the risk of confusing research with rural development tourism, Chambers (1983) specifies six common biases in field research that I believe to be valid still today. The first is the spatial or urban bias, which is due to the fact that most outsiders use vehicles, starting and ending in urban centres and penetrating rural areas mostly through tarmac roads. This causes them to miss the most isolated areas. In addition to this, they often miss the poorest groups within the villages visited, by

⁷³ There is a difference between fieldwork and field studies (see Mikkelsen 1995: 27). The former is the process of gathering empirical material, necessarily conducted in the field. It is a process which is intertwined with analysis of the material and, if necessary, revision of initial questions. Field studies involve a number of different activities conducted in close contact with the field but not necessarily confined to the field. One component of field studies is the actual fieldwork.

keeping close to the main roads also upon arrival. The second bias is what Chambers calls a project bias, which means that villages that outsiders tend to visit, are the ones where something is happening in terms of development projects. These villages might therefore not be representative of other areas. Third, there might be a person bias, in that the people that outsiders meet and talk to more often than not are from the male, well-articulated elite, such as teachers and village headmen, raising new problems of representation. As a fourth potential source for skewed understanding of rural poverty, Chambers mentions the dry season bias. The wet season, particularly the time before the first harvest, is the most difficult period for many people, but it largely remains unseen due to the fact that outsiders often show up during the dry season. Fifth, there might be a diplomatic bias, stemming from politeness and/or timidity both on the part of outsiders as well as of poor people⁷⁴. The sixth and final potential bias is called professional bias. This might for example mean that too specialised researchers have difficulties seeing the various linkages between different kinds of deprivations, such as physical weakness, isolation, and powerlessness. It might furthermore be that findings are skewed by the interest of the researcher for coming up with "interesting" results.

The methodological approaches of Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) have been developed, in much by Chambers himself, for outsiders to get a better understanding of rural poverty. RRA and PRA share a number of key principles, summarised by Mikkelsen (1995: 69) as:

- *a reversal of learning* (by learning from people, directly, on the site);
- *learning rapidly and progressively* (by not following a blue-print but learning by improvisation, flexibility and iteration);
- *offsetting biases* (by being relaxed, not rushing, listening not lecturing, and by seeking out the poorer people and women, to learn from them);
- *optimising trade-offs* (between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness, by knowing what is worth not knowing, and by not measuring more than needed);
- *triangulation* (see section 5.6);
- *seeking diversity* (by seeking for variability rather than averages).

In addition to these shared principles, adherents of PRA stress facilitation (that "rural people" do it themselves), self-critical awareness and responsibility, as well as sharing of information, between the facilitator and "rural people", between rural people, and between different facilitators (ibid.). The approach chosen here is inspired mostly by the shared principles, while the role as a facilitator is constrained by not using any of the specific PRA-techniques (e.g. wealth ranking or participatory mapping). In this sense, this is not action research explicitly aiming to empower participants. As to wealth ranking, I used recent PRA-studies conducted all over Sri Lanka as a way of categorising families in order not to repeat work that was already conducted. There have been attempts of sharing knowledge directly (see 5.8.). Furthermore, I subscribe to

⁷⁴ As an example, I can feel that I sometimes did not dig deep enough into the discrepancy between aspirations and reality when I felt that the subjects tended to become very sensitive to the respondents.

the point made by Edson (1988), that a key feature of field research is flexibility, as a way of adjusting to the fact that we cannot know all relevant questions before entering the field. Adding new questions and interviewees, and being open and adaptive during the course of the work, are preconditions rather than problems in field research (Espling 1999), as it is a learning process:

[A field study] seeks answers to certain questions in a systematic way without following a strictly predetermined route of enquiry. Field study is a learning process and in the process new questions may arise which require analysis, sometimes by unthought-of methods (Mikkelsen 1995: 26).

If flexibility is threatening reliability, interpreted conventionally in terms of standardisation and inter-subjectivity, the point here is that it might increase validity, by providing more relevant answers to the questions that are addressed, as well as by allowing one to ask the relevant questions.

My own positionality in relation to respondents is of course problematic. To start with, it would be naïve to expect interactions between representatives of the "haves" and the "have-nots" of the world not to be affected by this unequal relationship. For my part, there is a risk of both romanticising life in rural, exotic places, as well as, somewhat contradictory, of representing people as mere victims stripped of agency. On the part of respondents, there is always a risk of them taking me for someone that I am not, for example as someone who has come to the village for starting up some kind of project. It is hence important to be very explicit about what respondents can and cannot expect to get out of the interview, *before* starting it⁷⁵. In addition to these class-related and post-colonial aspects, there are gendered dimensions of this interaction. According to Bernard (2003: 351), there are at least two consequences of gender when doing fieldwork: "(1) It limits your access to certain information; and (2) It influences how you perceive others". In other words, being a male may affect whom I get to talk to, what they choose to say to me, and how I understand what they are saying. The intention in this study is to discuss and make explicit these different aspects whenever they have been found relevant. Finally, if it is so difficult to do field research in another cultural setting, why, then, spend time and effort doing it? One reason could be that insiders might take things for granted and be too influenced by their own assumptions to see certain nuances (Alvesson & Deetz 2000), suggesting that a *complementary* outsider perspective could actually contribute something. Another reason is that every

⁷⁵ This links up with issues of validity, reliability and ethics. It is important to make explicit what the respondents may and may not expect from the interview, in order for them not to feel fooled or at least disappointed afterwards. If the outcome and aims of the interview is not properly clarified, the risk of answers being adjusted to fit what the respondents think that I want to hear is bigger. When I still have believed answers to be skewed, I have returned to the same issue once again during the same interview, but from another angle, so as to crosscheck my own interpretations. One example regards costs with education, where the numbers mentioned by parents sometimes seemed very high as the initial question was put. This could normally be adjusted or clarified as the discussion moved along and I got a better picture of what kind of family that I was in. Sometimes the same question had to be put several times in different manners, if I was uncertain whether the respondent had really understood the question.

research community needs first-hand experiences from other countries and cultures. A conclusion from this would be that the problem is not so much that people from Sweden take an interest in studying issues in countries like Sri Lanka. What need to be strengthened, are rather possibilities for researchers from countries like Sri Lanka to do research in countries like Sweden, as well as in other countries in the South.

5.2.2 Working with field-assistants

My main field-assistant is a university-educated woman of mixed ethnicity, normally residing close to Colombo. This means that she is something of an outsider in Hambantota as well. By working together for such a long time she really got involved in the work, which I consider to be a great advantage. In Hambantota town, a Muslim fisherman assisted me with interviews that demanded knowledge in Tamil. This man is more of an insider, as he resides in Hambantota town itself. To use field-assistants was found necessary, as my knowledge of the local languages is far from good enough to conduct interviews or analyse essays on my own⁷⁶.

There are obviously problematic aspects with using interpreters or field-assistants. For one, filtering or "barring" information through a further layer, makes the interview process into an indirect, four-way communication (Espling 1999: 102pp). Additionally, English is the mother tongue neither of me nor of the field assistants. We have thus worked hard with interpretations in all directions - concepts, questions and answers - both before and after interviews. Translating essays is very stimulating and rewarding in terms of insights, but it demands a lot of time and energy. Second, using a field-assistant means the presence of another person in the interview situation, which might affect whether people feel free to say what they want, depending on whether they see the third person as a possible threat or as someone to be trusted. It is easy to problematise the work with field-assistants. But one should not downplay the positive aspects of it, even apart from obvious language issues. It might, for example, be that the presence of another Sri Lankan makes discussions more relaxed. In interviews with women, as well as for girl students to write essays, it has been advantageous with the presence of another female. In some interviews with fishermen in Hambantota town, I felt that the presence of another "insider" was really helpful by creating a more relaxed environment. Working with field-assistants has, finally, allowed me to continuously discuss my interpretations, as well as to get a better understanding of how questions could be phrased in a contextually more sensitive manner. Acknowledging that it is a difficult task, and that there is a big need for training and team-building, I owe my field-assistants a great deal for having managed to go through with this research.

⁷⁶ This language barrier is the main reason to why planned focus group interviews were never conducted. The process of interpretation would reduce the dynamic between participants, which is what makes focus groups an important complement to individual or household interviews (Mikkelsen 1995).

5.3 Semistructured interviews

5.3.1 Some general reflections

The main research technique in this study has been semistructured interviews with parents, and the same technique was generally used in interviews with key informants, like school personnel. These interviews follow interview-guides with open-ended questions divided into themes and sub-themes. Open-ended questions are questions that require some explanation on the part of the respondent; there are no forced-choice answers. Semistructured interviews are, however, neither open conversations, nor closed and fully structured questionnaires, but somewhere in between (Kvale 1997). As Bernard (2003: 205) puts it, this approach to interviewing "...demonstrates that you are fully in control of what you want from an interview but leaves both you and your respondent free to follow new leads". I understand the interview situation as a guided conversation where I as a researcher am part of constructing knowledge in interaction with respondents. Total reliability in terms of inter-subjectivity is hence an unrealistic goal, as another interviewer possibly would end up in a partly different conversation. Yet, even when open-ended questions and semistructured guides are used it is not a free, non-hierarchical conversation. The respondent is affected by the presence of a researcher exerting some kind of social control (Silverman 1997). Not only is this a necessary ingredient in all human interactions. Acknowledging the conversational nature of the interview situation is a precondition for reaching an in-depth understanding and thus validity.

Conducting semistructured interviews is the most common technique for letting people present their own views and experiences; open-ended interviewing is a way of obtaining knowledges that often have been neglected (Smith 2001: 29). This is useful not only for understanding life worlds, but also for understanding how people's views of the world make them feel, how they relate to it, and what it means that they see the world the way they see it. It is impossible to understand how people feel and act without getting closer to the way they see their own situations, in relation to other people. But this does not mean that these understandings and perceptions should not be complemented with other perceptions and perspectives, including those of outsiders. There are ways of increasing the reliability of interviewing (see Silverman 1997: 148). Two ways, which have been used here, are pre-testing of interview guides and thorough training with field assistants before the interview situation.

5.3.2 Selecting and interviewing parents

The main rationale for interviewing parents is to understand their attitudes to education - aspirations and expectations - as well as the resources and constraints that they see as most important for fulfilling their aspirations. Parents and their children are the most crucial sources for understanding aspirations and expectations of the families, and voices of children are included through student essays (5.4). All interviews with parents were conducted in their homes. The choice of place for the interview-situation was

primarily to make the parents feel at ease, but it was also the most practical solution. In the analysis, I conduct counting regarding how far parents want their children to study, what school subjects they see as most important for their children, and whether they are sending their children to private tuition or not. However, my selection methods do not allow me to draw any far-reaching inferential conclusions from these analyses, and they rather serve to illustrate diversities.

When it comes to selecting parents, two criteria were used for stratification, relating to social and spatial marginality: poverty status and place of residence. Other ways of stratifying have been contemplated. Using occupational categories, such as farmers, is for example problematic due to the diversity of rural livelihoods. As to poverty status, there were two rationales behind using a broad conceptualisation of poverty when selecting families, that is, to include more variables than income levels. One is that income data is very difficult to come across while accessible proxies are notoriously unreliable. Selecting poverty-alleviation-recipients would, for instance, be one way of identifying the poor but it would not be valid due to the politicisation of these schemes. Looking at housing-status is a classical method for finding households at different poverty levels. Yet, due to housing-schemes and to the fact that so many people have migrated for work to the Middle East, housing-status is increasingly irrelevant as a proxy for poverty (Gamburd 2000). This is because many migrant workers remit enough money for a brick-house to be built, but remain with little money left after finishing the construction work. The second rationale for having a broad view of poverty is more theoretical, and relates to my own understanding of poverty as a deprivation of capabilities where income is important but far from the only factor to take into account (Chambers 1983; Sen 1999). Hence, a diverse and empirically grounded social stratification has been used as a point of departure, stemming from earlier research on perceptions of development in Sri Lanka (Shanmugaratnam 1999). These criteria include aspects such as land- or boat-ownership, public sector employment, water, electricity, furnishes, etc⁷⁷ (see Appendix 1).

What I did, in practice, was to first walk around in the villages, to get a picture of the area as a whole. Although bad as a proxy I have tended to use housing as a first way of finding parents belonging to the different strata, but I have had to wait until the interview was conducted before finally classifying the family as rich, middle-level, poor or very poor. A few times I asked the interviewed parents and other key-informants whether there were any families in the community being, for example, rich, whether there were families in which children were not sent to school at all, or if any families sent their children to schools outside the village. In effect, it was a combination of a stratified semi-random selection, and a snowball technique, where the latter is more strategic since groups assumed to offer certain perspectives are searched for. The idea

⁷⁷ This classification draws on research on poverty and development conducted in 19 villages in different parts of the country. The studies were carried out in the latter part of 1998 and early 1999, and aimed to grasp the perspectives of the villagers through participatory research methodologies.

with this kind of non-probability selection is to find experts on different situations, to illuminate diversity and different perspectives in the local communities, and to find groups that are causally related. This necessitates flexibility:

In intensive studies the individuals need not be typical and they may be selected one by one as the research proceeds and as an understanding of the membership of a causal group is built up. (...). This is not intended as a justification for empty-headed fishing 'expeditions'. It is just a counter to the rather peculiar idea that researchers should specify what they are going to find out about before they begin and an acknowledgement of the need to develop research procedures which do not inhibit learning by doing (Sayer 1992: 244-5).

Stratification means to ensure that certain groups in the population are included, and there was no way of obtaining statistics regarding how big the different groups were in the whole population. It is important to note that all but the "rich" are to be classified as "poor" in relation to the aims and the research questions. Furthermore, other groups than poor parents have been interviewed, in a search for additional perspectives. A few rich families were included, primarily for understanding possible interrelationships between the accessibility of educational opportunities among different groups. However, in the two rural areas, it was difficult to find any rich families at all.

Most respondents were women - either interviewed as individuals or together with other family members - and although my field assistant was a female, women probably spoke more freely to us when not alone. The reason for this gendered selection bias is the classical one: I mostly worked during daytime when many men are off working the fields, while women are more likely to work the plots closest to the home, in the household, or both. Research from other areas suggests that women generally are keener on investing resources in their children's education than their husbands (Colclough *et al.* 2003). Yet, only in very few families did I feel that the man might have had different aspirations with the children's education than the woman had.

In addition to these socio-economic criteria, I have made an effort to interview parents from different geographical settings. The sample thus contains families from rural - both paddy and chena cultivating - semi-urban and urban communities. One problem here regards the terms rural and urban, and for Sri Lanka, the term "rurban" is many times more accurate than any of the other two are (Meyer 2003). I have used the categorisations from the Sri Lankan administration (DCS 2001). Semi-urban areas are not found in the official categorisation, and in this study, the term is designated to Sooriyawewa town, a town with around 4,000 inhabitants which is not counted as an urban area in the census, but which also cannot be equalled with the situation in rural areas. Initially, I intended to include areas in the western parts of Hambantota District as well, but this was never possible due to time restrictions. However, as will be seen from some of the statistics obtained from that part of the district, this comparison would have been interesting in the sense that all "really good" schools in the district are found outside the Hambantota and Sooriyawewa divisions. To suggest that Sooriyawewa

Division is "representative" of all areas outside the western province in Sri Lanka would hence be a gross exaggeration, and there are big disparities between and within districts (e.g. Peiris 1996). There are also differences between urban areas within the spatial hierarchy, where Hambantota town is to be considered a marginal urban area in relation to other big urban areas in the southern province, that is, Galle and Matara.

Two villages and a smaller town within Sooriyawewa Division were selected for interviews with families, and it is in schools in these areas students were invited to write essays. The first village is Meegahajandura, situated in the Grama Nilhadari (GN) Division with the same name⁷⁸. Meegahajandura is an old village, dating back to 1840, and compared to many neighbouring villages, it was rather accessible physically some 8-9 km away from Sooriyawewa town. There was no tarmac road but the village was still accessible from Sooriyawewa town the whole year around. According to the local government officer (GN) (KI03; KI04) around 90 percent of the 62 households were farming in 2002. A main occupation was chena cultivation but several families also cultivated paddy through an irrigation scheme. In 2002, 69 percent of the households qualified for poverty alleviation, but as stated above, this is not a good indicator of poverty. Meegahajandura was chosen to "represent" a less difficult area within the division, which had irrigation-fed agriculture in the form of paddy cultivation. The school in Meegahajandura was officially classified as a Not Difficult school in 2004, which means that the situation regarding the transport system, electricity and water was found less problematic than in areas where schools were classified as Difficult or Not Difficult. It was a school with classes up to grade 11, and although the teacher situation in the school was one of the worst in the whole division (see section 7.4), it still attracted students from surrounding schools. Students who managed to pass the O-level examination – around seven out of 56 managed to get through on their first attempt in 2003 – went to the school in Sooriyawewa town for A-levels, or further away, to Hambantota town or Ambalantota town.

The second village – Usgalle in Andarawewa GN-division – is situated around five kilometres away from Sooriyawewa town. The village contained 115 households in 2002 and it was chosen to "represent" a more difficult area within Sooriyawewa division. Ninety percent received Samurdhi assistance and just about all families were doing chena cultivation in 2002. During my last stay in the field, in 2004, life was improving in the Andarawewa GN. An irrigation scheme had been started up, although few families in Usgalle were selected for paddy land and hence had to remain in chena cultivation. Furthermore, in 2002 and 2003, one of the striking things about Andarawewa and Usgalle was that it was difficult to get there when it rained, but in 2004, a new road had been built from Sooriyawewa town. Although not a tarmac road, the improvement in physical accessibility was substantial. More facilities were also given to the school, which was classified as a Difficult school, and by the end of the

⁷⁸ The term Grama Nilhadari (or GN) is used both for the administrative level below the D.S. Divisions and for the local government official "in charge" of that level.

field stay I felt that it was a school that was experiencing positive changes from having had an extremely difficult situation. Students went to the Andarawewa school up to grade 11, and if they managed to pass the O-level examination, they would continue for their A-levels in either Namadagaswewa or in Sooriyawewa town, or in a school further away. In 2003, however, no student managed to pass this examination.

Sooriyawewa town is a small urban centre, with 3,948 inhabitants in 2001 (DCS 2001). In this study, it is seen as a semi-urban area, as it is an agglomeration of people and services without being classified as an urban area in the census. The town was functionally much more diverse than the rural areas above, with banks, shops and paved roads. In Sooriyawewa town, it was furthermore possible to find small “hotels” (eating-places), Private Tuition institutes, communication centres, copy shops, etc. There was a newly built, good quality road stretching all the way to Sooriyawewa town from Hambantota town, and the accessibility of the town was hence rather good. Around the town, some irrigated paddy lands had been converted into banana fields. There was a big National School supplying this town and the surrounding villages with education up to A-level. Yet, due to the overcrowding of this school, a number of other schools in the area had been upgraded to ease the burden somewhat. At the O-level examinations in 2003, 106 out of 337 (31 percent) qualified for A-level, and those who were able to, tried to do this collegiate cycle in a neighbouring urban area; in Hambantota, Ambalantota, Tangalle, or Ratnapura.

Hambantota town, finally, with 11,213 inhabitants, was used to contrast the findings from Sooriyawewa Division, with examples from an area classified as urban in the census. This is the district “capital city”, located around six hours drive along the coast from Colombo. A key feature of the town was the cluster of administrative buildings built by the British, the *Kachcheri* (district headquarters). The town is more diversified ethnically than the district as a whole, with almost half of the population being Muslims (mostly Malays), and 395 being Tamils (DCS 2001). There was a harbour for small fishing boats, a small fish market and an ice industry in the town itself, and a Saltern just outside it. In the town there were a few big, semi-luxury hotels and a small supply of smaller restaurants. There were three bigger schools in Hambantota town, one of which was a Tamil-medium school with primarily Muslim students. Two of these schools were National Schools – with classes up to A-level – while the third was a rapidly growing school with classes up to grade 9⁷⁹.

The number and characteristics of all interviewed families during the first field period are presented in Table 5.1:

⁷⁹ Hambantota town is the only one of the selected areas to have been directly affected by the Tsunami in late 2004 (i.e. after my last field-visit), although also the big school in Sooriyawewa town served as a refugee camp for some time after the catastrophe. Around 3,100 persons are estimated to have died from the Tsunami catastrophe in Hambantota District. It was the divisions along the coast that were directly affected, i.e. Tangalle, Ambalantota, Hambantota, and Tissemaharama.

Table 5.1 Number and characteristics of interviewed families

<i>Status</i>	Rural			Semi-urban	Urban	Total
	<i>Usgalle</i>	<i>Meegahajandura</i>	<i>Other rural families</i>	<i>Sooriyawewa town</i>	<i>Hambantota town</i>	
Rich	-	1	-	1	-	2
Middle	3	3	-	1	4	11
Poor	7	6	2	8	5	28
Very Poor	-	-	2	-	6	8
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
Sinhalese	10	10	4	10	1	35
Muslim	-	-	-	-	8	8
Tamil	-	-	-	-	6	6
Total No.	10	10	4	10	15	49

Explanation: "Other rural families" are all living in neighbouring villages in Sooriyawewa Division, and were all seen to offer special perspectives, e.g. parents not sending children to school.

As to the families in Hambantota town, where the ethnic, socio-economic and occupational diversity of the population is bigger, there are "representatives" from all ethnic groups in the sample, but primarily from Muslims and Tamils (there were predominantly Muslims living in the town proper). Occupationally, they ranged from fishermen to people working in private companies, "abroad", and in the government sector. Agriculture in Usgalle (Andarawewa) was completely rain-fed, and there are no families doing paddy cultivation. In Meegahajandura, the families conducted both paddy and chena cultivation. The number of interviews was the same for three of the areas, regardless of their difference in size, while I made a few additional interviews in the more diverse Hambantota town. "Generalisations" should, however, not build on the number of observations but rather be based on an understanding of the mechanisms behind the phenomena one wants to generalise from (casually related groups). For example, the very few interviews with rich parents illustrated in what ways money and social connections could be used for access to educational opportunities. This is not to say that all rich parents are actually using their resources in these ways.

During the last period of fieldwork, in spring 2004, twenty follow-up interviews were conducted. Five families in Usgalle, five in Meegahajandura, five in Sooriyawewa town and five in Hambantota town were revisited. The rationale behind follow-up interviews can be to establish better contacts, to guarantee consistency over time, and/or to give both researchers and respondents a chance to reflect upon what has been said earlier (Alvesson & Deetz 2000: 85). To me, the final of these reasons was the most important and I used this second occasion mainly for crosschecking my own interpretations. What I did was that I revisited families where there was a particular issue that I wanted to clarify, but in these families, I also asked a number of other questions as well. Basically, I tried to get a deeper, as well as a more correct understanding of some key issues emanating from the first round of interviews by asking parents to reflect upon my interpretations, as well as by asking a few new questions. This was also the major outcome and although much less new information came out during a follow-up interview, I almost always left the discussions with deeper

insights about one or more important matters. Follow-up interviews were also a way of getting rid of the fear that earlier answers had been affected by such things as temporary stress and tiredness (that is, increasing reliability). The interview-guides from these two rounds of interviews with parents are presented in Appendix 2.

Booking interviews in Hambantota District was not difficult. Normally, it was merely to go to a family, introduce the aim of the visit as well as myself, and ask whether it was possible to make an interview. Only in two houses was I rejected an interview, and in one of them I was asked to come back another day when it was more appropriate (which I did). No tape-recorder was used, in order to make the interview more relaxed, at least for the respondent. After introducing my field assistant, myself and the aim of the interview, I asked parents a few of questions regarding their own background: number of people in the household and in the family, ethnicity and religion, education levels, occupation, income, etc. Through this exercise I also got a picture of how many people that lived in the household regularly as well as if there were any family members living elsewhere contributing with cash or otherwise. After this, interviews lasted between one and two hours. In most interviews, guides were followed closely, but if discussions took unexpected turns or started off from the "wrong" end, I did not interrupt unless discussions lost focus. Most questions were asked in all families, while some were left out if not perceived relevant in a particular family. I finished interviews by asking whether respondents wanted to add or ask anything. "Transcription" of field-notes, that is, writing up interviews on my laptop, took place the same day as interviewing in all but a very few cases.

One general problem in the interviews with parents was to get around the element of political correctness potentially embedded in the answers; for instance, it might be difficult for parents to say that they are not firm believers in education. Other problems regard the diversity of aspirations *within* families, as well as the common tendency in most societies of glorifying the past ("everything-was-better-in-the-good-old-days"). One way of qualifying statements of parents was to discuss the subject more in-depth with them, by posing questions about *why* education was perceived to be so important and so on, and interpret the answers critically. But it was furthermore found important to complement the voices of parents, by including other actors, as a way of getting additional or even contradictory information. This has primarily been done by including the voices of students through student essays, but also by asking school personnel about parental interest. Another line of qualification was to check the statements from parents and students against "reality", for example to compare attitudes to the education of girls with actual enrolment or attendance records.

5.3.3 Key informant interviews

Key informants are people who are well knowledgeable about the topic or area, or, more likely, some particular aspect of these. The term is used somewhat loosely here, as I will refer to all teachers and school personnel as key informants as well, for the simple

reason that I have interviewed them although they are not the main focus of the research. Doing a study about education without going to schools, and without talking to teachers and principals would, however, have seemed very strange. During the second period in the field, I managed to get an interview with the principal or the vice-principal in all but one school (Wedigamwewa), and these interviews lasted for 45 minutes or an hour. During the third phase I met the principals or vice-principals again, this time from all schools. At this time, I also introduced the questionnaire and asked them to comment upon the attendance figures for both students and teachers collected the previous year. Interviews with principals were conducted in their offices, apart from in two cases when I interviewed them in their homes.

With school principals I often had to book interviews in advance. Interviews with teachers were conducted more randomly, as opportunities came up, or when schools could manage without a staff member for an hour or so. I tried not to keep teachers away from their teaching obligations though. During the second period of fieldwork (2002-3), I interviewed eleven teachers, three in urban and semi-urban schools and the rest in rural schools. During the third period, in 2004, an additional seven teachers were interviewed formally and the selection of teachers was done rather randomly as it was a matter of finding someone who had some spare time. Importantly, however, and especially during the second fieldwork period, my vehicle worked as a kind of "bus-service" many mornings and afternoons, as we stopped to pick up teachers on their way to or from their schools. Many insights were gained from these informal chats and unstructured interviews/discussions. A lot of teachers from within and outside the district were also met on buses and in small eating places ("hotels") around the district and the country, often happily sharing some information with a stranger eager to know everything about their work.

In addition, I have also visited a number of Pirivenas and Private Tuition institutes. As there was little written information about these institutions, selection had to be made rather randomly although I tried to visit the places where children from the four areas generally were sent. Altogether, I visited and made interviews in five Pirivenas - one in Sooriyawewa Division, one in Hambantota Division and three in Matara town. In all but one of them I managed to get an interview with the Head Monk. As to Private Tuition, I tried to include several different kinds of institutes catering for different groups of students. Altogether, I visited and made interviews in six Private Tuition institutes, one in Sooriyawewa town, one in Tangalle town, and four in Hambantota town. In all of these, I spoke to both owners and tuition teachers (and sometimes this was the same person).

Important sources of information were the three Zonal Education Offices in the district, where I conducted a few interviews. A problem was that in the Hambantota Zone, there was a new director each year I came back to the office, allegedly due to a highly politicised appointment process. To improve my understanding of the local contexts, finally, I made interviews with local administrators in Andarawewa GN,

Meegahajandura GN and Sooriyawewa Division, and with the chairman of the Hambantota Chamber of Commerce. In addition, I interviewed the garment factory manager in Sooriyawewa town, the local representative of the World University Service of Canada working with vocational training in the areas, as well as a number of Buddhist Monks in Sooriyawewa town and Meegahajandura. In 2002, finally, I visited an Industrial Park in Beliatta Division with a small garment factory.

5.3.4 Observations and other experiences of value

All fieldwork involves more or less of observation. Making observations in the field is a way of reducing the risk of becoming too dependent on perceptions and statements from interviewees, either by seeing things that they are unaware of or by understanding issues that they for one reason or the other have problems articulating (Alvesson & Deetz 2000: 88). In this study, I have not conducted participatory observations, but it has given a lot of extra information to keep my eyes open for case material in all kinds of situations. Hence, observation has not been a chosen method as such, and yet one that has contributed significantly to my understanding of the research topic. Nevertheless, doing observations is not unproblematic, and it is commonly forgotten that even this, is a theory-laden exercise (cf. Sayer 1992).

Being observant helped me to see whether children were working extra in fields or in fishing, to better understand the troubles teachers had to go through to get to and from school, the actual time of their arrival to work, etc. It furthermore gave me the possibility to ask questions about how the information provided in interviews - e.g. about school facilities or sources of income in families - was compatible with what met my eye. I spent one day trying to help out in a chena-field, in order to get a better sense of the main occupation of many of my respondents. I did not follow classroom practices, but when introducing the exercise with student essays, I was able to see and feel some of the troubles that teachers meet as they try to conduct lessons in the long halls with no walls separating the classrooms.

5.4. Student essays

One major impediment in the formation of appropriate youth-oriented policies and programmes has been the lack of an in-depth understanding of the youth in terms of their aspirations and grievances, their ideas, values and attitudes, and their main experiences within the social, economic and political realm (Mayer & Salih 2003: 227).

5.4.1 Why student essays?

In addition to interviews with parents, 77 student essays have been collected in five different schools. This was one of the unthought-of ways of collecting information that I decided to include after experiences made in the field. One rationale behind bringing in the voices of students was pragmatic, as they were likely to have information that would not be possible to get by merely interviewing parents and school personnel. As

many students I met with tended to become a bit shy by the presence of an "outsider", letting them write essays was seen as the best way to really make them express their concerns. Another rationale relates to differentiated perspectives on, and experiences with, development, and to the discussion about whose realities should count (Chambers 1997). For educational research in general, Blasco (1998) suggests that an adolocentric perspective has dominated the field. In Sri Lanka, there are informative and comprehensive national youth surveys (see Hettige & Mayer [Eds.] 2002), but there was still a need to let children and youths speak out more in thorough on particular issues, such as educational opportunities.

Hence, grade 10 students were asked to write around 3 A5 sheets each, in either Sinhala or Tamil, on the topic "My aspirations with education and the problems I face in achieving them". They had three days for finalising this exercise. As incentives, I introduced a small competition by selecting three essays in each school, and give the winners symbolic prizes⁸⁰. All participants were given an exercise book and two pens, as a gesture of gratitude, but no one was aware of this until essays were handed in. A perfect complement to essays would have been follow-up interviews. Yet, as the idea of complementing the voices of parents and school personnel with student essays came quite late in the fieldwork, this alternative was never realistic.

5.4.2 Who wrote the essays?

The essays come from five schools: two in rural parts of Sooriyawewa Division (Andarawewa and Meegahajandura), one in Sooriyawewa town, and two National Schools in Hambantota town. These were selected as they belong to the areas in which interviews with parents were conducted. There is a system of classifying schools as "Very Difficult", "Difficult" and "Not Difficult", based on rather crude geographical aspects of the communities in which they are located. One of the rural schools was "Very Difficult" while the other four were "Not Difficult". Having visited all schools in the division, and a large number of other schools in the district, it is obvious that reality is more complex than this classification manages to catch. This issue is dealt with in the discussion about the education network (Chapter 7). I asked grade 10 students to write essays, both because they were sufficiently old to be able to comprehend and fulfil the exercise and because they were getting closer to the first selective exam after the

⁸⁰ Arranging these kinds of competitions did not feel entirely good from my perspective, but I was advised that it was the most accepted procedure in this context. The competition is likely to have affected the number of contributors positively. In one school I did not have the possibility to introduce this competition, and in that school the number of contributors were also very low. This was in Zahira NS, the only Tamil-medium school in the sample, where I only received altogether five essays (even as the students were informed they could write the essays in Tamil). Importantly, this "reluctance" was also due to that there was an excursion in the school the day before I collected the essays, which according to many students, meant that they did not have the time that they had expected for writing the essays. The day when I came to collect the essay was my last day in the field, which was the reason for not arranging with a competition, and at that day, I only received two essays. The other three essays from the Zahira NS students were sent to me by mail by the students, as I had reached Colombo.

Ordinary Level. The fact that their thoughts about education were affected by being close to this examination was evident from reading the essays, as they put a lot of emphasis on problems relating to this occasion. Where there were more than two grade 10 classes this was handled in two different ways. If I did not receive any information about systematic differences between the different classes, I just randomly picked one class. In one school, where I was told that there was "good" and "bad" classes, I chose to collect essays from one of each of these categories (that is, one "good" and one "bad" class). In three of the schools there were only one or two classes in grade 10, which made the choice less problematic as all students could be asked to write essays.

It is impossible to be certain about what this selection of schools and classes means in terms of biases, but examination results (see section 7.3.4.) show that the two rural schools performed very badly in comparison with most other schools in the division. An even more pertinent issue might, however, regard what students *within* the classes who wrote essays, and again, it is not easy to come up with a clear-cut answer. Looking at who actually wrote the essays says nothing about those who did not write essays. Still, all participants were asked to write what their parents were doing for a living and almost all of them were doing farming, either on their own paddy fields, or as chena cultivators, or as day-pay labourers for others. The fact that there commonly is more than one source of income in the family is complicating this picture, and many students did not state in what ways and to what extent their parents were doing farming. They were also asked to write where they lived and the number of members in the family, as well as family details on religion and ethnicity. The obtained information that has been possible to quantify is summarised in Table 5.2:

Table 5.2 Number and composition of essay students in the different schools

School	Boys	Girls	Total	MH	Medium of instruction in the school	Answers (%)
Meegahajandura	8	20	28	5,6	Sinhala	28/42=67%
Andarawewa	2	9	11	6,1	Sinhala	11/17=65%
Sooriyawewa NS	4	17	21	6,2	Sinhala	21/60=35%
St Mary's NS	3	9	12	5,7	Sinhala	12/32=38%
Zahira NS	1	4	5	6,0	Tamil	5/29=17%
Total Sample	18	59	77	5,9	-	77/180=43%

Explanation: MH=Average number of members in the families; Answer (%) is how many students that handed in essays divided by the number of students present when the exercise was introduced, which means that it does *not* include students who did not show up for school that particular day.

The total number of students who handed in essays would probably have been higher had it not been that the attendance rate in Sooriyawewa NS was down to 50 percent the day when the essays were to be collected, due mainly to rain. It can be seen from Table 5.2 that many more girls than boys have chosen to hand in essays. This might be explained both by girls having higher aspirations with education and by them being more used to "do as they are told" (both of these explanations to this gender pattern were frequent among school personnel). The exact reason is impossible to determine

and I will argue that a deeper study of gendered attitudes to education in Sri Lanka, among students, is warranted. The average numbers of family members did not vary much and it was much higher than figures for Sri Lanka as a whole⁸¹. As to ethnicity, an absolute majority of essay students were Sinhalese. The few students who wrote essays in the Tamil-medium school were all Muslims. Ethnic dimensions were hence better covered in interviews with parents, where the diversity was somewhat bigger, but most areas visited were ethnically very homogeneous. A potentially significant bias in the material is that essay students might have higher aspirations with education than their classmates and hence are more likely to feel frustrated from having few opportunities of achieving them. This bias was partly handled by including the voices of parents and school personnel. Yet, I received essays from almost half of the students attending school that day, which I consider to be quite a high percentage. From reading the essays, it can be concluded that students neither are only from a group of high performers nor only from a group of relatively unsuccessful students. There seem to be voices from both these groups.

5.4.3 What were students asked to do - what did they do?

There are five important aspects to be mentioned about *what* I asked students to write, and *how* they were supposed to do it. For one, I did not give any examples of what should be included in the essays. This would probably have increased the "precision" of some of them, but I also thought that it would bias the content intolerably. In fact, one thing making the essays so interesting is that they only include issues that the students themselves chose to bring forward. A problem is, however, that this makes them less coherent a source. Second, students were promised to remain anonymous, in the sense that none but my main field-assistant (another "outsider") and myself would get to know who wrote what. This is likely to have greatly enhanced the reliability of essays, and many students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to write about things that no one else ever got to know about. In all but one school, essays were carefully sealed with glue or staples, and many stressed that I was not allowed to reveal what they disclosed. Space might, however, be important here, and the fact that the students wrote the essays in their homes, and not in school, might have meant that they were more critical of the schools than of their parents. The reverse might of course have been the case, had they written the essays in the school.

Third, I asked the students to write essays in the way they wanted to write them. A few chose to write stories, while others included poems to express experiences and feelings. In retrospect, a certain amount of freedom was probably helpful, and some of the stories are rather illuminating. But sometimes, it is a bit difficult to grasp the underlying meanings of the poems, and useful material might actually have been lost this way. Fourth, as I knew that the word "aspirations" might not be obvious to

⁸¹ In the Household Income and Expenditure Survey for 2002 (HIES 2002), it is stated that there are 4.2 persons in the average Sri Lankan family, while the figure for Hambantota District is 4.3.

everyone, it was used interchangeably with "hopes" when introducing the assignment. From reading the essays it does not seem as if understanding the assignment was a big problem to any of the students. A fifth and final thing regarding this method is that some actors within schools obviously see it as a threat to their own positions. It all came out well, this time, but asking students to anonymously express their views surely has a potential to disturb relationships between the researcher and school personnel, by upsetting power relations in the schools. This further illustrates the importance of listening to more than a few interest groups when doing research about educational opportunities: Whose realities count?

5.5 Statistics about the spatial distribution of the education network

5.5.1 Data about schools, teachers and students

Semistructured interviews and student essays are important for understanding why something happens and how it is perceived, but these methods say less about questions like: how often? how much? Therefore, the distribution of the education network was largely approached extensively, by analysing the network and how it had changed over time; within the division and the district, as well as, to a lesser extent, between the district as a whole and the rest of the country. The aim of this part was primarily descriptive and I have not used any statistical methods, such as regression analysis. Most statistics collected regard where schools with what facilities were located, how many teachers there were in the different schools, in relation to the number of students, and how all of this had changed over time. Problems of using pupil-teacher ratios were discussed in section 2.7.4. These ratios refer to the number of pupils in a class, school, region or nation, divided by the number of teachers assigned to the same unit, and are often used as an indicator of educational quality.

Educational statistics are often incomplete or flawed, especially in rural areas (e.g. Lakin with Gasperini 2003). This makes any statistical exercise problematic. There are for instance certain incentive-structures built into reporting systems, which make the information in need of critical scrutiny. One thing regards the tendency among schools to over- or under-report the number of teachers and/or students for reasons relating to resource allocation (see Watkins 2000; Garrouste Norelius & Mendes 2003). This was a real problem also for this study. In one of the schools I was told upon visit that there had been over-reporting of the number of students, so as to be allowed to upgrade the school to include higher grades, which required a certain number of students. This problem was not so serious for the schools that I visited in person, which include all of the schools in Sooriyawewa Division, three schools in Hambantota town, and a number of National Schools in the district for which I felt that the data obtained seemed unrealistic. But for the rest of the schools in the district, and for the "historical" data, it is a problem that should be acknowledged.

A lot of statistics come from the national level, like the Ministry of Education and the Department of Examinations. Most of the material for the local level - apart

from the time-series data, which I obtained from the Ministry of Education - come from the local Education Zonal Offices, or from the schools directly. Originally, all statistical information comes from schools. They, in turn, send it further on to the Education Zonal Office, which passes it on to the Ministry. A guiding principle has, therefore, been that the closer to the original source, the more reliable the data. One problem with the statistical information regarding students is that definitions changed during the study period. Earlier, schools reported also repeaters as students. When obtaining the first set of data, the number of students hence seemed to have dropped more drastically between 2000 and 2004 than what was actually the case. For most of the big National Schools in the district, where the drop was most drastic, I visited the schools to get the correct number of students. Yet, I could not possibly visit all schools in the district, so this is another possible source of error in the material. The Statistical Director at the Ministry of Education told me that the Ministry has asked the schools not to report repeaters as students for a number of years, but some schools did not follow these instructions. Different schools hence follow different definitions. This means, in practice, that the Ministry provides teachers to non-existing students ("ghost students"), which probably is an inefficient way of using scarce resources, even though these teachers may of course be very useful anyway. Repeaters have the right to sit for examination again, but they should not be reported as students, as they require neither classrooms nor teachers.

Two indicators *not* used in this study are worth mentioning, because they are both commonly used to evaluate the internal efficiency of education systems. One regards repetition rates, and a main reason for not using these is simply that they were difficult to obtain in disaggregated forms. Furthermore, there is a practice in the area of letting students pass automatically through the levels, even though there are end-term examinations (that is, de-facto automatic promotion). On one occasion, for example, I asked some students, who were to sit the end-term examination that particular day, whether this made them nervous. They replied in the negative, saying that the teacher used to provide them with the answers anyway, and similar information was obtained from several parents. This means that repetition rates in Sri Lanka might say little about the internal efficiency of the education system. A second common indicator of internal efficiency is the dropout rate. These were not used here primarily because it was difficult to obtain the relevant data. Schools normally did not know how many of the students, who left the school, had dropped out of the system, and how many had moved to another place or started in Pirivena or in private education. They were all counted together, which means that they were not useful for my purpose at the local level, although they might still have been informative at the national level.

5.5.2 Attendance data of teachers and students

One important empirical contribution here is that pupil-teacher data was complemented with attendance records, for teachers and students, only available in schools. The term

"attendance" is used to describe different things, but in this thesis, "attendance rates" means the percentage of school *days* that students and teachers actually showed up in schools. Collecting this information for all schools proved to be heavy work, and school registrars were generally not well kept. On the other hand, this gave me a chance of hanging out quite some time in the schools, and thus an opportunity to make observations and conduct many formal and informal interviews.

There are some potential errors in the attendance data. Some principals told me that teachers sometimes help each other out, by filling the attendance record for colleagues who do not come to work. There may also be reasons for principals to show high attendance rates among teachers, because this can be seen to indicate legitimacy and good management, but this is less likely to have been a problem. Furthermore, many students and parents mentioned that teachers did not attend classrooms even at times when they had showed up at school, and this kind of absenteeism was not covered in the attendance records. In the few schools where they had reported half-day attendance as well, I have calculated two half-days as one full day. I cannot see any rationale for under-reporting attendance of teachers, and it is hence likely that the teachers' actual attendance is somewhat lower than the figures presented in this thesis show. As to student attendance, it is difficult to see any obvious reason for under-reporting, apart from the possibility that teachers want to shift the blame for bad results in examinations to disinterested students. There are risks of over-reporting student attendance, albeit less so than for teachers. I have been made aware of that some students helped each other out, or came to school in the morning to sign the book only to take the rest of the day off or go to Private Tuition. Again, it is likely that the actual attendance of students was a bit lower than indicated by the figures provided here.

5.5.3 School facilities: A questionnaire

To get information about the availability of school facilities in the different schools, a small face-to-face questionnaire was put together. In each of the interviews with principals, the same close-ended or forced-choice questions were put. The reason for doing this was that it was difficult to find information about school facilities in official sources, particularly at the disaggregated level, and it was seen as important for quality difference between segments of schools. The reliability of this exercise is likely to have increased substantially by me being present in the school, with the possibility to complement interviews with observations and additional interviewing with other actors. Hence, principals were asked to respond in one out of four possible ways - satisfied, not satisfied, not available and not necessary - to questions about the availability of toilets, desks and chairs, electricity and water, buildings, etc. The "not necessary" option was added quickly, as I understood that some of the facilities that were not available were not considered necessary to get. Unsurprisingly, almost none of the respondents said that something that was already available - satisfactory or unsatisfactory - was not really necessary. A problem with this way of doing it is that "satisfactory" and

"unsatisfactory" are relative concepts, making it difficult to compare between schools. For example, regarding electricity, the situation was found unsatisfactory in several schools, but this could mean that existing facilities were not working at all (Meegahajandura), that there was electricity but only in the office (Mahagalwewa), or that they did not have electricity for *all* buildings (St Mary's NS). On the other hand, these feelings were important from a bottom-up perspective and merely using "available" and "non-available" would have concealed even more nuances. In addition to these forced-choice questions, respondents were also allowed to come with open-ended comments regarding each question; an option which most of them used and which clarified some of the problems pointed at above.

It was not possible to get time-series data for school facilities. A sub-optimal method was applied to handle the time dimension by asking all respondents about changes over time. In a way, it was of course difficult for a principal to suggest things to go in the wrong direction in the school that he or she was in charge of. This is, however, not likely to be as influential when it comes to school facilities, which to a large extent were beyond the principal's influence. Many principals anyway advised me to approach others with the same question, for this very reason. I hence asked parents and teachers about how the situation regarding facilities had changed in their particular schools, in order to complement the information obtained from principals.

5.6 The interpretative and communicative processes

An important aspect of research is the degree to which others can follow or at least understand the interpretative processes. It is important to acknowledge that the interpretative process does not start when the empirical material has been collected (Alvesson & Deetz 2000: 130). Interpretation or analysis involves searching for patterns in the information and for reasons to why these patterns emerge, to add meaning to the result, and these processes start even before entering the field (Bernard 2003: 429). Patterns also emerge through interpretation in the field, possibly leading to new issues to probe or new informants to address (as discussed above).

Well at home, however, interpretation was done in a similar way for semistructured interviews and essays. I started by reading all essays and interviews without making any notes or classifications. As a second step, I manually coded the material in themes and sub-themes, often resembling the interview guides, but also with new themes emanating from the empirical material during the interpretation. Hence, the themes were a mixture at different levels of abstraction; from my analytical framework to respondents' own wordings. A third part of the process was to read all these themes several times, to get a picture of what should be highlighted in the presentation, as well as to move information between themes if seen to fit better elsewhere. It is important that the interpretation continues as the dissertation is being written, when new insights and synergy-effects emerge from themes being merged together. After finishing a draft, all interviews and essays were read once again, in their original form, so as to ascertain

a close correspondence between what people have actually said and what I write that they have said. This was to avoid "cherry picking", that is, unintentional picking of unrepresentative quotations supporting my own assumptions. The final reading was also another way of finding missed nuances in the material and to recontextualise individual quotations (Jackson 2001).

Both triangulation and respondent validation have been used for validating the findings. Triangulation has been used, both with regard to methods and sources, as ways of cross-fertilising and crosschecking the information obtained and enhance both reliability and validity. As field-assistants have been used there is furthermore an element of investigator triangulation (Mikkelsen 1995: 82), in that more than one person is examining and interpreting the same situation or text. The need for triangulation is partly due to limitations inherent to any method or source (or investigator). A strength of triangulation is that you do not get too dependent on one method or source, and that you get a more varied and rich empirical material (Alvesson & Deetz 2000). A main problem is, however, that different methods and sources might show different realities, which can be difficult to interpret coherently, and triangulation must therefore consider the context-sensitive nature of field research methods and information (Silverman 1997: 158). One example could be that if parents and teachers express different opinions regarding the commitment to education of the other part, this should be seen against the possibility that the relation of educational delivery is strained by other processes (as discussed in section 2.7.4).

As to respondent validation, I have tried to shortly present my immediate interpretations during interview-situation, to get a reaction from respondents and thus a possibility for reinterpretation. Probing questions were used throughout interviews, in as sensitive a manner as possible; answers can be challenged by the researcher, and back up-information can be asked for, but it should be done by way of crosschecking, "...not by cross-examination" (Mikkelsen 1995: 109). Furthermore, I participated in a workshop during my second field trip, where preliminary results and issues were presented to divisional secretaries and administrators from all 12 divisions in the district. This was made possible through my connections with the research program on regional development mentioned in section 1.8. Not only was this exercise part of an idea of sharing experiences and interpretations with the local communities. It was also a way of getting further insights and alternative interpretations of the empirical material. Finally, during my final stay in the field, I made follow-up interviews in around half of the families and in all of the schools and an important part of these discussions was to validate my interpretations from earlier field trips.

A major challenge has been how to present the material as transparently as possible. Two main strategies have been applied here. To help the reader scrutinise the interpretative process, for one, the empirical parts are full of quotations, to illustrate why the material was interpreted the way it was. Quotations are hence used to support interpretations, but also as a way of illuminating diversity, and it is therefore crucial to

follow, in the accompanying text, what a specific quotation is meant to "represent". Using a lot of quotations is a way of letting people represent their own views as far as possible. I have furthermore tried to interpret different kinds of information - e.g. statistics and interviews - in an integrated manner, to let the two cross-fertilise and crosscheck one another. The second strategy has been to make explicit the diversity of the material, as a way of acknowledging the sometimes disparate and contradictory nature of just about any encounter with the "real world".

6. ATTITUDES AMONG FAMILIES: EDUCATION, FOR WHAT?

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents attitudes to education among poor families in marginal areas⁸². To understand these attitudes is important for answering the first set of research questions, but it is also a necessary background for a contextually relevant discussion about the accessibility of educational opportunities (Chapters 7 and 8). The chapter starts with a general discussion about parental interest in education, whether it is seen to be important and the reasons behind these answers (6.2). Section 6.3 focuses on the students' aspirations with education, from an analysis of their essays, although students were not very outspoken on this matter. After this, there is a section about the perceived need for education in relation to the changing world of work (6.4), as well as a section about what skills that are important for access to different segments of the labour market (6.5). Section 6.6 illustrates the difference between aspirations and expectations, by bringing in the importance of role models and other social dimensions of attitudes, the availability of jobs and meritocracy, as well as a few notes on school quality (which is further discussed in Chapter 8). Finally, there is a section on whether education is perceived as being increasingly important (6.7) before the chapter is summarised (6.8).

6.2 Parental interest in education

6.2.1 Poor parents and the value of education

Despite earlier research saying the opposite, a popularly expressed proposition is still that poor, little-educated people, and peasant farmers, are unaware of the importance of education. Yet, when asking parents from the different geographical settings in Hambantota District, answers to the very basic question of whether education is important, are non-ambivalent: "Yes, of course!" (SMH02); "Education is the most valuable thing!" (SSH04); "That is why we spend all our money on education!" (SSH06); "That is why we are sending!" (SAH08). And so on. Generally, parents even laugh when the question is put, as if indicating that they find it somewhat silly. No one

⁸² This chapter draws mainly on the interviews with parents, but this information is also complemented with student essays as well as with interviews with key informants, especially at the school level. The quotations follows a reference-system where *R* means respondent, *Q* means question, *SE* means student essay and *KI* means key informant. Interviews are classified spatially, where *SSH* means that the interview was conducted in Sooriyawewa town, *SAH* means that it was in Andarawewa, *SMH* that it was in Meegahajandura, *HH* that it was in Hambantota town and *SOH* that it was conducted in another rural area in Sooriyawewa Division. Most of the time I disclose the school where a teacher or principal is working by referring it to a specific interview, but where I believe the information to be too sensitive, I let the respondents remain anonymous. This reference system is the same in the following chapters.

suggests education *not* to be important, although, as will be seen, the issue gets considerably more nuanced and complex as discussions move along.

Other actors in the education system might however have a different view of the value attached to education among parents. Research from other regions suggests that there might be a strain in the relation of educational delivery, with a mutual distrust especially between parents and teachers. Both parties might, so to speak, "blame other victims" of tough reform programs and economic recessions, and teachers and school personnel might, thus, be more sceptical regarding parental interests in education. In a way, this assumption derived from the literature is evident also in this study. There are, however, two kinds of answers about negative parental attitudes to education heard among school personnel, which are important to distinguish between. One is that rural parents are not interested in education, because they need the labour power of the children for other purposes, which hence is more related to the opportunity costs of education, rather than to low parental interest:

R - In the urban areas parents are interested [in education]. They have money and they try to send their children. It is different with village children; their parents are not interested in education because they need the labour power in their homes (SSN2, Teacher, Semi-urban School).

This view is actually rather common when school personnel are asked a second time to explain what they mean by low parental interest. Others are, however, more genuinely critical of whether poor parents take any interest in their children's education. A rather common view is hence also that parents, who are poorly or not educated at all, cannot see a value in education. Yet, the dimension of opportunity-costs is surfacing in the background of the following quotation as well:

R - Parents who are not educated do not see the value of education. Just a few parents here are interested, and they try to push their children for education, but the others are not interested. They try to keep their children at home to do work (SMa1, Vice-Principal, Rural school).

A third position among school personnel is, finally, that parents unambiguously are very interested in education, and this position is just as common as the other two:

R - Parents are very interested in education, but they do not have enough money. All are farmers, doing chena, but they want to send their children (SMe4, Teacher, Rural School).

Listening to what students have to say might be another way of qualifying the perceptions of reality, as presented by the parents themselves. This is indeed one intention with bringing in voices of other actors than parents; to get around possible biases stemming from what is regarded "politically correct". However, there is little doubt when reading the essays that students feel that their parents value their education highly, although many bring this up in very generalised ways. The prime example

regards money, and how parents spend the little money they have left after buying food and other necessities on expenditures for education:

My father does not have a permanent job. My mother also does not have a job. He earns little money, and this little money he spends on education for my three sisters and me. My only hope is to fulfil their hopes (SE43 - Urban Girl).

Our parents spend money for us with big difficulties. We should not do useless things; that would be a sin. They spend every cent on us; we have to make use of that to get benefits (SE19 - Rural Boy).

Yet, a large number of students have a slightly different focus than parents express themselves, regarding why their parents are so interested in education. Many students stress, for example, that educating the children is the only hope parents have for getting out of their difficult situations, while very few parents, as I will show, say that educating the children is for their own economic benefit. Nevertheless, among students it is hence common that they bring up how they want to help their parents through being successful in school. This is an important driving force for students as well as a source of frustration if they feel that they might fail in meeting these aspirations:

In these villages, people have low incomes. Parents have a lot of money problems. But the parents try to give good education to their children to try to send them up in society. After that, they [the children] can get good jobs. That is good for their families. They can help their parents - the parents also have hopes (SE70 - Semi-urban Girl).

My parents send me to Private Tuition with big difficulties, because there are no teachers. Their hope is to somehow send me up. When I think about the O-level examinations I am afraid, because there is a lack of teachers in our school (SE22 - Rural Girl).

The rather widespread ideas among school personnel that poor, little-educated parents and peasant farmers do not really value education, and that they need more incentives for doing so, does not get any support from student essays. None of the students complain about a lack of home support, apart from the few who mention that low education levels of parents make it difficult for them to help out with homework. That is another matter though, to be discussed as cultural capital. Hence, from feeling that parents have sacrificed so much in order to send them to school, there is rather a deep sense of indebtedness expressed by many students.

6.2.2 Why education is important

According to the voices of parents and students, then, there is no doubt that parents can see a value in education. A more pertinent issue than *whether* education is seen as important might hence regard *why* parents say that they are so interested in education. One possibility is that parents see education to be important because they feel that they themselves could gain something from sending their children to school. Yet, it is not at all common that parents say that they are interested in their children's education for

their own future gains, although it is difficult to distinguish this clearly from what might be considered "politically correct". A few parents however do mention their own future wellbeing as a reason for why it is important that their children go to school. One poor, rural man, for example, suggests that, "Education can give the [children] a good position. They can find a job. Then they can take care of their parents" (SMH01). A middle-level, rural woman argues, in a similar vein, that, "When they are educated they can get somewhere, and after that, it will be good for us" (SAH08), while a poor, rural woman contends that, "We have to come up from this position. Therefore we send the child to school every day" (SOH01). However, to distinguish between gains for the children and gains for the parents themselves is a fruitless endeavour; if it is good for the children it most often will be good also for the parents. But parents do aspire for education to allow for their children to lead lives they themselves have never had (see below). This is related to, but qualitatively different from, educating the children for one's own benefit.

Very few parents mention education to be important for learning the three R's - that is, reading, writing and arithmetic. Major concerns for these very few parents are, however, that without being able to read, write or count, you cannot read boards, write or read letters, fill forms in public institutions, etc. This is thus one part of what is meant by the expression coming up in many interviews, that, "Without education, you cannot go to society"⁸³. "Going to society" - or "facing society", which is another way of saying almost the same thing - means to be able to confront others without shame; to be respected for whom you are. This is an extract from a discussion with a poor, rural man, a peasant farmer, in Usgalle Village:

R - To live in society, they need to have some education.

Q - Can you explain that - why do they need to have some education to live in this society?

R - People need even a little education, otherwise they cannot do anything. If they farm they can get a harvest, but when they go to the fair, they cannot sell their harvest if they cannot count. Without education, people cannot even go on the road.

Q - Why can they not go on the road?

R - If someone has education, then he can go on the road without fear - read boards on buses, find the direction, and such things (SAH10).

Among these parents, knowing how to read and write are considered key requirements for living in the Sri Lankan society. This is also related to the risk of being looked down upon by other members in society. If you cannot read, for example, you run the risk of being considered a fool (SAH04), or a worthless citizen (SE22). Still though, even parents that do mention the importance of the three R's often have much higher aspirations with their children's education than this, often hoping that one day, they will even reach the university. It is clear that even parents in marginal areas see that at least

⁸³ *Samayata yanne* [go to society] is an expression that is used in many interviews and essays.

some education is a basic requirement for leading lives that they value. Yet, there is much more to it than this, if the surface is scrapped.

It is very common that parents say that education is what could help the children become something more than their parents have become, for example: "I want my children to become more than me" (SMH06, poor, rural woman). This is a way of probing deeper into how parents understand the potential value of education, as many of them relate their own difficult situations to the fact that they did not receive enough education when they were young:

R - If he [my son] is not good in education he cannot come up. Then he has to work as his father, as a labourer. We know about the importance of education, because we did not get good education, and now we are suffering. (...). Today, his father is working under the hot sun because he did not get good education (SSH06, poor, semi-urban woman).

R - We did not study well, and that is why we are in a very low position. We do not want to see our children in the same position (SAH05, poor, rural woman).

Education is hence seen as a key tool for not being engulfed in intergenerational traps; for the children to "come up" or to "get out of this position". Still, many of the parents interviewed have gone through quite a few years of the education cycle themselves. A quotation from a middle-level, rural woman, who later in the same discussion says that she wants for her children to become teachers, illustrates this:

R - I studied up to O-level but I am doing farming and I do not want to send the children the same way (SAH08, middle-level, rural woman).

Related to the above is that some parents highlight that providing education for the children is essential, because it is the only thing that they can give them as protection for the future. Even though the children might not get a job from education, they say, others in society will at least not look down upon them if they are educated. This might thus partly explain why parents continue to send their children to school, even in a situation of high youth unemployment:

R - I am not going to build a new house because I want to spend all of the money on their education. We do not have any property to give them. I want them to study as far as possible. (...). It is not for the job; they are going to society. When they go to society, people do not care about them if they do not have education. A job is very important, but I do not have jobs as the target (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

Not having jobs as a target with education is, I would say, exceptional, although parents often have other targets that jobs with sending their children to school. Especially in a situation where parents do not have any land or other productive property of their own, they tend to stress this aspect of securing the children's futures with education, as they cannot see what else they could give them. To one middle-level urban man, this is why education is even more important in urban areas, because urban children will not have any land to cultivate in the future, if they cannot find a job through their education

(HH11). Yet, most rural families would disagree. Also peasant farmers who do have some land almost invariably stress the importance of education, as they do not want for their children to end up as farmers in the future.

Though a main aspiration, many parents and students do not expect to gain much economically from education (see section 6.6.). An important reason for attending school - despite this - is that education is perceived important for the ethics of the individual as well as for the society as a whole. One thing that is commonly brought up is that it is important that children learn to respect and/or obey their parents and other elders, and this is mostly mentioned by rural parents (e.g. SMH01; SMH02; SMH03). This is hence something that they want the children to learn in school, although it is not always clear whether this is what they see that the children learn there. Another thing, which is often mentioned by parents as a rationale for educating their children, involves them becoming "good citizens". This is mostly used as an equivalent to, "learn about good and bad" (SMH04), "separate between right and wrong" (SMH08), or to live in society, "without disturbing others" (SAH10):

R - They might not find a job, but if you want to be a good person in society, you need education.

Q - Do you mean for getting a high social status?

R - No, I am not talking about social status, I am talking about being a good citizen (SMH02, middle-level, rural man).

Interestingly, most parents do not stress religion as a particularly important subject, and when asked, they rather tend to bring forward subjects that are deemed to be of importance for getting good jobs (see section 6.5.1). It is likely, but not readily clear, that many perceive the prime role of the school to be to impart other kinds of knowledge, as religious issues are taught in the religious schools, which most children attend in weekends. But ethics can of course be about more than religion, despite their close interconnections in many contexts, and several parents stress the need for a good language and a good behaviour, and that schools should play a role in equipping the children with these skills. This is also used as one way of distinguishing "good" from "bad" schools by some parents, and rural schools tend to be seen as better in this regard (that is, students in rural schools are not seen to get a "bad behaviour").

The importance of "good ethics" is also mentioned by many students, although it is most commonly, but far from only, brought up by rural and semi-urban students. To many, education and knowledge are seen to be of importance for being able to make ethical choices in life, and hence for living in a righteous way:

From school education we can get good education. Not only that - we can get good ethics, rules and regulations. Now the society is going away from good ethics. Today, the society does not take care of their mothers and fathers (SE46 - Urban Girl).

A general feeling among several students, exemplified with this quotation above, is expressed to be that the sense of ethics is being lost in the present society, giving way

to "new" values based on greed and competition. This feeling is expressed also among parents, especially regarding that children of today do not obey elders the way children used to do when the parents themselves were young. This is probably nothing peculiar, and my discussions on this issue did not take me deep enough to distinguish these expressions from more shallow notions of everything-being-better-in-the-past. Nevertheless, this ethics-dimension of educational aspirations might be related to a rapid growth of the number of Pirivena students in the district, as an alternative to government schools (see section 7.7).

Education is hence often seen as important to protect "good ethics" and to make "good citizens" out of the children, although schools might not always be seen to fulfil this mission successfully. Here is a final voice from a woman whose children have already finished school, and she stresses the aspect of becoming "good citizens" when evaluating their success:

Q - What aspirations did you have with sending your children to school?

R - I hoped that they would become educated people, good citizens. And now I am happy. All of my children are very good. They do not drink - they do not even smoke!

Q - So your aspirations are fulfilled?

R - Yes, I live very peacefully. I gave them all the encouragement. Now they can choose their path (SMH05, middle-level, rural woman).

It should be mentioned, however, that this woman has been exceptionally lucky with her children's education. They could all come to popular schools in Matara town, despite the fact that she is living in Meegahajandura village, and despite the fact that she says that she was economically poor at the time of her children's education. According to herself, admission to these popular schools was possible because one of her sons became a Buddhist Monk, and therefore could provide her with good connections (that is, improve her social capital), and help her to send the other children to popular schools as well. Now all of the children are sending her parts of their comparatively high salaries and she no longer describes herself as a poor woman.

6.2.3 Variations across society and space

So far, the argument has been that parents have high aspirations with regard to their children's education, although it remains to be specified what these aspirations really are, apart from "getting out of this position" and "becoming good citizens". However, parents should not be treated as a homogeneous category⁸⁴, and it is important to contextualise them and see whether this makes any difference regarding how they see the value of education. Yet, the most striking finding regarding this is that aspirations with the children's education differ so little between groups of parents across society and space. To begin with, it is difficult to see in what ways rural and urban parents

⁸⁴ Neither should students be treated as a homogeneous category. I have prioritised here to focus on gender issues in relation to whether education is important, as well as when it comes to issues of accessibility (Chapter 7), rather than in differentiated job aspirations for boys and girls.

differ as to whether they regard education as important for the future. Further, Table 6.1 below illustrates how far up the educational ladder parents want their children to climb:

Table 6.1 Level of education aspired for by parents in the different areas

Level of education aspired for by parents	Meegahajandura Village	Usgalle Village	Sooriyawewa Town	Hambantota Town	Total
O-level	0	0	0	4	4 (9 %)
A-level	1	3	2	3	9 (20 %)
University	6	7	7	3	23 (51 %)
Question not asked ⁸⁵	3	0	1	5	9 (20 %)
Total number of parents	10	10	10	15	45

Source: Interviews with Parents

Hence, university education is by far the most common aspiration in all areas but Hambantota town. The reason it is only the *urban* area that differs in this regard is that several of the Muslim and Tamil fisher families living there have lower aspirations than other groups in other areas (see below).

Furthermore, there is no support whatsoever for the idea that rural children would need a different kind of education - more relevant to rural areas - from children in urban areas. On the contrary, it is clear that rural parents think that a spatially differentiated education system would risk placing their children in an inferior position, compared to urban children. Below follow just a few examples of such a fear, but the issue comes up frequently during discussions, and no one really sees any advantages with such a system, including the urban parents⁸⁶:

R - If there was a difference [between rural and urban children], and the [rural] children went to town, they would not know how to speak with them [urban children]. They would be lower than them (SOH02, poor, rural man)

R - Same! They will select what they want, but it should be the same education system for rural and urban children. If there are different education systems there will be a big divide between urban and rural children. They [rural children] would always be farmers; they could not move to another status in society (HH08, middle-level, urban man).

Hence, my findings clearly suggest aspirations to be rather homogeneous across space. This is of course very important for what follows and the main message is non-ambivalent: education is seen as a vehicle for social mobility that should be the same for everyone regardless of where in the country they live. As could be expected, those parents who are illiterate and very poor mention the importance of the three Rs more often than do other groups of parents. Still though, also these parents stress the importance of English, and of passing at least the O-level examination, in achieving their aspirations. Very poor and poor parents also see that if they want to provide their

⁸⁵ One reason for not asking the question, in some cases, was because there were no children in school.

⁸⁶ This latter might, however, partly be due to that many of urban parents - living in Hambantota town - consider themselves to be rural in relation to, particularly, people from Colombo. This means that although I try to be consistent in the way I use the terms rural, semi-urban and urban, my understanding sometimes differ from the perceptions of the respondents.

children with an education that can give them the possibility to lead a different kind of life than what they themselves are doing, learning the three Rs will not suffice.

Undoubtedly, this is related to that education - at least among parents - largely is seen as a means to leave the rural areas. This is an issue that was discussed particularly in the follow-up interviews and only in one family (SSH05, revisit 2004), the poor, semi-urban mother was not keen on her children leaving Sooriyawewa after they have finished school. Under ideal circumstance, many parents would of course have preferred to live close to their children also in the future, but the picture as to where they actually preferred to see the children's future is very clear:

R - If they get a good education they cannot find a job here; all are farmers. There is nothing to do here. When they have education they have to go somewhere else to find good jobs (SSH06, revisit 2004, poor, semi-urban woman).

R - [Laughter] No that is not good [for the children to live in rural areas in the future]. They have to go away from the village. If they could live in a town that would be better (SMH04, revisit 2004, poor, rural woman).

The reasons behind this, and to what extent it is something new, will be further problematised in the sections that follow.

Almost all parents interviewed clearly state that there should be no differences between girls and boys, that both sexes should have equal access to education. At least as a principle, this position is not contested. These statements and principles have to be qualified with attendance data as it is possible, again, that there are certain answers that are considered more politically correct than others. In the rural and semi-urban Sinhalese-dominated areas, the only person who actually wants to make a distinction between gender groups, as to the importance of education, is a poor, illiterate Sinhalese woman in Sooriyawewa town (SSH04). She suggests that education is more important for girls, so that they can better protect themselves better in the society. Apart from this, the major difference comes in some urban families in Hambantota town. The parents that differentiate between boys and girls are normally very poor and poor Muslim fisher families, but a similar argument is also heard in one of the very poor Tamil families:

R - Education is more important for boys. As we are Muslims, the girls do not need much education (HH02, poor, urban, Muslim fisherman).

R - If we had had boys they would have needed more education.

Q - Why?

R - Because when we give education to boys they can go anywhere. Girls will have to stay at home anyway. Boys need to know English.

Q - And girls do not need that?

R - No! (HH06, poor, urban, Muslim housewife, husband fisherman)

There is thus a socio-cultural dimension to differentiated educational aspirations for boys and girls, particularly regarding Muslim families who often motivate their gendered aspirations with the fact that they are Muslims. But it is important to stress

that most families, even among these groups, still suggest that education is equally important for boys and girls and attendance rates are higher for girls than for boys also in the Muslim school in Hambantota town (section 8.6). Moreover, one poor, urban fisherman contends that boys can get by with less education than girls, and that it hence is important for girls to learn computer skills so that they can work in the city (HH03). Another thing is that among the Muslims who are not doing fishing as an occupation, and who are not as poor as this particular group tend to be, there are no such gender-differentiated statements and everyone says that education is equally important for both sexes. In related research referred in chapter 2, parents had equally stated that there were no differences between gender groups, but when asking the children, it was found that there were. But no students suggest that they get treated differently by their parents due to gender, although many girls in Hambantota town experience gender discrimination from various other actors within the schools (section 8.3).

Yet another, but related phenomena, is that among the Muslim and Tamil fisher families stating gender preferences in favour of boys, the general aspirations with education are much lower than for families in other groups and in other areas. It is more common in these families to hear that education is important for learning the three Rs, and more importantly, just a few of them mention that they aspire to send the children to the university. Partly, this may also be related to the fact that there is a widespread feeling of being discriminated against in the labour market as well as in society at large. This is especially so for Muslims and very poor Tamils: "For Muslim people, it is very difficult [to get a good job] even with a good education. First they give to the Sinhalese people" (HH02, poor, urban male Muslim). A very poor, urban Tamil man says that, "...in Hambantota, no one cares about the Tamil people. All Tamils work under people from other religions - we are the lowest. (...). That is why a lot of Tamil children are not going to school" (HH15). It is impossible from such a small sample to give a definite answer as to what the most important factors behind the lower aspirations with education among these groups are. The answer seems to rest in a combination of religious interpretations, poverty levels, and educational backgrounds of parents, but there are hence perceived ethnicity-related constraints to the accessibility of "good jobs", which come into the picture as well.

6.3 Students' aspirations with education

The students choose to write more about problems they have with achieving their aspirations, than about what these aspirations actually are, which is unfortunate but rather understandable. There are differences between the five schools, but more noticeable is that aspirations with education are very high among almost all of the students who write essays. It is, however, important to remember to distinguish between aspirations and expectations, something that is obvious when aspirations of students and parents are confronted with their experiences with reality, and with the chances they see for fulfilling their aspirations (see section 6.6).

A lot of aspirations with education, among students, are concerned with "getting a good job", and a few general things can be said about their job aspirations. First, rural students are less keen on specifying their job aspirations, and many of them rather tend to discuss the matter in a general manner. Very general statements about "getting a good job", passing examinations, going to the university or to higher education, becoming a "good citizen", getting into a high or a good position in society, taking care of parents and siblings, etc, are commonly not followed up or specified by rural students. In contrast, among urban and semi-urban students, aspirations tend to be more precise; just below 50 percent of these students specify preferred future occupation in their essays, whereas the corresponding figure for rural students is merely 23 percent. From a few random follow-up discussions with rural essay-students (e.g. SAH08; KI24), it is, however, clear that they do nurture specific job aspirations as well, even though they seem reluctant to spell them out. Second, among those who mention specific job preferences, it is more common for rural students to mention the teaching profession, while urban and semi-urban students more often want to become doctors. This might partly be a result of the availability of streams for A-level - in areas where Science is not readily available, the dream of becoming a doctor might seem too distant. Much less commonly mentioned occupation groups were engineers, nurses, lawyers and journalists. One girl expresses a wish to become a singer, while one rural boy wants to learn English and how to drive, so that he can go abroad for work. None of the students mentions anything about wanting to become a farmer in the future. Perhaps more surprising is that none of them, apart from the boy who wants to learn how to drive to be able to go abroad, mentions any of the other main opportunities open to people from marginal areas: garment factory work, joining the army, self-employment, or going for work to the Middle East.

It is furthermore striking that so many students write that they want to continue up to university, and this goes for rural and urban areas alike. The prospects for this are of course rather bleak, with a very small percentage managing to climb all the way up the educational ladder in Sri Lanka. Yet, as an aspiration, it is very real among both students and parents also in marginal areas:

My only hope is to pass the O-level with distinctions, to go to higher education levels and continue up to the university, and to fulfil my parents' hope. Then I can help them and be a good citizen (SE29 - Rural Boy).

As a school student I have to get good education to live in society without disturbing others. After the A-level, the highest place to go is the university. Everyone knows that those who fail in their A-levels, they have to stop their education (SE70 - Semi-urban Girl).

6.4 Parents, education and the world of work

6.4.1 Farming and fishing - to remain in this position

Parents do not want for their children to end up as peasant farmers in the future, and this goes for boys and girls alike. The fact that discussions about farming often are

about boys should be understood against the background that women doing farming normally describe themselves as housewives. One reason behind why parents do not want the children to do farming is derived from what they think that the children want themselves, and as stated above, none of the children who wrote essays mention that they want to farm in the future⁸⁷. This is also the understanding of parents, who add that children do not want to do manual work at all, and that they do not want to "work under the hot sun". Equally, parents do not see farming as a viable option for generating sufficient income, and as stated previously, they do not want their children to end up in the same situation as they are in themselves. Farming will not, it is clearly said, help poor people to come up from their present positions (that is, it is not connected to social mobility), and most parents involved in farming mention the lack of good and reliable rains as the most serious constraints in these areas. Low prices for agricultural products in relation to high production costs and increasing costs of living are also highlighted as factors behind wanting children to do something else. I would have expected some spatial differences here, between the chena-dominated areas in Usgalle village and irrigation-fed areas like Sooriyawewa town and parts of Meegahajandura village, where some farmers have managed to switch to higher value crops like Banana. Yet, even among farmers in these latter areas, whose conditions might be improving today due to irrigation schemes, farming is very rarely seen as a preferred future occupation for the children. Surprisingly, the very few parents who mention farming as something that they would want the children to do in the future almost exclusively come from Usgalle village. These very few parents cultivate large pieces of land, but they mainly do it as chena-cultivators, and they do not own the lands themselves. Here follows a few illustrative voices regarding farming as a future occupation of the children:

R - This village is a very rural village. When we do farming it is very hard. We have to work under the hot sun, and after that we get sick. It is a very difficult job, and I do not want them [my children] to suffer the way we do. We know about this job and we do not want our children to work hard. That is why we try to give them a good education... (SMH09, poor, rural woman)

Q - If you say that farming is difficult for the future, what are good jobs to do in the future?

R - Doctors, teachers, and engineers! I would like that - it is my hope and my wish! [Big laughter!]

Q - Are there also bad jobs, or jobs that you do not want them to do?

R - Farming! It is difficult! We cannot improve! I would not like to see the children in the same position as us (SAH05, poor, rural woman).

To do fishing, further, is not seen to be a good future occupation even among the fishermen themselves. On several occasions, other parents and school personnel tell me that the fishermen generally want their sons to continue with the occupation of their

⁸⁷ In a recent youth survey a large part of the youths mentioned that they would want to do farming provided that it generated sufficient income (see Hettige 2000). However, the impression from my interviews is clearly that farming generally is not seen to generate sufficient income, making these statements somewhat hypothetical.

father. According to the fishermen themselves, however, fishing is seen to be a very tough and irregular job, giving a low income and few possibilities for saving or even borrowing money. "I am a fisherman and I do not want the children to become like me!" (HH01, poor, urban man). Fishing is hence seen to make people remain in the same social position and therefore as a "choice" of last resort:

R - When they study they can work for the government; when they do not study they have to go for fishing. That is the case in Hambantota - most of the people is doing fishing because they do not have good education (HH04, very poor, urban woman).

R - [Fishing] is not a bad job but it is not a permanent job. If we need to borrow money, we cannot get. If you have got a permanent job you can borrow money from other people because they know that you will get a salary (HH05, very poor, urban Fisherman).

The picture is thus rather unambiguous - parents neither want their children to become farmers, nor fishermen. The question is, then, what jobs they want for their children, and what kind of education they think is needed for getting these other jobs.

6.4.2 "Good" and "bad" jobs - to get out of this position

Most of the parents rank the preferred job opportunities with a striking similarity. Government jobs, in general, are ranked on top:

Q - Why do you want [them to get] a government-sector job?

R - That is the output from education - to get a job in the government sector. My husband is earning under the burning sun. We have to do something with that money! (SSH06, poor, semi-urban woman).

To become teachers is much wanted in rural areas, whilst to become doctors and engineers is what many urban parents mean when they say that they want the children to get "good jobs". The most common reasons for preferring government jobs is that they are regarded as more secure, and that they provide a pension for the future, and this goes also for lower-rung government jobs, like clerks. In Hambantota town, a lot of Tamils are working for the urban council as cleaners and the like, which is not considered to be a "good job" at all by those who do it as day-pay labourers. Yet, it does provide those who have had permanent employment there with a monthly pension above what you get in salary for working in many rural garment factories. To get the popular government jobs, then, most parents say that you need to have passed at least A-level, which is true if you for example want to go for teacher training:

Q - What kind of government jobs would you like for them to get?

R - Teaching!

Q - How much education do they need for that?

R - Advanced level! If they fail the examination, they will have to go to the garment factory, because we do not have enough land. So they have to pass the examination, otherwise they have to go to the garment factory (SOH02, poor, rural woman).

Next in rank - after the government jobs - comes private sector jobs, which hence generally are seen to be less secure and less predictable than jobs in the public sector, even if salary levels at times are seen to be higher. Above all, private sector jobs normally do neither provide a pension, nor as good marriage prospects:

R - Not in the private sector! The private sector pays higher salaries but the government sector provides pensions (SMH03, rich, rural woman).

R - Government jobs! If they work a long time they get a pension. If they work in the private sector they get nothing, only salary, and sometimes it closes. Then they get nothing (HH03, poor, urban man).

A few parents say that it does not matter whether it is in the government or in the private sector, but the general picture is very clear and my findings here are all in line with other findings on people's job preferences in Sri Lanka. It thus adds no new information apart from providing fresh empirical support for that the situation has not changed, despite attempts from the government and other actors to change popular perceptions of the private sector and of self-employment. In addition, it is interesting to note that most parents in the interviews believe that it is private, rather than public sector jobs, that will be on the increase in the future, even though most of them do not consider this as a positive development.

The private sector is of course diverse, and there are, hence, both "good" and "bad", "secure" and "insecure" jobs within it as well. To get the "good" private sector jobs, and especially in foreign companies, it is often said that you need to be skilled in English. Here is the voice of a poor woman in Sooriyawewa town: "In here, there are some [foreign] companies. If you do not have English, and if you do not know computers, you cannot get a job on the inside. (...). Those who do not know English cannot work with people from Japan and China"⁸⁸ (SSH06). If the children cannot go for any of the more secure private alternatives then - in the office or "on the inside" - a job in the garment sector is another option. The garment sector is a big employer also in rural areas, but it is not a job that parents want for their children to do:

Q - So the garment factory is not a good job?

R - The monthly income is very low. It is below 4,000 Rs - sometimes it is only 3,000 Rs per month. With all the expenses, for travelling and clothes, they cannot save anything (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

Q - What about garment factories?

R - Yes, now that is a common job! If someone stops education in the middle, they can go to the garment factory (SAH08, poor rural woman).

The garment factory is hence seen as a place where you try to get a job if you fail in education, if you have to "stop in the middle", and most parents believe that you need

⁸⁸ This woman is probably referring to the Japanese company that constructed the road between Sooriyawewa town and Hambantota town.

an O-level examination to get a job there⁸⁹. It is also not seen as a job that allows for the children to lead a substantially better life than their parents are. An important matter coming up in discussions about job opportunities is whether it is possible to save anything, for buffering up, and for becoming less vulnerable. This is not seen to be the case with garment factory jobs, just as it is not seen to be the case with farming or fishing. An important element is also that the social status of women who work in garment factories - especially if they have to live far away from their homes - might deteriorate rapidly. What is stressed in most of my interviews is, however, rather the low wage levels, as well as the lack of job security and pension schemes.

Another common option is to go to the Middle East, as a housemaid, a driver, a gardener, or for a better-paid job, like an engineer. Many people, especially women, have gone for foreign employment and brought some money back home. Yet, women who go to the Middle East to work as housemaids might end up with little more than they had when they left, after having paid for the trip and, commonly, replaced their cadjen-roofed clay-house with one built out of bricks. Going to the Middle East, especially as a housemaid, is seen to be very risky and dependent on external forces beyond your own command (that is, that it is "a good host family" or "a good place"):

R - When they have education we do not have to send them to the Middle East. I have experience from that - if we find a good place it is good; if it is a bad place it is very bad.

RH - It is only luck! (HH12, poor urban woman, and her husband)

Hence, to go to the Middle East and work as a housemaid is not seen as something that that will take the children out of their present social positions. For many people, it even seems to be ranked below the unpopular garment factory jobs, due to that it is considered to be so insecure. Also in the Middle East there are of course different kinds of jobs available for Sri Lankans, and education, it is said, can make it is easier to get a job that is considered better than working as a housemaid:

R - I was a housemaid. If you want to work as a housemaid you do not need education. If you want to work in a company you need some education (HH14, very poor, urban woman).

R - My job was very good! Better than in Sri Lanka! [Laughter!] But some people are going there and they do not get proper salaries. It is very hard work. In my place there was also some people coming as labourers (SMH07, middle-level, rural man, who has worked as an office peon in Dubai).

⁸⁹ In the garment factory in Sooriyawewa town, the manager says that they do not take uneducated workers. All employees have passed at least the O-level examination (i.e. 11 years of education) and they even have a few university graduates (KI26). In another garment factory - in the neighbouring Beliatta Division - I am equally told that you need to have an O-level to get employed (KI23). This is likely to be more of a screening device, i.e. to filter out those who do not have suitable attitudes, rather than that work processes in these factories actually demand that you have gone to school for such a long time. The salary in the factory in Sooriyawewa differs for skilled and unskilled workers, and it is productivity and experience which makes this difference, not education levels. The basic salary for skilled workers (around 100 out of the total 400 employees) is 4,200 Rs per month, while unskilled workers get the government set minimum wage of 2,925 Rs per month (in 2004).

To go to the Middle East, as a housemaid, is thus normally not considered as a way out. But as many people in the areas live in great austerity, the matter is of course much more complicated. A rather common standpoint, at least among the poor and the very poor, is that any job is better than what they have now: [Going to the Middle East] "...is good compared to us" [big laughter!] (SOH02, poor, rural woman). And a poor, rural woman, who is home from Dubai, contends in a similar vein, that: [Being a housemaid] "...is not a good job, but we cannot find a job here!" (SMH06). This dimension is very important, but the major question addressed here is not whether it is better or worse for people that they can get these kinds of jobs. In fact, if they do take the jobs, it is likely that they have considered the alternatives to be even worse. The point here is merely to clarify what kind of jobs that are seen to take parents and their children out of their present situations or poverty traps. More specifically, it is about what kind of jobs that parents think will improve the chances of their children for leading a better life in the future than they do themselves. Measured by these standards, most of the jobs available to the poorly educated, in the Middle East, as well as in the garment factories, are simply not seen to be *good enough*, even if they are seen to improve the situation within the poverty trap. Rather, and this is an important point, parents are actually trying to send their children to school so that they will not have to end up in these occupations, as that is what happens to people who fail in school or who has to stop "prematurely".

Parents seem a little bit more open for vocational training than expected when entering the field, which partly might reflect an increased understanding that the much sought-after government jobs are - and most probably will continue to be - hard to find. As some parents see it though, learning more practical skills would be good for the children, but, "...in the school time, it would be a barrier to their studying" (SMH09, poor, rural woman). Again, vocational training and practical skills are mostly viewed as something that would be good for those who fail in "school":

R - First I look for education. If they get education, it is better to send them to government jobs. If they get bad education, it is better to send them to vocational training (HH03, poor,urban man).

A problem facing a future vocationalisation of education in Sri Lanka - and the old proposition to make the education sector more relevant to the world of work - is that most people see it as a second-to-best alternative for those who fail in the "normal school". Today, many might also see it to be connected to various schemes for self-employment, which are normally not seen as viable occupations, and to programs for school dropouts. From the perspective of a local WUSC-representative⁹⁰ - who works actively with strengthening vocational training in the area - a lot still needs to be done to improve the status of vocational training, and one way of doing this might be to

⁹⁰ WUSC stands for World University Service of Canada.

integrate it more closely into the formal school system. But the main problem is that the kind of jobs that vocational training initiatives are seen to lead to - e.g. carpentry - is seen to be worse than other kinds of jobs, and hence not a preferable option (KI51).

6.5 Education and necessary skills

6.5.1 Most important school subjects according to the parents

Most of the parents were asked what school subjects they perceive to be most important. One important methodological restriction here is that in some of the discussions (one or two in all areas), this question was interpreted as aiming for the most important subjects *for getting jobs*. Otherwise, Buddhism might for example have come out stronger, although I still believe Table 6.2 to be rather representative of the priorities of the interviewed parents. Another drawback of the table below is that it only includes what parents have answered to the direct question about the most important subjects. If they have mentioned English, Buddhism, or computing skills, for example, as being of big importance in another part of the interview, it is not counted here:

Table 6.2 Parental perceptions of most important school subjects, numbers and percent

Most important school subjects	Meegahajandura Village	Usgalle Village	Sooriyawewa Town	Hambantota Town	Total (%)
Maths	6	9	5	7	(27) 77 %
English	3	8	6	9	(26) 74 %
Science	4	6	4	2	(16) 46 %
Sinhala	2	4	4	6	(16) 46 %
Religion	3	2	1	1	(7) 20 %
Computers/ICT	2	0	0	1	(3) 9 %
Total number of parents	8	10	7	10	35

Source: Interviews with Parents

Table 6.2 should not give a false impression of being "representative" - it is merely a way of illustrating the quantitative basis for my interpretations. It is clear that Maths and English, by far, are seen as the most important subjects in most places, followed - broadly speaking - by Science and Sinhala. English, Maths and Science are also the subjects where those who can afford it send their children to get extra Private Tuition (Chapter 7), which would support this interpretation. The importance of English will be discussed separately in section 6.5.2. Maths is a core subject and it is also seen to be important for becoming an engineer, while Science is connected to a future as a doctor, both of which are very popular occupational aspirations among parents (and students). Several Muslim and Tamil parents stress the need to learn Sinhala as a subject. Only one of these parents mentions Tamil as an important subject.

Religion is mentioned slightly more often among rural families, but it is likely that many parents think that this knowledge is to be imparted from other institutions, such as the Sunday schools and in the family. In support of this interpretation, many Tamil-speaking Muslims try to enter their children into a popular Sinhala-medium

school in Hambantota town, although the Tamil-medium school is a Muslim school whereas the Sinhala-medium school is to be considered Buddhist. This is, then, because the chances of getting "good jobs", and of accessing popular A-level streams like Science, are considered to be much bigger if Sinhala - not to mention English - is used as a medium of instruction. The following is an extract from a discussion with a middle-level, Muslim man in Hambantota town:

R - If you want them to get it [education] in the English medium, you send them to Zahira NS [Muslim school with Tamil-medium] up to grade 6, and then you can move them to Hambantota KV [Sinhalese school with English-medium classes from grade 6]. (...).

Q - Will you do that?

R - Now she [my daughter] is in grade 2, so I am not in a hurry to decide. Now she gets instructions in Tamil and in Hambantota KV it is in Sinhala. It will be a clash in mediums. I can wait with that decision.

Q - But it also means that she would move from a Muslim school to a Buddhist school?

R - No, it is not a religious problem - it is a language problem⁹¹ (HH11).

This is not to say that Buddhism, Islam or Hinduism is unimportant for the parents who often highlight the need for the children to have a strong religious background. Even parents who stress computing skills and Maths as the most important subjects (e.g. SMH02) say this.

Another important dimension is what A-level streams that are popular choices for those who can manage to get through the O-level examination. It is obvious from interviews with parents that it is the Science streams that are the most popular ones, followed by the Commerce stream. Again, this is not very surprising. The Arts stream, associated with problems of youth unemployment, is by far the least popular one. However, one A-level student stresses that he has chosen the Arts stream as he thinks it will increase his chance of entering the university (KI22).

6.5.2 The cry for English

Q - Why are parents so interested in English in this area, although very few of the jobs around here - like garments, the army, farming - demand that knowledge?

R - They feel that without English, you cannot do anything in the future. They are afraid that the children will be isolated if they do not know English. I also feel like that about my own children (SN1, Principal, Rural School).

To an outsider, it might at first be difficult to understand why English would be considered to be important by people inhabiting these marginal parts of the country. Statements about how essential English is for the future are striking: "In the future, we

⁹¹ Zahira NS is a Tamil-medium school in Hambantota town and Hambantota KV is a Sinhala-medium school in the same area, where they have started with English-medium classes from grade 6. A study of Jaffna Tamil migrants to Colombo similarly shows that when it comes to education, most parents get very individualistic, setting their otherwise strong and exclusionist ethnic consciousness aside (Siddhartan 2003). These Tamil parents would normally try to get their children into one of the prestigious schools in Colombo, and they were not inclined to send them to Tamil-medium schools.

will not even be able to go to the shop without English" (SAH04, poor, rural woman). Yet, if one moves around in rural villages in Sooriyawewa Division, and even in Hambantota town, most often people can barely speak English at all. Furthermore, it is not a requirement in most work places accessible to local people, such as in garment factories, in the shops, in communication centres, in the Saltern. But with a literate population of which many can access television (if so with the aid of car batteries), information travels rapidly even to marginal areas. And a clear message from politicians and other elite groups is that English is set to be the language of the future. There is thus a widespread idea among both parents and students that English will be the all-dominating language in Sri Lanka.

Some interest in English is built on a misunderstanding that English is a core subject, that is, as necessary for admission to the A-level (true for at least three of the families). However, and much more importantly, there is also a widespread consensus that English is, and increasingly will be, needed for all kinds of basic activities:

R - It [English] is important for everything. When we go to the bank, the papers are in English. Then we have to go to someone who knows English to fill the papers.

Q - What kind of papers are written in English in the bank?

R - Very recently my husband's mother got some money from her father, who died. She went to get the money from the bank, but everything was in English, so we could not fill the papers. Then we went to a doctor and asked him to fill the papers (SSH08, poor, semi-urban woman).

Q - Do any jobs demand knowledge in English today?

R - If you want to get a good job, English is very essential. You cannot get a good job without English and Maths. All the time their father is telling them to go to Private Tuition to learn English.

Q - You say that without English and Maths you cannot get a good job - what kind of jobs are you talking about?

R - Our target is not only the job; that may happen and it may not. But they have to have English to carry on with their lives (SAH03, middle-level, rural woman).

To go to the bank, to the hospital (SSH07), and to the police (HH01), are all seen to require knowledge in English, at least by a few of the parents. Although exaggerated, this might partly be due to English being the language of power. If someone wants to show his or her superiority in Sri Lanka, English is an effective tool for doing that.

On the economic side, one very poor farmer in a rural village explains why he thinks that English is so badly needed in rural areas today by showing a packet of seeds, which is imported from Malaysia. The instructions are in English and he says that the same goes for many of the chemicals, which he uses in farming:

Q - So, English is important also in a rural area like this one?

R - Yes, farmers normally did not need English before. Now we need it to be able to read instructions for chemicals and seeds. So it is important...that our children know English (SOH01, very poor, rural man).

Yet, most of the concerns about English regard the need for it to get jobs and particularly the "good jobs", which can take the children and their families out of the present situations:

Q - Why do you say that English is so important?

R - The present society is developing. It asks for English!

Q - Is it for doing jobs that they ask for English?

R - Yes! To do a job they need English knowledge.

Q - What kind of jobs can you not get if you do not know English?

R - If you do not know English you can go to the garment factory jobs. You cannot go to government jobs (SAH07, poor, rural woman).

Q - Why is English important in this area?

R - If they [my children] fail to pass the A-level, they can find a job somewhere. Without English they cannot find a job.

Q - So A-level is normally what you need to get a job?

R - They cannot find a job with only O-level - they would have go to the garment factory. If they want to go to a factory, to a pharmacy, or to a communication centre, they have to pass A-level and pass English at O-level (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

It is common to hear exaggerations about the importance of English, but as stated above, a lot of the popular jobs do require knowledge in English today, which is a main reason why the language it is perceived to be of such an importance. To work "on the inside" - that is, in the office - of private companies (including garment factories) would also often require English proficiency, in order to speak with owners if they are foreign or to communicate with customers and others on the world market. In the garment factory in Sooriyawewa, the manager says that it would be good if the workers new more English for them to better be able to follow written material in that language. It is furthermore common to hear in parental interviews that English is important for learning computers and accessing the Internet, even in areas yet to be electrified. Most parents do not bring up computer skills when the question about "most important subjects" is put, but it still surfaces in many discussions and it is said by several parents to be one reason behind English being so important for children today:

Q - Why do you mention these three subjects [English, Science and Maths]?

R - If you want to come up [in society], you need these three subjects!

Q - (...) - why English?

R - English is an international language.

Q - Do you need English to get a job here in Sooriyawewa also?

R - Yes, and for IT (SAH05, A-level student, poor, rural family).

R - Now the necessary language is English. She [my daughter] can learn Sinhala and Tamil as second languages. When we work with computers we cannot do it without English. If she has good English she can get a good position in the future. If she has knowledge in English, she can get a job if she goes [only] up to grade 8. Without English she cannot get a job even after A-level (HH11, middle-level, urban man).

In Sooriyawewa NS, just like in the urban schools in Hambantota town, there is supposed to be training in computers and ICT, General Information Technology (GIT).

This subject should be taught in English (KI05). The person who is responsible for it in this school says that he started to give GIT in English, but that he soon found himself forced to do it in Sinhala instead, because it was too difficult for the students to follow the lessons. When asked whether he thinks that ICT-skills are important also for people in marginal areas, he says that this is what the politicians say today. Yet, he is a bit sceptical himself:

R - It [ICT] is very important for persons doing higher studies. But it is very difficult for people who do not have English. We can teach what the Internet is, but they do not know how to use it (KI05, Teacher, Sooriyawewa NS).

A general impression is that parents in all of the areas seem to be a bit more affected by the rhetoric about "global skills" than they need to be, given the rather limited spread of opportunities of using them in the district. But even if the importance of English and computer skills is exaggerated, these are still the skills - together with Maths and Science - that many see as requirements for their children to get out of their present positions and get a better future. Unrealistic as this might seem, it is important to acknowledge that the alternatives are to tell them that they can only hope for a better life in the margins of society, or to prove them wrong.

6.6 Aspirations and expectations

6.6.1 The significance of "others": Role models and neighbourhood-effects

R - The problem is that [the students] can see that most of the students who went to school - who completed their O-levels and A-levels - are idling. They might think there is no idea of going to school. Even parents might think so, that there is no idea (KI01, Former Principal and Zonal Director of Education).

When reading the student essays, it is strikingly many references to the experiences of others, particularly of the elder brothers and sisters of the students. As commented already, the importance of role models is an interesting issue in a situation where aspirations with education are so high although unemployment rates among graduates also remain so high. In this section, I will first illustrate how role models affect attitudes to education. After this, I will briefly discuss another aspect affecting attitudes to education, namely the neighbourhood effect, which is more difficult to capture with the methods used here. I will start off by quoting some of the students who refer to "significant others" in different contexts, and in the essays, most of these references are formulated in the negative. In the essays, further, it is possible to distinguish between those who write about experiences with examinations and those who refer to what has happened to others on the job market, as they have finished school:

My father passed the examinations but he does not have a permanent job. He is staying at home. This will happen to us also in the future (SE62 - Semi-urban Girl).

My sister did the O-level year 2000. When she was schooling in those days the teachers did not pay attention to the English subject. Of those who did the

O-level in 2001, very few passed the English subject. What was the reason for this? I say that the reason for this is that when teachers are in the school they are not teaching to the children. They do not pay attention to the children. My sister anyway faced the O-level. She did not pass the exam. She failed the exam. If they had taught well, I am sure she would have passed with very successful results. For example, the same thing is happening this year. Our fate is also like that (SE15 - Rural Girl).

As it seems, however, the significance of role models like brothers, sisters and parents is not primarily to decrease the hopes or aspirations with education, but rather to lower the student's expectations. Role models are hence important also for frustrating the students, as they show that actual opportunities do not necessarily fit well with what they hope to achieve with going to school. Most often, this is about students being afraid of not passing examinations, as they can see how others, coming from the same area and a similar social background, have failed in their endeavours.

Also among parents, it is very common to refer to how "others" are doing, as a way of exemplifying what might happen to their own children in the future. The most frequent examples concern youth unemployment and the way many people end up in garment factories, in the Middle East, on paddy- or chena-fields, in fishing boats, etc, despite their high educational qualifications:

R - They [university students] have to go to the garment factory. They have a degree but they have to go to the garment factory. And they do not have time to get married, they do not get a good family. I have some experience of this - one girl got a special degree, but she is now working in the garment factory as a machine operator (HH08, middle-level, urban man).

Role models are hence often referred to as a way of showing the risks with investing time and money in education, even though most of the parents still are of the opinion that education is important for the children anyway. Yet, the father quoted above - HH08 - also points to others who have succeeded in the education system, despite coming from the same local community (see the quotation below). This example illuminates an apparent paradox: university graduates are seen to end up in the unpopular garment factories, and with bad prospects for getting a good family life, but parents still find it encouraging that other families have managed to send their children all the way up the education ladder:

Q - How far do you hope that the children will study?

R - There is no limit. Maximum!

Q - But you just said that they would end up in the garment factory anyway - will you still encourage them to study further?

RW - It is our best inheritance - dowry - for the kids. We have to do it. We have economic problems but we encourage them to go to higher education. Not for the jobs, but if they can do any business...

R - I have some experience from this. One family has a lot of economic problems. They did not take their foods properly to send their children to Private Tuition. Now some of them are at the university (HH08, middle-level, urban man and his wife).

Role models can be both encouraging and discouraging. The best example of an encouraging role model is perhaps a young girl in Sooriyawewa, who was able to go abroad for international competitions because she was found to be a talented athlete. Several students bring her up as a good example, as someone who has succeeded, and several parents also mention her in interviews, making her into something of a role model. The story of this girl is rather illuminating as it equally shows the influence of media-flows in these marginal areas. The national television broadcasted a program about the girl, where the audience was told the story of how such a talent is constrained by difficult living conditions and poor opportunities for education. Somewhere in the program, it was stated that children from these areas are "treated like wild flowers"; beautiful but left to fend for themselves in the forest. This expression is used by a large number of students, also from neighbouring villages like Meegahajandura, as a way of explaining how unjustly rural students are treated in comparison to urban students. This might thus be a way of illustrating how socio-spatial permeability is increasing spaces for comparison, opening up for frustration gaps if inequalities in life opportunities are seen to be too big. From another angle, it also illustrates how a role model can show the way for others, and several parents now discuss sport successes as a possible way of gaining a scholarship and entrances to better schools (which is what this girl was offered after the program). There is, though, naturally a significant "fallacy of composition" would all go for the same strategy.

Due to unavailability of data, it is not possible to compare examination results, enrolment rates, etc., between different villages, which would have been one possible way of researching neighbourhood-effects. Nevertheless, it is still possible to qualitatively note a few such effects with the material that is available, and the most striking is how well aware everyone in the villages are, about the behaviour of other people's children. There are very few children who are not enrolled in school in the areas visited, but where there are, other people in the villages are fully aware that the children from this or that family are not going to school. However, it might be even more important in this context that people also seems to be well aware of whether children in other families are attending school regularly or not, for example through noting whether there are children working the fields or helping the parents with fishing during school-hours. All of this presumably adds to the pressure on parents to send their children to school, as parents who do not send their children are critically scrutinised by the whole neighbourhood. It is not possible here to illustrate the extent of this kind of influence in more exact terms, but generally speaking, the neighbourhood-effect would seem to be positive for both enrolment and attendance. Another important issue in relation to this is the pressure emanating from peers and friends of the children, and this especially regards the need for Private Tuition. In several families, it is mentioned that the children really want to attend Private Tuition, because all of their friends do.

6.6.2 The situation on the labour market: Jobs and meritocracy

It is clear from interviews that the most important - but far from only - reason for sending children to school is for them to get a "good job", which neither includes farming or fishing, nor going to garment factories or to the Middle East. Yet, it is important to understand better how parents understand the linkage between education and the labour market, also in the light of the actual possibilities of getting a job. Many among the school personnel highlight the problems of getting the desired occupations as a factor lowering the interest in education, especially among students:

R - The problem is that they [the students] do not trust education; they are disappointed with education. It is happening everywhere, and in this area, it is also the same. The hopes and wishes are all destroyed.

Q - Is that because of the difficulties of getting a job afterwards?

R - Yes! They decide to get normal [that is, not high] education, and get engaged in something else. They do not trust education. You know, a lot of graduates are waiting without jobs (SStM2, Principal, Urban School).

R - In grades 12 and 13 they [the students] have the attitude that there is no point in studying because they have to go to garment factories or the army anyway. From grade 10 they have this attitude (SN1, Principal, Rural School).

The importance of role models is big, as people can see what happens to other people who have gone through the education system. Education is surely seen to be important for getting jobs, but many students and parents have quite a "realistic" understanding of whether education will necessarily give them the positions on the labour market that they aspire to. To many parents, a high education level is not even the most important requirement for getting these jobs:

R - It [education] is not important for getting a job. If you know politicians you can get a job. There are people here who have A-levels, but they do not have a job because they do not have political connections (SMH04, poor, rural woman).

Q - Do you also need political connections to get a job?

R - [Laughter!] Yes! If someone has little education and a big influence from the politicians, he can get a job.

RH - Those who are not qualified for jobs they get anyway. The qualified are unemployed, but the unqualified can get jobs. (...)

RH - In this area we do not have any choices. The politicians decide: this one is qualified for this, that one is qualified for that. We have no chance to choose (SAH04, poor, rural woman, and her husband).

A number of points can be made in relation to this. One thing that is commonly heard among parents is that education is more valuable for the poor, as the rich can make use of their money to get into good positions in society. Consequently, being educated can be seen to become even more important for those who lack other bargaining powers in what seems as a largely non-meritocratic environment. It is clear that even if education is not considered to be sufficient for getting the "good jobs", or for leading a better life in the future than parents do today, it is still seen as important. And this is crucial! Even among the groups who are most pessimistic about the future

labour market, and about the linkages between qualifications and social positions, they still send their children to school and they still hope for them to reach the upper levels of the education system. There are a number of reasons for this, one of them being that they need education to become "good citizens". Yet others stress that it is important so that the children can "go to society", while a few parents say that it is important because even if they cannot get a job in Sri Lanka, education might help them to get a job abroad. Most importantly, a poor, urban fisherman, when confronted with the possible contradiction between his own hopes for "good jobs" through education, and his other statements about the lack of meritocracy in society, just laughs out loudly and says in English, "We try and try" (HH01). Hence, even if parents are sceptical, and see that people with influence and money may well get good jobs and positions without having a good education, education might still be the only hope there is for the poor. Below follows one illustrative way of reasoning about education and the labour market:

R - Yes, they cannot do anything without education. Even with education, they cannot find a job, but we want to give them the knowledge.

Q - Can you explain what you mean by, "even with education they cannot find a job"?

R - Some here are well educated, even up to A-level and the university, and they cannot find a job. However, I do not give education for the children to get a job, but to be able to go here and there, and to get together with society.

Q - How much education do you need for that?

R - Up to the A-level! That is a big thing. I cannot say that this is the end of education, but my hope is for A-level (SSH04, poor, semi-urban woman).

It stands out clearly from discussions with the rich families that some of them also are struggling by all means to get a "good job" for their children, and that sometimes, it is difficult for them as well. This is primarily due to a scarcity of government jobs:

R - In Sri Lanka, without political connections you cannot do anything. Second [most important] are qualifications. Third is money. My daughter does not want a company job, she wants a government job. (...)

Q - Why can she not get a government job?

R - She wants to be a teacher. She does not want to go to the garment factory. She applied for an insurance company also, but with no reply. (...)

Q - But why can she not get a government job then?

R - I have good connections with MPs and ministers. I went and asked for my daughter. They say that they will do that, but now the government sector jobs are not increasing. Next year in January they will start giving jobs again. They say that next year is a "job year" [Big laughter!] (SSH02, rich, semi-urban man).

Furthermore, the daughter of a middle-level, semi-urban woman, who passed the Arts stream examination at A-level, does not want to go to the garment factory, so her mother and herself are now hoping for politicians to get her a government job. The strategy they use is commonly referred to as "going with the politicians", and for this family, this means doing some work in the service of the ruling party (that is, canvassing). They say that they can only *hope* to get a job from that - there are no promises - but the girl believes that, "...the chances of getting a job increases. It is like a qualification" (SSH09). It should be recalled here that I have not made any specific

inquiries regarding the relationships between connections and job opportunities, so the point here is merely to show popular perceptions of these relationships.

6.6.3 Aspirations are not expectations

We are studying full of hopes; to get a good job after education; to live happily in the future. We are dreaming, but soon our dreams will be destroyed (SE38a - Rural Girl).

Parents and students have high aspirations for themselves and for their futures, and they have few problems spelling out what role education could play – or even would have to play – to fulfil these dreams. Nevertheless, this does not make them into a naïve group of people who cannot see any structural or other problems that might stand in the way for accessing that kind of education. As I am interested in processes of inclusion and exclusion, and the role the accessibility of educational opportunities has for these processes, I have found it necessary to ask questions about what parents want for their children, supposing nothing stood in their way. Yet, high aspirations with education of students and parents are seen to be difficult to meet with the opportunities open to them - in the education system, on the labour market, as well as in their homes. Large parts of the students' essays are also devoted to expressing the frustration resulting from this discrepancy between aspirations and reality, especially with regard to passing examinations and meeting the world of work. Just as in discussions with the parents, the general picture is that the students are aware of the potential of education for creating a better life for them. But they are also "realistic" in the sense that they see the problems they will have to face in trying to achieve their aspirations.

Most of the frustrations brought up by students regard the problems of passing examinations, given the opportunities open to students in the different schools. It is important to remember that to reach the goals of getting out of the present positions - by getting "good jobs" - most see a need to have passed at least the A-level:

We do not have teachers in all subjects. We inform the principal every day but he does not take any action. In some subjects we do not have teachers - in history and Tamil. How can we go to the exam without fear? Everyday we tell the teachers, but they do not do anything. Now, one month has passed already, and we do not know anything about history. We know what history is - history is what was in the past. But we are going to the examinations! With this situation, we have to stay at home after O-level (SE41 - Urban Girl).

Difficulties in passing examinations are of course seen to indirectly affect possibilities of getting a good job and of achieving a "good social status". Other students stress this connection more directly by suggesting that, in the present situation, it will be very difficult to become a doctor, or a teacher, or whatever "good job" that they aspire to get through education:

From my childhood I have had a wish to be a Sinhala teacher. This wish, plays hide and seek with me (SE49 - Urban Girl).

How can we study in a school like this? Do you know what I am afraid of? I am not sure I can achieve my aspirations and be a doctor (SE77 - Urban Girl).

Yet others do not specify what aspirations they want to achieve in relation to their limited opportunities, but they still stress - and often with metaphors of some kind - that their capabilities of leading the kind of lives they value are very limited, given their educational and other opportunities:

This is a very rural area; there is no water to drink or to bath; the rain does not come in time. Because of this, my aspirations are covered with a black cloud (SE31 - Rural Girl).

The flowers that bloom in the jungle are going to die in the jungle. No one can get anything from them. It is the same with us. We do not have the opportunity to wear the gold crown (SE49 - Urban Girl).

We have a very big wish to study well in education. But this wish will run away like water (SE61 - Urban Girl).

The metaphor of "wild flowers" used in one of the statements is recognised from the discussion above, and it is really quite commonly used in this pessimistic sense. It is furthermore common that the frustration is connected to not being able to achieve the hopes laid down by others - more specifically the parents - for them to be successful.

Reading the essays is generally a rather depressive activity, as the students so clearly stress the discrepancy between what they aspire to with education and what they feel that they can achieve through the same tool. But all students do not express the same feeling of helplessness. I will end this section by raising a few slightly more optimistic voices, where students either are determined to fight themselves through the observed barriers or where they do not perceive them as too difficult to handle:

My hope is to be a lawyer. It is difficult to go this way. I know it is a very difficult target to achieve but I do not like to change my hope. If someone gets something very easily it is not worth anything. The above problems are common to all students. I expect all school students to get the same rights (SE70 - Semi-urban Girl).

[Our parents] want to see us go forward. Somehow I think I can get through these barriers and win. At that time, our parents would be happy (SE36 - Rural Girl).

My aspiration with school education is to pass all examinations and be a female engineer. That is my big hope. With faith and courage, I am sure that I will be successful in my hope (SE57 - Semi-urban Girl).

6.7 Is education perceived to be getting increasingly important?

One important aspect when analysing interviews and essays has been whether education is perceived to be *more* important now that it was before, and if so, for what reasons. There are, however, problems for understanding this dimension of changes over time, as for example when "before" is meant to have been. In parental interviews, I tried to handle this by asking them to compare with how it was when they went to school, that is, between 10-25 years back. Students do not write much about the time-

perspective, and given their youth, it would also be very difficult for them to compare with earlier situations. It is interesting, however, to note how many of the students stress the need for education *in the present society*, and how this at least in a few cases is related to living in a society where the technological sophistication is increasing:

Our parents are doing farming to nourish us and to give us a good education. We will be indebted to them forever. The present society is not like in the past. Now it is going up. The technology is very high. We have to spend a lot of money to get education (SE57 - Semi-urban Girl).

Of the parents, all but three state that education is more important now than it was when they were young. Yet, the more important information comes from when parents are asked to specify *why* education is seen to be more important today than it was before. These answers can broadly be divided into two categories. The first of these regards factors relating to the education system itself and the fact that so many people are educated today, which is increasing competition for qualifications and jobs. The second reason concerns factors relating to changes outside the education system, such as the opportunity structure on the labour market. Many parents mention both of these factors as reasons to why education is more important now than it was earlier.

As to factors relating to the education system, the fact that so many people have got educational qualifications today is the most pertinent issue. This is seen to further increase the demand for qualifications, and hence the competition for jobs: "...today, whatever they [children] want, they [employers] are looking for education" (SSH08, poor, semi-urban woman). One important example supporting this interpretation is that to get work in the local garment factories, you need to have passed the O-level examinations, which means eleven years of "successful" schooling. In most families it is contended that you must at least have passed the A-level to get a chance to escape the present position, although a few would suggest that passing the O-level would be good enough. Yet, if you want the kinds of jobs that are identified as "good jobs" - those belonging to the two higher segments of the labour market - you should at least have passed the A-level, preferably not in the Arts stream, and preferably together with the relevant connections. Still others, also among very poor parents, think that only up to the university is good enough for the children today. Important is, furthermore, that the need for education to "go to society" or to "face society" - that is, to be able to move around in society without shame, and to be treated with respect by others - has increased in the eyes of many parents. I will get back to the various effects that the increased competition for educational resources causes for the accessibility of educational opportunities, because it implies that the relational dimensions of these opportunities increase in importance. Suffice here is to just mention that one important reason for the increased interest in education is that more parents are sending their children to school now than what was the case earlier, and to higher levels.

Consequently, parents of today are seen as more keen to educate their children than they were in the past, and in this sense, it is interpreted as increasingly important:

R - In my time it was not necessary to study. Now there is a competition in studying.

Q - Why is there a competition in studying?

R - All are trying to send their children to school. Sometimes parents work as labourers to fulfil their needs, but they send their children to education because they do not want to see their children in the same position as they are in (SAH02, poor, rural woman).

R - We have not studied, and that is why we are like this. If the children do like us, they will end up like us. That is why we want to give them education.

Q - Do you think that [education] is more important today than it was when you were young?

R - Earlier, many people did not have education. This generation needs education. It is very important.

Q - Why do they need it - can you explain a little bit more?

R - If they have education, they have power. If they have education, they can go forward.

RB - Earlier, parents told [their children] not to go to school, "You can go and work!" If you do the same thing today, it becomes a problem (HH13, very poor, urban man, and his brother).

Nevertheless, the most common explanation as to why education is seen as much more important today than in the past, is that the society at large is changing. With these changes, there are new challenges facing those who want to come up from present positions, in addition to that chances of leading a decent life as a peasant farmer are seen to become bleaker. To start with, it is very common to hear vague statements like: "Now the country is developing" (SAH08); "The world is going the technological way" (SMH03); "Now it is developing. (...)...science and technology is developed in the country. We cannot do farming in the future" (SAH05); "The society is not like earlier. Now it is developing. We have to prepare our children for this society" (SAH07); "Now science and technology has been developed. In my time they did not have IT-facilities" (SSH06); etc. Hence, there are good indications showing that people feel that new qualifications and skills are necessary in "the present society", although many parents have difficulties spelling them out more in precise.

All of the quotations above are selected from semi-urban and rural areas in order to illustrate that ideas about a rapidly changing context is far from only an urban phenomenon. Furthermore, the following conversation with a 52-year old female farmer in Meegahajandura, quoted at length, shed some additional light on how many parents' perceptions of the role of education are changing in these marginal areas:

Q - Was education important for getting a job also when you were young?

R - At that time, we did not expect to get a job. We went to school for our own day-to-day activities; to write letters; read the newspaper; read a telegram. That was enough. I had enough knowledge for that.

Q - But this is not the case anymore?

R - No!

Q - Why not?

R - We did not study but we could work hard. But the younger generation is not like that. The world is changing. My education is not enough for today.

Q - What is it that they need to learn today?

R - They need Sinhala and Buddhism because then, they can become good persons. Then, they have a good background. After that, I think that computer skills and mathematics is good. My youngest daughter [who passed the A-level examinations, but who has no job today] did not have any knowledge about computers. I asked her to go [and study it] but (...). It was too expensive (SMH02, middle-level, rural woman).

The reason for quoting such a large part of this conversation is that it includes several points that come up in other interviews as well. One is that young people of today are different, that they do not want to - and/or are unable to - "work under the hot sun". This includes, for example, farming: "Earlier we had good possibilities to do farming, but now we do not have that" (SSH01, poor man). If I were to identify one factor (among many) that is *most important* in explaining why the perceived value of education has increased, then increased difficulties for doing farming would be it. Another important point in the quotation above is that there is a need for a new kind of knowledge today, for which you need both more and a different kind of education. A more representative example of the whole sample would perhaps rather have been someone highlighting the increasing importance of English in the present society, but as mentioned earlier, the need for computer skills does also surface in many discussions. Earlier, learning the three Rs is seen to have been sufficient, but this is rarely the case anymore. The final important point from the quotation is the continued need for first language and religion, for the children to become "good citizens".

6.8 Short summary of the chapter

Interviews with parents have been conducted in marginal parts of the island. Regarding the aspirations with education outlined in this chapter, this selection has important implication for the concluding discussion. It means that even in some of the most marginal areas of the country, outside war-affected areas and the plantations, education is rather unambiguously seen as very important among parents in all the different geographical settings. It also means that even poor and very poor parents in marginal areas almost exclusively see the most important role for education to be for their children to get "good jobs" that will take them away from their present social situation. Above all, they do not want the children to end up as peasant farmers or fishermen, but they also do not see that the "new" job opportunities - garment factories, going to the Middle East, and self-employment - will fulfil what they aspire to for the children.

Consequently, education is seen as a vehicle for social and geographical mobility, and the most important school subjects for doing this are identified to be Maths and English. Science is also mentioned among the most important subjects and computer skills are brought up by surprisingly many, given that opportunities for using computers are so scarce. There is hence a strong resemblance between the skills that poor parents in marginal areas identify as crucial, and the discussion about the need for

new skills in the global economy. In addition, parents generally feel that it is necessary with quite a few years in school, in order to fulfil their aspirations, preferably up to the A-level or even the university. Most respondents relate this both to that so many others in the society are educated today - increasing the competition for "good jobs" - and to that the society is seen to be changing in a way that increases the value of education.

It could equally be seen that especially role models, and among them predominantly the experiences of close relatives, make parents and students rather pessimistic as to whether they will achieve their high aspirations. The perceived school quality also plays a part here. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they see education to have no value. It has decreased the expectations they have for passing examinations, getting "good jobs", etc, but education is still seen to be important and for an absolute majority of parents increasingly so. This is for "going to society" and for "being a good citizen", but also because it is seen to be the only chance the children have to get out of the present positions, and hence as a necessity. In other words, they cannot afford not to try! I will get back to the discussion about aspirations and expectations with education more thoroughly in the concluding discussion in chapter 9. However, the situation outlined above naturally gives rise to important tensions in relation to the accessibility of educational opportunities, which is the subject of the two following chapters.

7. THE EDUCATION NETWORK: WHAT IS WHERE, WHEN?

The children in the towns go to big, big schools – children who live in the village have to go to the village school (SE22 – Rural Girl).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses characteristics of, and recent changes in, the education network in Hambantota District, with a special focus on the situation in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town. This is done primarily from a descriptive-statistical perspective, but I complement this picture with perceptions of parents, students and school personnel, as well as of other key informants⁹². First, there is a note on perceptions of parents regarding what they see as "good" and "bad" schools, and the reasons behind this division, as well as a discussion about the importance of relative dimensions of educational opportunities (7.2). After discussions regarding the distribution of schools (7.3), teachers (7.4) and school facilities (7.5), the perceived need for English is confronted with the opportunities for learning it for students in marginal areas (7.6). The sections about schools and teachers start with a broader view of Hambantota District in comparison with the country as a whole and with a few selected districts. As a second step, I briefly look at the intra-district situation, that is, between different divisions, only to end up in a thorough presentation of the situation within the division of Sooriyawewa and in the schools in Hambantota town. Following this (7.7), there is a presentation of complementing and alternative systems of education, that is, Private Tuition and Buddhist Pirivenas, as well as a section focusing on perceptions among various respondents about "who is to be blamed" for the present situation (7.8). The chapter ends with a short summary in which three processes of importance for the following chapter, are identified (7.9).

7.2 "Good" and "bad" schools...and why the difference matters

7.2.1 What are "good schools"?

Accessibility of educational opportunity – the way it is conceptualised here – is crucially about possibilities to go to different segments of schools. In the literature, there is some confusion or disagreement as to how school quality can best be measured. Popular quantitative proxies are results at examinations, pupil-teacher ratios, etc. Even though these externally identified criteria are problematic, they are also important in

⁹² The chapter draws mainly from statistical information from the Ministry of Education, Zonal Education Offices, as well as from schools themselves, but this information is also complemented with information obtained in semi-structured interviews with parents and key informants, as well as from student essays and observations.

their own right, and they are hence used below. That many students pass examinations might not indicate a high quality, but in many education systems, including in Sri Lanka, passing examinations is important anyway. Yet, it is also important to listen to voices among those concerned, in order to see whether they tend to use the same kind of proxies or if they bring out other issues that ought to be taken into account as well. It cannot be taken for granted that parents and students use the same kind of proxies as planners and researchers when "selecting" between and evaluating schools. The quotation below, for example, is from a rich, semi-urban man, who does not want to put his children in the locally available National School, because of the family background of other students. On top of this, he mentions a number of factors, which come up frequently in other interviews as well:

Q – Why does your son go to school in Ratnapura?

R – The school in Sooriyawewa is not good - it is a very difficult school. All children come from families where the parents are doing farming. All the time they are making trouble in the school - one day they went on strike also. That is why I do not want to send my children to this school. My son is doing the Science stream, and there are no good teachers here. There are no English teachers also, and no facilities for the Science Laboratory. Some time he [my son] might continue up to the university, and if he comes from this school, he will not get a good welcome. In here, there are no private classes, they have to go to Tangalle or Ratnapura [for that] (SSH02, rich, semi-urban man).

All parents were not asked exactly the same question regarding this, so it is not possible to summarise the answers in a table. Taken together, however, there are a number of issues that are brought up by parents when they are asked why they think that a particular school is good or not, or when asked to specify what a "good school" should be like. The most pertinent issue regards the importance of available, competent and committed teachers. This partly supports the idea that pupil-teacher ratios can be used as a proxy for quality, but with additional dimensions that cannot be captured in full by statistics alone. Second, it matters a lot what formal status the school has, and a school is often said to be good – or, at least, better than another one – because it is a big school or because it is a National School. The former is related to a view that a school is better the higher it can take the students in the educational hierarchy, and a school where you can go straight up to the A-level, without having to switch school on the way, is commonly referred to as better. However, the quotation from the rich man above, which regards a National School, illustrates that there is a need to distinguish also *between* National Schools. Combinations of the above two factors are common, as in this statement from a poor woman from Usgalle village: “This [school] is not good. (...). There are no teachers. It is a normal school, up to grade 11” (SAH01, poor woman). Hence, in relation to the official school stratification, 1AB schools are generally more popular than, in due order, 1C, Type 2 and Type 3 schools. This ranking

furthermore corresponds with oft-used terms such as “big” and “small” schools, where the former normally is equalled with better⁹³.

Some parents mention the importance of facilities, especially a laboratory for practising Science. In addition, the quotation above indicates that it is of value that there are (good) Private Tuition opportunities in the vicinity. A poor woman motivating why she would have wanted to send her child to a school in Tangalle town, rather than in Sooriyawewa town where she lives, states that: “The Private Tuition here is only up to A-level. If they want to go to Private Tuition after that, they have to go to Tangalle or Embilipitiya” (SSH05). Even if the school in question is a National School, as is the case in Sooriyawewa town, the general perception is that students have to complement the formal school system in evenings and weekends, if they want to pass examinations (see section 7.7). Many parents furthermore judge schools according to what happens to students as they finish, and whether graduates get any of the highly preferred occupations. Unfortunately though, this dimension of external efficiency is not possible to follow up, as I have not conducted any tracer studies. Finally, parents generally put a lot of weight on whether students in the schools pass examinations, including the grade 5 scholarship examinations. This is crucial, and it means that schools are seen to be good if they provide access to better segments of schools or to the university.

I will get back to all of these dimensions in depth throughout this chapter. What is important to remember is that the distribution of especially National and IAB Schools with facilities for A-level Science, is a good indicator to start with when looking at the distribution of educational opportunities in space. Other dimensions of importance regard teacher availability and examination results. Most of these would hence be fairly close to the conventional ways of measuring quality.

7.2.2 The importance of relative dimensions of educational opportunities

A striking finding is how especially students tend to compare themselves with other students, without even having been asked to do so in their essays. Above all, this is the case with rural students, who consider themselves discriminated against as compared to urban students. But also parents, whose children are enrolled in more popular schools in urban areas, consider themselves to be at disadvantage compared to parents in, for example, Tangalle, Matara and Colombo. Roughly speaking, parents in rural Sooriyawewa want entrance to schools in Sooriyawewa town (or in Hambantota town), while parents in Sooriyawewa town want to enrol their children in Hambantota town (or in Tangalle/Ratnapura). Parents in Hambantota town, in turn, dream of sending their

⁹³ An important qualification here is that a few students and parents mention that the school in Sooriyawewa town has become too big, so that it influences negatively on student behaviour. This does not mean that they want the children to remain in the rural school; only that the schools in Hambantota town are preferred to the one in Sooriyawewa. In Sooriyawewa NS, however, some teachers who are very negative about the quality of their own school still suggest that some things are worse in schools in larger urban areas. One example regards the behaviour of the children, which they think is "better" than it is in larger urban areas.

children to a school in Matara, Galle or even Colombo. There are always, it seems, greener educational pastures elsewhere! It should be remembered that in most areas visited here, aspirations with education are very high; by far above what access to basic education can offer. It should also be stressed that education in much is seen as competition, due to the limited number of positions in universities and in the government sector. Below follow a few examples from a massive flow of rural-urban comparisons coming up in the essays:

In towns and villages there are education facilities. But in this kind of village it is very difficult. For example: town schools have libraries, laboratories and buildings. In the village school there is a lack of these things. If we compare town schools and village schools, our school education is at a very low level. The reason for this is that there is a lack of teachers. All students have as their aspirations to get a good job and to be a good person in society. With these difficulties, this is very difficult to do (SE31 - Rural Girl).

We do not have a van to come to school as they have in the town schools. We do not have facilities like the town schools. In the town schools there are computer facilities - my school does not have those facilities. I would like to study computers and the other children also. We would like to have computer training. Unlike the town schools, we do not have library facilities, no electricity, and no water (SE18 - Rural Girl).

Rural students generally do not consider themselves to have less ability to learn than students in urban areas, but they feel that the opportunities provided to them constrain them from competing successfully for jobs or entrances to university. It is also easy to read in a rights-perspective in many essays, and the ideal that all Sri Lankan students should have equal opportunities, is strongly rooted among students and parents. Students feel that they have fewer opportunities to get "good jobs", to come into a good position, to fulfil their aspirations with education. Comparisons are equally common among parents, as exemplified by this man in Hambantota town, who feels that his children are suffering, in relation to children in Colombo and to the rich:

R - In Colombo you find many International Schools. They are teaching in English. Those who can afford they are sending. What about the future of poor children? They are suffering! In my view, they are all children. Now I am worried. If they had given us enough facilities, we would not have been in this position. My children are suffering; they should not be suffering! (HH08, middle-level, urban man).

It will be seen, however, that sometimes, what other schoolchildren have is grossly exaggerated. Even if the most important lesson is that awareness of what is missing out is big even in marginal areas, statements like the one below show the need to be a bit careful about how much to read into some of these comparisons:

Better schools have glass rooms, and each person has one computer and one room. We have a competition with them (SE29 - Rural Boy).

This quotation is important, because it indicates that also the rural students see education as competition, if so without a level playing field, in addition to the rights-

perspective mentioned above. Quite naturally, however, there are no such schools where all students have one room and one computer each. Similarly, rural schools do not have, "...only 5 percent of the facilities in the urban schools" (SE01). Very often it is also not stated *which* urban schools that students and parents are comparing their own situations with, *what* kind of facilities they perceive to be so unfairly distributed, and *how* this is changing over time. That is what the rest of this chapter is about.

7.3 Where are the different segments of schools?

7.3.1 The bigger picture: Hambantota District in Sri Lanka

I will start here by briefly placing Hambantota District in a national context, as well as in a comparison with rich districts in the Western Province (Colombo/Gampaha) and with another marginal district just to the north of Hambantota (Moneragala).

According to statistics from various school censuses, it can be seen that the number of schools in the country as a whole increased from 9,117 to 9,864 between 1980 and 1990, while it had decreased to 9,790 in 2003 (see Table 7.1). The recent decrease is in line with the scheme of school rationalisation starting in the mid-1990s, and with the overall decrease in student numbers. In Hambantota District, the number of schools increased substantially between 1980 and 1990, and the figure for 2003 is still higher than in 1990. Also in Moneragala, the number of schools has increased if comparing 1980 and 2003, as have the number of students, while trends in Gampaha and Colombo rather are the opposite:

Table 7.1 Number of schools and students in selected districts, 1980-2003

District	No. of schools			No. of students		
	1980	1990	2003	1980	1990	2003
Hambantota	279	314	316	104,647	140,188	132,236
Moneragala	175	210	261	58,024	94,475	104,393
Colombo	451	449	418	342,336	363,583	347,659
Gampaha	594	585	540	297,104	340,339	320,320
Sri Lanka	9,117	9,864	9,790	3,280,787	4,111,272	3,941,685

Source: School Census (1980; 1990; 2003), Ministry of Education

One way of looking at the distribution of educational opportunities is through the spatial distribution of the popular 1AB schools⁹⁴. According to the School Census in 2003, six percent of all government schools in the country are 1AB schools. The percentage for Hambantota District is the same (6), with 19 out of the 316 schools being 1AB schools. In Colombo and Gampaha, 16 and 9 percent of schools respectively, are 1AB schools. For Moneragala, the corresponding figure is 5 percent. This situation is not surprising, considering that Hambantota and Moneragala have lower population densities, and thus a bigger number of small schools. As can be seen in Table 7.2 below, the situations in Hambantota and Gampaha districts resemble the

⁹⁴ In countries where enrolment rates are lower, it would have been problematic to use the number of students as point of reference, because it would not say much about the total "demand" for education in that area (measured as how many children that *would want* to go to school).

situation for the country as a whole, in terms of the percentage of students enrolled in 1AB schools. It is in Colombo District, that the largest percentage of students is enrolled in 1AB schools⁹⁵:

Table 7.2 Number of schools by status in selected districts, 2003

District	1AB	1C	Type 2	Type 3	Students in 1AB schools	Pop. density person/km ²
Hambantota	19	68	161	68	26 %	210
Moneragala	12	41	135	73	22 %	72
Colombo	65	82	211	60	48 %	3,305
Gampaha	51	93	263	133	31 %	1,541
Sri Lanka	606	1,752	4,267	3,165	29 %	299

Source: School Census (2003); Census of Population and Housing (2001)

Looked at in this aggregated sense, the situation in Hambantota District compares with the situation in the country as a whole, while Moneragala has a more difficult situation.

This situation should furthermore be seen in the light of the recent past. Referring to School Census data, Samaranayake (1985) notes that there were 279 government schools in Hambantota District in 1978, catering for 98,538 students. The 279 schools represented 3.1 percent of the national total of 9,072 schools, and this relationship is basically the same in 2003 (3.2 percent). In 1978, there were six 1AB schools, 38 1C schools, 161 Type 2 schools and 74 Type 3 schools, but there are no figures for how many students there were in the different schools. Compared with 2003, it can also be seen that the biggest increase in Hambantota District has been for 1AB and 1C schools, while the number of Type 3 schools decreased over time. This is in line both with trends of upgrading schools, as well as with the closing down of small schools. According to the School Census in 1980, of 279 schools in Hambantota District, 2.9 percent were 1AB schools, while the figure for the whole country was 5.2 percent, at that time. Hence, the increase in 1AB schools, to 2003, is more rapid for Hambantota District. Corresponding percentages for Colombo and Gampaha districts in 1980 were 12.1 and 7.5 respectively, compared to 16 and 9 percent in 2003.

Of special interest here are National Schools. Almost all National Schools are 1AB schools but many 1AB schools are not National Schools. Looking at the number of students enrolled in National Schools, in relation to the total number of students (Table 7.3), it can be seen that, again, Colombo is disproportionately endowed. Hambantota and Moneragala are just above the national average while Gampaha, surprisingly, has a lower percentage than the national average:

⁹⁵ Noticeable in the School Census from 2002, is that in Sri Lanka as a whole, it is 1AB schools that have the highest pupil-teacher ratio (25), followed by 1C schools (22), Type 3 schools (19) and Type 2 schools (18). This information has not been available to me for 2003, but it means that two common proxies for quality - school status and pupil-teacher ratio - seem to point in opposite directions.

Table 7.3 National Schools (NS) in selected districts, 2003

District	Number of NS	Number of Students in NS	Students in NS as % of all students
Hambantota ⁹⁶	13	26,219	20 %
Moneragala	9	19,032	18 %
Colombo	15	103,061	30 %
Gampaha	28	41,504	13 %
Sri Lanka	298	688,739	17 %

Source: School Census 2003, Ministry of Education

These comparisons are difficult to draw any firm conclusions from because they say little about how many students that finally get into popular schools. If a child is enrolled in a Type 2 or 3 school according to the School Census, this might be only for the first few years. Equally, I did not provide sufficient background information for a deeper understanding of the statistics. Finally, intra-district dimensions will be discussed below, together with a qualification of the accuracy of this aggregated picture. Taken together, however, this section still gives an introduction to, and raises important questions about, the distribution of schools in relation to the number of students. By way of conclusion, it can be said that Hambantota District is *not* disadvantaged compared to the national aggregate, while the situation in Colombo is much better in terms of having considerably higher percentages of students enrolled in popular schools. In several respects, the situation even seems to improve more rapidly in Hambantota District over time, than in both the country as a whole and in Colombo.

7.3.2 Sooriyawewa Division in Hambantota District

Moving closer to the empirical focus of this study, it becomes even more difficult to draw firm conclusions about the situation for individual families from statistical data. As units of comparison get smaller, inter-unit flows of students increase in importance, suggesting that the picture for one area might say less about the situation for children living there. Nevertheless, Table 7.4 below shows the inter-divisional distribution of schools. Sooriyawewa Division has got the highest number of students per school, followed by other dry divisions like Ambalantota and Tissemaharama. In the case of Sooriyawewa, this is due to that so many students are enrolled in the one big National 1AB School, located in Sooriyawewa town (see section 7.3.3). Another dry division, Lunugahamwehera, has comparatively many schools in relation to the number of students, while it has no school with opportunities for A-level Science.

⁹⁶ Except Aluthwewa NS, where the figure for 2004 evidently is not correct.

Table 7.4 Number of schools by status and division, Hambantota District, 2004

Division	1AB	1C	2	3	Schools - Total	Stud./ School	1AB Stud.	NS Stud.
Hambantota	2	3	14	2	21	461	24 %	24 %
Sooriyawewa	1	2	11	2	16	596	39 %	39 %
Ambalantota	3	6	17	4	30	584	35 %	28 %
Tissemaharama	1	7	13	6	27	571	14 %	14 %
Lunugahamwehera	0	3	12	9	24	197	0 %	0 %
Tangalle	4	6	19	12	41	426	35 %	21 %
Angunukolapelassa	1	7	12	2	22	381	17 %	17 %
Beliatta	3	11	14	14	42	243	32 %	5 %
Weeraketiya	2	7	11	4	24	485	40 %	40 %
Okawela	1	1	9	2	13	276	33 %	0 %
Walasmulla	1	7	11	3	22	443	29 %	29 %
Katuwana	2	7	16	3	28	452	19 %	10 %
District total	21	67	159	63	310	421	28 %	21 %

Sources: Hambantota, Walasmulla and Tangalle Zonal Education Offices; Ministry of Education, Statistical Branch; Visits to Schools

Visits to schools around the district reveal important flaws to Table 7.4. The *actual* percentage of students enrolled in schools with facilities for A-level Science, in Hambantota Division, is for example not as high as stated in the table. The 935 students in Zahira NS, a Tamil-medium school classified as a National 1AB School, do not have opportunities for A-level Science in their school, due primarily to a lack of Tamil-medium teachers. The actual figure would thus be 14 percent for Hambantota Division, rather than the 24 percent in Table 7.4, but as I do not know the actual situation for most of the other schools, I have to use official statistics for matters of comparison. Almost the same problem is there for the National School in Sooriyawewa, where there is a lack of teachers and facilities for A-level Science, so that students have to do a lot of the work in Private Tuition instead. In that case, the actual percentage for Sooriyawewa Division would have been zeroing, like in Lunugahamwehera. Both of these examples reinforce the earlier suggestion, that there is a need to make a distinction between different kinds of National Schools.

For the intra-district level, information has only been obtained from 1996 and forward, but on the other hand, this has been a turbulent and interesting period. Table 7.5 shows the distribution of students between types of schools in the district:

Table 7.5 Number of students in schools of different status, Hambantota District, 1996-2004

School status	Students, 1996	Students, 1998	Students, 2000	Students, 2002	Students, 2004
NS ⁹⁷	23,686 (16%)	25,064 (17 %)	25,786 (18 %)	27,373 (19 %)	26,011 (20 %)
Other 1AB	8,026 (6 %)	8,578 (6 %)	9,288 (6 %)	9,311 (7 %)	8,749 (7 %)
1C	45,551 (31 %)	44,374 (31 %)	43,489 (30 %)	41,421 (29 %)	38,338 (29 %)
Total	144,900	144,086	144,101	140,661	130,577

Source: Ministry of Education, Statistical Branch

For the district as a whole, the number of students has gone down quite drastically since 2000, after a period of near-stagnation since 1996. The number of students in 1C schools has seen an absolute decrease year by year. There is a slightly decreasing

⁹⁷ Except Aluthwewa NS, because the figure for 2004 evidently is not correct.

percentage of all students enrolled in these schools. The situation for National and other 1AB schools is somewhat different. In both of these popular categories, the absolute number of students increased between 1996 up to 2002. This increase in enrolment in popular (urban) schools is in line with the urbanisation of education identified at the nation level (Chapter 5). For the Southern Province, the reasons for this urbanisation of education are summarised by a high official at the Provincial Ministry of Education to be increased physical mobility, increased political interference in school admissions, and increased parental interest with education (KI28). The combination of these three factors has allowed more students the opportunity to go to popular urban schools. Interestingly though, the trend might well have been arrested, at least in Hambantota District, since 2002. Although the percentage of students enrolled in all 1AB schools (including National Schools) is increasing all the way through - from 22 percent in 1996 to 27 percent in 2004 - the absolute number decreasing between 2002 and 2004⁹⁸.

Looking at all National Schools in the district one at the time, a decreasing absolute trend in student numbers since either 2000 or 2002 can be depicted in nine of them. This is the result of a combination of factors. One is that, in a system of feeder schools, it is logical that schools higher up in the hierarchy closely follow the pattern of schools further down in the system. Hence, if general enrolment levels decrease, enrolments in National Schools will eventually decrease as well. However, visiting National Schools, it is revealed that the decrease is primarily a result of national efforts to decrease student numbers in National Schools (see Chapter 5):

R - We had a meeting yesterday with all principals of National Schools [in the district] and we were strongly advised to reduce the number of students to 40 in each class. Now, in this school, we even have 50 in some classes, but from this year [2004] we have to reduce it to 40. I informed my staff that we will only take 40 students for the grade 6 classes (KI34, Principal, Weeraketiya NS).

The absolute decrease is part of the attempt to increase the quality of National Schools, which is seen to be threatened by a too rapid inflow of students. The government is upgrading parallel schools in the area, this principal adds, but parents still want to put their children in his National School. Importantly, decreasing absolute numbers in National Schools is hence not necessarily the result of decreased demand for admission, and the same picture is given to me in *all* National Schools visited. In my interpretation, the reasons behind the decreasing number of students in National Schools are thus three: there are fewer students totally in the system due to low population growth, there is an upgrading of parallel schools to stop the urbanisation of the student population, and there are greater restrictions for access to National Schools when it comes to admission. Since recently, National Schools do not accept students apart from through

⁹⁸ The number of teachers has followed the same pattern as the number of students, implying that pupil-teacher ratios for 2004, in all 1AB schools, are basically the same as they were in 1996, with the National School average even increasing slightly (from 28.5 to 29.5).

their own primary schools and the grade 5 examinations (see section 7.3.3), something that is very important for what follows.

It should finally be noted that the policy of school rationalisation and closing down of small schools has had effects in Hambantota District during the last eight years or so. Data collected in Zonal Education Offices suggest the total number of schools in the district to be down to 310 in 2004, not the 316 suggested in the School Census for 2003. There are three education zones within Hambantota District - Tangalle, Walasmulla and Hambantota - and altogether nine schools have been closed in these three zones in recent years. As no schools have been closed in Sooriyawewa Division, I have had to rely on related research. Gunawardena (2003), writing for the national evaluation of the school rationalisation scheme conducted by the National Education Commission, shows what has happened regarding this in Hambantota District. In the Tangalle Zone, one school was closed in 1997 and three in 2001, while in the Walasmulla Zone, one school closed in 1997, one in 1999 and one in 2001⁹⁹. In Hambantota Zone, further, in which Sooriyawewa Division is included, one school closed in 1997 and one in 2000. According to Gunawardena (ibid.), the majority of schools in the district were closed due to low student numbers with half of them having less than 10 students. The multiple reasons for closures identified by various informants also include lack or paucity of facilities, physical inaccessibility (e.g. location on a hilltop), and the absence of teachers in particular subjects, especially English. Other reasons mentioned are the emergence of popular schools close to these small schools, in combination with parental interest to give the best possible education to their children. In some schools, however, reasons for closure identified by informants were lack of parental interest, or principals' and teachers' indifference or inefficiency. Only in one school in the whole province - where 58 schools have been closed - is it reported that students have dropped out due to the closure (ibid.).

One thing that seems to hold true for many parts of the district is that the distribution of schools is far reaching, in the sense that there is a school in, or at least within a short distance from, most villages. To verify this, it would have been useful to do buffer zone analyses around schools with help of GIS, but I have had problems finding precise enough maps with all villages marked as points (as opposed to as written names or lines). This would have made the analysis too unreliable.

7.3.3 Situation regarding schools within Sooriyawewa Division

To understand the dynamics in the education network, a local perspective is necessary. Within Sooriyawewa Division, 16 governmental schools catered for 9,536 students in 2004 (see Table 7.6). There is one National School since the 1980s, with all streams for A-level. This school - Sooriyawewa NS - is located in the main town. There are three 1C schools, ten Type 2 schools and two Type 3 schools. There is furthermore a system

⁹⁹ At the Education Zonal Office in Walasmulla, however, it is claimed that 5 schools have been closed in the Zone but I use the figure provided by Gunawardena (2003) for matters of comparison.

of classifying schools as Not Difficult, Difficult and Very Difficult, depending on a number of criteria relating to the areas in which the schools are located. These criteria include the quality of the road network and the availability of certain services, such as post offices, transport facilities, etc. In the division, six schools are classified as Very Difficult (including Andarawewa), six as Difficult, and four as Not Difficult (including Sooriyawewa NS and Meegahajandura). Trends in the distribution of students and teachers over time will be discussed in section 7.4.3:

Table 7.6 Students, teachers and status of schools in Sooriyawewa Division, 2004

Name of school	School status	Students	Teachers	Classification
Rural schools				
Ihala Kumbukwewa	Type 3	10	2	Very Difficult (VD)
Welliwewa	Type 3	85	4	Difficult (D)
Mahagalwewa	Type 2	206	10	Difficult (D)
Meegahajandura	Type 2	561	15	Not Difficult (ND)
Habarathhawela	Type 2	195	9	Difficult (D)
Wewegama	Type 2	375	14	Difficult (D)
Bendigamtota	Type 2	485	20	Very Difficult (VD)
Viharagala 550	Type 2	369	11	Very Difficult (VD)
Hathporuwa	Type 2	329	14	Very Difficult (VD)
Andarawewa	Type 2	348	13	Very Difficult (VD)
Wedigamwewa	Type 2	152	10	Difficult (D)
Ranmuduwewa	Type 2	175	7	Very Difficult (VD)
Viharagala	1C	975	31	Not Difficult (ND)
Namadagaswewa	1C	871	27	Not Difficult (ND)
Weeriyagama	1C	702	29	Difficult (D)
Semi-urban schools				
Sooriyawewa NS	N1AB	3,698	114	Not Difficult (ND)
Sooriyawewa Division		9,536	330	

Source: Information collected in the schools

It is important to remember that, in Sooriyawewa NS, there are few possibilities for doing A-level Science, even though there are students enrolled in the stream, because there is a lack laboratory facilities. This indicates that, what looks like a rather even spatial distribution in a statistical exercise might well conceal a different situation on the ground. Several teachers and urban parents suggest that Sooriyawewa NS is only a National School by name, not by quality. Nevertheless, many rural parents still want to enrol their children in this school, and they had to conduct multi-shift teaching with morning and afternoon classes up to around 1997. Since the mid-1980s, however, a number of new schools have been started in the division, due to overcrowding of existing schools, especially of Sooriyawewa NS. Earlier, Sooriyawewa NS is claimed to have had around 6,000 students, and still in 2002, the number of students was as high as 4,143 when I visited it (SSN1). As the figure for 2004 is down to 3,698 (SSN5), it is evident that something rather drastic has happened.

There are attempts of making the school structure in the division more "rational", while other processes are operating due to the practices of individual schools. To start with, there has been an upgrading of several schools, so that more

schools can cater for students in higher classes. Weeriyagama, Namadagaswewa, and Viharagala can now take students for A-level classes, which means that fewer students can go to Sooriyawewa NS at that level. Yet, there are few students in these new A-level classes in 2004, and there is a serious lack of teachers in these schools for those higher levels. Weeriyagama is one of the very few schools in the whole area where a lack of teachers is not brought out as a main problem, but there are teacher problems for the A-level because they do not have teachers for all subjects¹⁰⁰ (SWi3). In Namadagaswewa, there is a serious problem with teachers at the A-level. In May 2004, I am told by the principal that the school is about to become a 1AB school, but they will not be able to conduct A-level Science although they have been provided with new buildings and a laboratory. One reason is that there is no equipment in that laboratory. Another is that they do not have teachers to conduct it (SN2). In Wedigamwewa, they started giving O-level classes from 2004, and the first class will sit for the exam in 2005, but although the number of teachers is increasing, they really do not have enough of them for providing O-level classes (SWed1). Also the school in Wewegama is being upgraded, and the first O-level class was started in 2004. The principal says that this is good especially for girls, many of whom might otherwise not have been sent to a school in another area after grade 9 (SWe3). In Viharagala 550, they have O-level classes since only a few years back, as well (SVK1).

Other schools in the division have been downgraded, largely because of a lack of teachers. This is true for the schools in Mahagalwewa and in Meegahajandura. In the former of the two, they had up to grade 11 until year 2000, but on my arrival in the beginning of 2003, there were only classes up to grade 9. They did try to start O-level classes again in 2003 but they had to stop it immediately. According to the principal (SMa1), this has increased dropout rates. The reason for the increased dropouts are said to be that it substantially has increased the distance that students have to travel, and there are problems of transporting students to the nearest school with O-level classes. In Meegahajandura, they conducted A-level classes for three years, but in 2000 they had to stop it because of the lack of teachers (SMe1).

In Welliwewa, Bendigamtota, Ihala Kumbukwewa, Hathporuwa, Ranmuduwewa, Habaraththawela, and Andarawewa, there have been no changes in the number of grades these schools can provide, in recent years. Furthermore, in the two primary schools in the division - Welliwewa and Ihala Kumbukwewa - they conduct multi-grade teaching. There are no schools in the division offering multi-shift teaching, since this practice was stopped in Sooriyawewa NS in 1997. As mentioned above, however, no school in Sooriyawewa Division has been closed, although there were plans for closing Ihala Kumbukwewa as I was doing my second period in the field in 2002-2003. Having discussed the reasons for not closing it, both at the Hambantota

¹⁰⁰ Weeriyagama has been made a 1C school, not a Type 2 school (SWi1). Yet, in the aggregate calculations in Table 7.4, I have counted it as a Type 2 school, for matters of comparison, because in the data obtained from the Ministry of Education, it is still a Type 2 school.

Zonal Education Office as well as with parents, teachers and the principal, my conclusion is that this was due mainly to two factors. For one, there was a lack of will amongst local implementing agencies to go ahead with the closing down of small schools. Second, the principal and the few teachers in Ihala Kumbukwewa are from the village itself, and they are hence very keen on staying.

In Hambantota town, finally, all schools visited are classified as Not Difficult, due to the fact that they are located in an urban area. There have been a few changes in the status of the three schools, however, and the situation for 2004 is given in Table 7.7:

Table 7.7 Number of students and teachers in selected schools, Hambantota Town, 2004

Name of school	Status	Students	Teachers	Classification
Hambantota KV	Type 2	2,130	66	ND
St Mary's NS	N1AB	1,352	45	ND
Zahira NS	N1AB	968	32	ND

Source: Information collected in the schools

Hambantota KV has been upgraded, and since 1999, it caters for students above grade 5. In 2003 they got enough buildings to start a grade 9 class and in a near future they hope to start O-level classes as well. This is the only school in the divisions of Hambantota and Sooriyawewa where they conduct English-medium classes. Until a few years ago, they conducted multi-shift teaching, but this was not popular among parents because it meant that students in the afternoon sessions had problems attending Private Tuition (SHam1). In St Mary's NS, they have started primary education as well, from grade 1. Up to 2003 it was divided so that Hambantota KV conducted the lower grades while students continued their education in St Mary's NS. From now, there will be increasing competition for students between the two schools (SStM3). In Zahira NS, however, they no longer conduct A-level classes in Science, due to a lack of teachers, despite that it is a 1AB school, which should be able to cater for students in these classes (SZ1; SZ2). This is the voice of one of its students:

My aspiration with school education is to be a doctor in the future. But there is a lack of facilities to study biology [Science] in our school. To study biology [Science] we have to go to a big, big school in another area. But how can poor children who are good in education go to these big schools? In my school [Zahira NS] there are no teachers for Biology [Science], Commerce and Maths at the Advanced level. (...). Our school is a National School but we do not have facilities like a National School. How can we achieve our aspirations? (SE75 - Urban Girl).

The upgrading of several schools, in order for them to cater for more students for longer periods of time, has many effects on what family resources that are important for accessibility of educational opportunities. This is discussed thoroughly in Chapter 8. One direct and very important consequence, however, is that it is more difficult now to enter popular schools for students who live closer to another school:

Q - My feeling is that it is getting more and more difficult for children who come from rural areas to get into the popular schools - what do you say about that?

R - Yes, it is very difficult if they have a school closer to their homes. If they pass the grade 5 examination, they can come (SStM3, Principal, St Mary's NS).

This is confirmed in interviews with principals in all popular schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, and forms part of an explicit attempt to make the school system more rational by way of having students go to the schools closest to their homes. In a way, one can say that the area rule is being implemented more thoroughly. It is, furthermore, part of an attempt to stop the overcrowding of urban schools, or what is here called an urbanisation of education. Apart from these quality concerns in urban schools, however, principals in rural schools are afraid that their schools will loose even more students, unless the mobility of students is restricted. For most *schools*, keeping students in the closest school would hence be a win-win situation. Yet, the tension this leads to can be illustrated by this voice from a rural mother, who is eager but unable to send her children to a popular, semi-urban school. The principal in the school the woman wants to send them to, supports her statement just below:

R - My daughter is now in grade 8, but she is still very poor compared to how I was in grade 2. I am sending them to Private Tuition, and I am trying to send them to Sooriyawewa NS, but this principal has asked the principal in Sooriyawewa NS not to let any children from this school enter (SAH08, middle-level, rural woman).

R - ...the principals in these [rural] schools have requested from me not to take their students to this school because their schools are going down. So I refuse them. In these schools there is a serious lack of teachers, so everyone wants to come here... (SSN2, Principal, Sooriyawewa NS).

In Viharagala, a school close to Sooriyawewa NS, the principal says that up to 2002, many students went on to Sooriyawewa NS for the higher grades, while this is not the case anymore (SVM2). In Welliwewa, further, I am equally told by the principal, that students from his area cannot go to urban schools, because these are full (SW2).

Below follows a long extract from a discussion with the director of the Hambantota Education Zone. The extract serves to further illustrate the tensions stemming from School Rationalisation. Interestingly, the director stresses problems of getting students *out of* the National School in Sooriyawewa, not only of getting less students to enrol there:

R – Around Sooriyawewa NS there are no good schools so all children try to go there. And there are also many newcomers to the area, so it is a very big problem. Economic problems also affect that; and there are no other schools.

Q – But now they are upgrading [schools in] Namadagaswewa, Weeriyagama and Viharagala...

R – The main problem is the transport problem. There are no good roads. And Namadagaswewa and Sooriyawewa NS are too far from each other, so the students cannot travel. Namadagaswewa has many new buildings but the population around there is very low. That is a big problem. So if we cannot

build another school closer to the one in Sooriyawewa, we cannot reduce the quantity; now it is too far.

Q - Now they have only 3,500 [sic.] students in Sooriyawewa NS and no other school is really increasing much – where are all the students?

R – They have decided not to take new applicants so that means big problems. They have facilities for 4,000 students but they do not want to take more. Only Namadagaswewa and Viharagala have buildings, the others schools have not.

Q – And they [Namadagaswewa and Viharagala] do not have enough teachers – especially not for A-level...

R – Yes, and another problem is that students do not want to go to these schools; they want to go to Sooriyawewa NS because they show good results [at examinations]. Viharagala also shows good results but they have teacher problems. The big problem is that teachers are not from there; they come from Matara and Galle (KI37).

Upgrading schools might hence solve transport problems for children in rural schools, by reducing "the need" to travel, but it does not help in bringing children out of Sooriyawewa NS to the surrounding schools. Furthermore, most parents still want to enrol their children in urban schools, regardless of whether there is one closer to their homes. The Zonal Director quoted above says that the school in Sooriyawewa has the capacity - in terms of buildings - to take more students, but that the ministry has to provide more facilities and teachers for that. When asked, he contends that it is a problem that they are limiting admissions to National Schools, without equipping the schools in which students are forced to remain with adequate facilities for education.

7.3.4 Areas and schools where students pass examinations

We do not get a good education. We have eight periods in a day - three out of eight they are not teaching. Some days they teach only one period. In many subjects we do not have teachers. They give the same examination paper to us as in other schools. But in those schools they teach eight subjects. How can our school's students answer those questions? In Sinhala we can write something, but how can we write in the English subject? When I think about this I get very sad. One year from now we have to write the O-level examination. What shall we write? I cannot understand. I am not sure I will pass the O-level examination, but my parents' hope is that I will pass the examination. Somehow I try to fulfil their hopes (SE18 - Rural Girl).

Examination results are, in themselves, questionable indicators of what students have actually learned. It might also be that criteria for passing or failing have changed over time, further complicating the link between trends in performance and actual knowledge. Finally, results at examinations are due to a number of factors and their various interrelationships, which cannot be captured in full here. Still though, for understanding where "good schools" are located, it is of help to see where students pass examinations. In Sri Lanka, there are three big examinations worth taking into account: the grade 5 scholarship examinations, the G.C.E. O-level examinations after grade 11, and the G.C.E. A-level examinations after grade 13.

Grade 5 scholarship examinations have two purposes: to make possible for "able" children to obtain admission to National Schools and to allow for the

economically poor of these a small bursary. This is in line with how the government has tried to uphold an element of equality in the system; to allow educational mobility for “able” children through access to better segments of schools, that is, National Schools. It is not possible to say anything general about what schools that students end up in, would they pass the exam; the better the results, the bigger the chances for entrance to schools also in Colombo. Yet, as seen in Table 7.8 below, this examination is not a great leveller of educational opportunities, for rural students in Sooriyawewa Division. For most schools I do not have information about how many students who sat, but nevertheless, only four students from all rural schools passed the examination in 2002. In 2003, this figure had decreased, to three students. I know that one of the students who passed in 2002 went on to the very popular Weeraketiya NS – in the western parts of Hambantota District – and that one student passing in 2003 also was about to go there. Yet another successful rural student got entrance to a school in Galle but I do not have information about the rest of them.

Table 7.8 Results at grade 5 examinations, 2002-2003, no and % all Schools with grade 5 classes, Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town

Name of School	School Status	No. Sat 2002	No. Pass 2002	No. Sat 2003	No. Pass 2003
Rural schools					
Ihala Kumbukwewa	Type 3	-	0	2	0
Welliwewa	Type 3	-	0	-	0
Mahagalwewa	Type 2	-	0	-	0
Meegahajandura	Type 2	-	0	-	0
Habaraththawela	Type 2	21	0	15	0
Wewegama	Type 2	-	0	-	0
Bendigamtota	Type 2	54	2	52	2
Viharagala 550	Type 2	22	0	34	0
Hathporuwa	Type 2	-	0	29	0
Andarawewa	Type 2	-	0	-	0
Wedigamwewa	Type 2	13	0	10	0
Ranmuduwewa	Type 2	-	0	15	0
Viharagala	1C	99	2	78	1
Namadagaswewa	1C	-	0	15	0
Weeriyagama	1C	61	0	54	0
Semi-urban schools					
Sooriyawewa NS	N1AB	312	18	278	13
Urban schools					
Zahira NS	N1AB	75	7	55	6
Hambantota KV	Type 2	280	49	284	17

Source: Information collected in the schools

In Sooriyawewa NS, 18 and 13 students passed in 2002 and 2003 respectively, while the situation for Hambantota KV is better in both relative and absolute terms. Of note is that this is neither a National nor a 1AB School - it is a Type 2 school - but it is nevertheless very popular among parents. According to the principal, this popularity is to a great extent due to that many students pass the grade 5 scholarship examination (SHam1). My interpretation is hence that this examination opens up some opportunities

of a few students, mainly in the most popular urban schools. Yet, it rarely improves the situation for students in rural schools, as these students do not pass the examination. This is a general feeling in many rural schools as well:

R - [Grade 5 Scholarship examinations]...are selecting good students to Royal College, Ananda, Nalanda, and like that¹⁰¹. It is not helpful to poor students. It is for the big schools (SN2, Principal, Rural School).

O-level examinations, to continue, are important for access to the A-level, which in turn was identified in Chapter 6 as a necessary qualification for many "good jobs". Passing the O-level examination is also a prerequisite for many of the locally available jobs, such as garment factory work. To qualify for A-levels, it is necessary to pass six subjects with at least three credit-passes, as well as to pass the core subjects of Maths and First Language. This is how "pass" has been calculated in Table 7.9 below, that is, as the number of students obtaining sufficient results for continuing their education, while a larger number of students passed the exam in the sense of qualifying for jobs. At the national level, the percentage of students qualifying for A-level increased rapidly since the mid-1990s, and it was kept at 42 percent in 2002 (GOSL 2003). Table 7.9 shows the situation in all schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town where they have O-level classes:

Table 7.9 Results at O-level examinations, 2002-2003,
All schools with O-level classes, Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, no. and %

Name of school	School status	2002			2003		
		No. sat	No. pass	(%) pass	No. sat	No. pass	(%) pass
Rural schools							
Meegahajandura	Type 2	79	11	14 %	56	7	13 %
Habaraththawela	Type 2	25	9	36 %	26	11	42 %
Bendigamtota	Type 2	51	17	33 %	47	7	15 %
Hathporuwa	Type 2	38	4	11 %	43	17	40 %
Andarawewa	Type 2	31	4	13 %	21	0	0 %
Viharagala	1C	117	22	19 %	134	26	19 %
Namadagaswewa	1C	57	14	25 %	68	21	31 %
Weeriyagama	1C	48	12	25 %	62	11	17 %
Rural schools total		446	93	21 %	457	100	22 %
National Schools (NS)							
Sooriyawewa NS ¹⁰²	N1AB	405	126	31 %	337	106	31 %
Zahira NS	N1AB	43	14	33 %	42	9	21 %
St Mary's NS	N1AB	210	84	40 %	246	95	39 %
NS total		658	224	34 %	625	210	34 %

Source: Information collected in the schools

¹⁰¹ These three are all very popular schools in Colombo.

¹⁰² These are only the first-shot students. Gender-separate data has not been collected but in 2002, 67 boys out of 202 (33 percent) passed the O-level examination in Sooriyawewa NS, while the corresponding figure for girls were 59 out of 203 (29 percent). In 2003, 36 out of 156 boys passed (23 percent), and 70 out of the 181 girls (39 percent). In most schools, the information that I get from principals is that more girls than boys pass the examinations.

The overall pass rate for the eight rural schools was 21 percent for 2002. The figure for 2003 was slightly better, at 22 percent, but still, less than 20 percent pass in five of the rural schools. In Sooriyawewa NS, the pass percentages are higher, at 31 percent for both 2002 and 2003. St Mary's NS has substantially higher percentages of 40 (2002) and 39 (2003). While Zahira NS obtained 33 percent in 2002, the figure was down at 21 percent in 2003, worse than for the average rural school in Sooriyawewa Division that year. At the same time, a few rural schools, such as Habaraththawela and Namadagaswewa, show results comparable with those in the urban National Schools. However, in the rural schools where I have collected student essays - Meegahajandura and Andarawewa - results are substantially lower than the rural average, which ought to have implications for how essays should be interpreted. In 2003, no student passed the O-level examination in Andarawewa.

Do the results in Habaraththawela and Namadagaswewa suggest that the difference between the best rural schools and urban and semi-urban National Schools is not that big after all? Yes, and no! Comparing the information in table 7.9 with a few other National Schools in the district (Table 7.10), it is seen that the difference *between* National Schools often is bigger than between "bad" National Schools and other schools. Well-performing National Schools are found in the district, but not in Sooriyawewa Division or in any of the other divisions in the dry, eastern parts.

Table 7.10 Results at O-level examinations 2003, selected National Schools, Hambantota District

School	School status	No. sat 2003	No. pass 2003	% pass 2003
Tangalle Balika NS	NIAB	264	209	79 %
Weeraketiya NS	NIAB	366	319	87 %
Walasmulla NS ¹⁰³	NIAB	216	139	64 %

Source: Information collected in the schools

Tangalle Balika NS - a girls' College in Tangalle town - and the National School in Weeraketiya, are two of the most popular schools in the whole district; probably *the* most popular ones. Yet, Table 7.10 illustrates why there is a need to distinguish between National Schools when discussing educational opportunities, as these schools have pass rates of 79 and 87 percent respectively. My interpretation is that restricting intakes to National Schools is part of making *all of them* into these kind of elite institutions, as was indeed one of the initial intentions with these schools.

It is furthermore interesting to look at results at O-level examinations in subjects that parents identify as most important. Available statistics for the national level suggests that the joint urge for learning and teaching English has not been translated into significantly better results at examinations (Table 7.11). The *failure rate* has fluctuated markedly since 1981, and although there is a downward trend, more than 70 percent failed the English subjects in the O-level examinations in 2001. If passing the

¹⁰³ For Walasmulla NS, I also managed to get gender specific data. In 2003, 63 out of 116 boys passed (54 percent) 76 out of 100 girls passed (76 percent).

English subject is made compulsory for entering the A-level Science stream, which is sometimes suggested, it would hence effectively exclude a great majority of students from this stream. This national picture is important for understanding recent changes in policy regarding medium of instruction, as this is connected to a frustration among politicians stemming from the low levels of English skills among Sri Lankan youths:

Table 7.11 Results at O-level examinations 1981-2001, Sri Lanka. performance by school candidates in English language

Year	No. sat	% Fail ¹⁰⁴
1981	147,771	84
1985	226,663	78
1990	268,399	70
1995	305,339	69
2000	342,775	74
2001	338,822	72

Source: Department of examinations, subject statistics

In addition to this national picture, it is important to add a spatial dimension, which will help in understanding some of the effects that the ongoing policy changes might have. Intra-district information regarding pass rates in the English subject at O-level is not available, but if national data are disaggregated by district, for the 1990s, it is possible to detect very significant spatial disparities. Colombo is by far the most successful district. In 1990, the Colombo *failure rate* was just above 30 percent (30.4), while in 1999, it was kept at basically the same level or just below (29.6 percent). In Hambantota District, on the other hand, the corresponding figure for 1990 was 81.2 percent. Although there had been a decrease in 1999 (74.4 percent), the differences between different years were too big to suggest it to be part of any slow but positive trend (Department of Examinations, Subject Statistics). In Maths, the failure rate at O-level examinations, in Hambantota District, decreased from 77 percent (1990) to 66 percent (1999), and this is part of a more stable trend. In Science, the failure rate in the district decreased from 69 percent (1990) to 60 percent (1999). Yet, failure rates in these subjects are still very high, and far higher than in Colombo, where only 28 percent failed Science in 1999, while 45 percent failed in the core subject Maths (ibid.). Unfortunately, more recent figures cannot be given.

The final examination in focus here is the A-level examination. This examination works both as an attainment examination and for qualification to the university. Again, it is the selective function that is in focus here. At the national level, 36 and 39 percent of the students passed the examination with sufficient results for qualifying for university admission in 2002 and 2003 respectively (Table 7.12). Pass rates are higher for Commerce and Arts in both relative and absolute terms, as compared with the two Science streams:

¹⁰⁴ There are four categories in the examinations: "Distinction", "Credit pass", "Simple pass" and "Fail". Since 2001, the category of "Fail" is called "Weak", and there is one more category in-between "Distinction" and "Credit pass", termed "Very Good Pass" or "B-pass".

Table 7.12 Results at A-level examinations, national level, 2002-2003
Students qualified for university admission according to streams, no. and %

Subject stream	2002			2003		
	No sat	No pass	(%) pass	No sat	No pass	(%) pass
Biology	30,940	7,298	24	28,159	6,546	23
Physics	27,002	6,406	24	26,644	5,785	22
Commerce	64,403	25,579	40	60,460	27,137	45
Arts	104,640	42,271	40	96,932	42,743	44
Total	226,985	81,554	36	212,195	82,211	39

Source: GOSL (2003: 118)

Looking at the situation for all schools with A-level education, within Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, in comparison with a few selected National Schools in the district, a rather surprising picture is revealed:

Table 7.13 Results at A-level examination, 2002-2003, selected schools in Hambantota District, students qualified for university admission, all streams, no. and %

School name	2002			2003		
	No sat	No pass	(%) pass	No sat	No pass	(%) pass
Viharagala	40	13	33	39	19	49
Namadagaswewa	11	1	9	32	3	9
Rural schools total	51	14	27	71	22	31
Sooriyawewa NS	104	38	37	147	58	39
Zahira NS	18	3	17	14	6	43
St Mary's NS	207	59	29	178	67	38
NS total	329	100	30	339	131	39
Weeraketiya NS	-	-	-	-	-	36
Tangalle Balika NS	-	-	-	269	107	40
Walasmulla NS	-	-	-	238	83	35
Other NS total	-	-	-			

Source: Information collected in the schools

At this level, there are small differences between one of the rural schools in Sooriyawewa Division, National Schools in the division and in Hambantota Town, and the very popular National Schools in the district. Yet, before jumping to comparative conclusions, it is important to acknowledge what is hidden behind the statistics, and two important points need to be made. For a start, in the two rural schools, there is only one stream available, the Arts stream, while the other schools have all streams. This is important because if data is divided for streams, it can be seen that in Tangalle Balika NS, the total of 40 percent conceal the following: In 2003, only 26 students out of 128 passed Science (20 percent) and 3 out of 30 (10 percent) passed Maths. In the Commerce stream, 43 out of 60 passed (62 percent) and for the Arts Stream, as many as 35 passed out of 51 (69 percent). I do not have this information for all schools but in Walasmulla NS, pass rates for Maths and Science were 5 and 17 percent respectively, while in Commerce and Arts, the corresponding figures were 54 and 60 percent. In Sooriyawewa NS, finally, no one out of 12 passed in Maths and one out of nine passed the Science Stream (11 percent). Figures for Commerce and Arts were 21 and 46 percent respectively in 2003. This first qualification is important for understanding that the difference between rural and National Schools is bigger than it seemed in Table

7.13. But there is another point to be made, which I believe to be of even bigger importance. “Pass” means that they qualified to go to the university by obtaining three simple passes. In addition, they need sufficient number of marks, according to the system governing the district quotas. I do not have figures for all schools, but as an example, none of the students who passed in Namadagaswewa qualified to go to the university. In Weeraketiya NS, on the other hand, eleven students were actually *selected* for Medical Colleges, ten for Engineering Faculties, and 60 students for other university places in 2003 (KI34).

This discussion should not be taken to be conclusive as to the quality of education in the different schools. As noted by the planning director in Walasmulla Education Zone (KI29), National Schools perform better also because they attract good students, for example through scholarship examinations, and they are generally located in urban areas where (better) Private Tuition opportunities are available. Although pupil-teacher ratios hence might be a better proxy for quality, this does not seem to be so important for parents, who want their children admitted even to overcrowded National Schools where pass rates at examinations are high:

R - Parents want their children to enter these schools [National Schools]. They do not care about the pupil-teacher ratio. And if we look at the grade 5 examinations, results are good - I cannot say that the quality is going down in these schools [because they are getting overcrowded] (KI32, Zonal Education Director, Tangalle Zone).

In the Tangalle Education Zone, parents try to enrol the children in feeder schools to National Schools in Tangalle town – especially the Tangalle Balika NS – so that they will end up there at a later stage, even if they do not pass the grade 5 examination.

7.4 Teachers: Prevalence, commitment and attendance

For grades 6 to 9, there are nine or ten subjects. But only two teachers are available for those grades. They [students] should be taught Sinhala, Social Studies, History, Technical Skills, Physical Training, and like that, but we do not have the teachers. People around here are helpless. They are not rich enough to send their children to better schools - they are forced to send them here. Sometimes I even tell them to send their children somewhere else but they cannot do it. They put all their hope in that I can bring teachers to this school (SR1, Principal, Rural School).

7.4.1 The bigger picture: Hambantota District in Sri Lanka

Teachers are among the most important components of the education network and their numbers need to be put in relation to the number of students. The pupil-teacher ratio is thus a good starting point. The overall pupil-teacher ratio in Sri Lanka has decreased over time and is now kept at the exceptionally low level of 21:1. Table 7.14 shows the situation in Hambantota District, in comparison with Sri Lanka as a whole, as well as with a few other districts. It is seen that the pupil-teacher ratio in Hambantota, in 2003, was just below the national average, and below the situation in Colombo and Gampaha,

while Moneragala is just above the national average. The pupil-teacher ratio in government schools, in Hambantota District, has decreased from 27:1 in 1980 to 20:1 in 2003. This is a more drastic decrease than what has been the case in Colombo and Gampaha, as well as in the country as a whole. The decrease in the pupil-teacher ratio in Moneragala District is more pronounced than for the national average, and both of these marginal districts have had a more rapid decrease than the economically prosperous districts in the western province:

Table 7.14 Pupil-teacher ratios in selected districts, 1980-2003, government schools

District	Students (no)			Teachers (no)			Pupil/teacher		
	1980	1990	2003	1980	1990	2003	1980	1990	2003
Hambantota	104,647	140,188	132,236	3,832	6,119	6,724	27	23	20
Moneragala	58,024	94,475	104,393	2,065	3,638	4,680	28	26	22
Colombo	342,336	363,583	347,659	13,527	15,424	14,846	25	24	23
Gampaha	297,104	340,339	320,320	12,016	14,177	13,705	25	24	23
Sri Lanka	3,280,787	4,111,272	3,941,685	136,714	178,333	186,695	24	23	21

Source: School Census (1980; 1990; 2003), Ministry of Education

In the case of Hambantota, the number of teachers has increased continuously while the number of students has started to decrease in recent years. In Moneragala, the number of both teachers and students has increased although the former has increased more rapidly. In both Colombo and Gampaha however, the number of teachers, in 2003, is less than it was in 1990, and so is the number of students.

Of importance is whether the increasing number of teachers has come through employment of untrained teachers. Table 7.15 shows the numbers and percentages of untrained teachers, in relation to the whole teaching cadre, for years when data is available. Two points are worth making. First, the percentage of untrained teachers increased rapidly between 1983 and 1990, especially in the two marginal districts. Second, since 1990, the percentage has decreased markedly, and in 2003, it was very low in all four districts, as well as in the country as a whole. Hence, untrained teachers was no longer a big problem in the areas looked at here:

Table 7.15 Untrained teachers in selected districts, 1983-2003

District	Untrained teachers, numbers and percentages of total teachers					
	1983		1990		2003	
Hambantota	982	25 %	2,609	43 %	274	4 %
Moneragala	682	33 %	3,638	49 %	331	7 %
Colombo	1,699	13 %	2,087	14 %	630	4 %
Gampaha	1,344	12 %	2,214	16 %	610	4 %
Sri Lanka	28,844	22 %	53,752	30 %	9,450	5 %

Source: School Census (1983, 1990, 2003), Ministry of Education

Finally, there are gender dimensions of importance, and especially for girls' education it has proven important in other areas that there are female teachers employed in schools. In Sri Lanka, however, it is not a problem to get *female* teachers. Of a total of 186,695 teachers in 2003, 129,036 (69 percent) were female, while in Hambantota District, 68 percent out of the total 6,724 teachers were female.

7.4.2 The inter-divisional distribution of teachers

The figures that were provided in section 7.4.1 hide rather big intra-district differences. Comparing the twelve divisions within Hambantota District, there is a tendency for divisions in the wet and intermediate parts of the district (like Beliatta and Okawella) to have lower pupil-teacher ratios than divisions in the dry parts (like Sooriyawewa and Tissemaharama). This is illustrated in Table 7.16:

Table 7.16 Number of students and teachers in different divisions, Hambantota District, 2004

Division	Students	Teachers	P/T
Hambantota	9,671	421	23
Sooriyawewa ¹⁰⁵	9,536	330	29
Ambalantota	17,509	867	20
Tissemaharama	15,423	613	25
Lunugahamwehera	4,719	266	18
Tangalle	17,484	891	20
Angunukolapelassa	8,382	444	19
Beliatta	10,209	708	14
Weeraketiya	11,633	564	21
Okawela	3,591	272	13
Walasmulla	9,752	483	20
Katuwana	12,668	607	21
Hambantota District	130,577	6,466	20

Source: Zonal Education Offices, in Hambantota, Tangalle and Walasmulla; Ministry of Education

One Assistant Zonal Director says that the fact that Beliatta and Okawela have lower pupil-teacher ratios is not to say that these divisions offer a better education in general, because, he says, teachers are so unequally divided between schools (KI31). However, a teacher in Beliatta tells me that it is a good division for teachers, because it is so close to Matara (KI21) and the Zonal Director for that division confirms that teachers in Beliatta do not want to get a transfer; they have good facilities (KI32). Divisions along the coast, with the big cities of Tangalle (wet) and Ambalantota (dry) are at the district average. In contrast, Lunugahamwehera, where there is no “big school”, is an example of a dry division far away from large urban centres, with a rather low pupil-teacher ratio. Not much can be said here about these figures apart from that Sooriyawewa has got the highest ratio of all divisions in the district.

7.4.3 Teachers and students in Sooriyawewa Division

The empirical focus here is between schools within Sooriyawewa Division in comparison with the popular urban schools in Hambantota town. For this level, I will start by saying something about general enrolment rates, although the quality of these figures is difficult to determine.

As seen in Chapter 5, a relatively small percentage of students remains to be enrolled in primary education in Sri Lanka, while the percentage enrolled at the

¹⁰⁵ I could not get the figures for Sooriyawewa for 2004 so this is information that I have collected in schools during mid-2004.

secondary level is somewhat lower. According to the Resource Profile for Sooriyawewa Division, in 2002, the number of children that are not enrolled in the division has fluctuated at low levels during the last few years, and no trend can be established. For 2001, however, which is the latest figure available here, the number of non-enrolled children between 5-14, was a mere 73, down from 86 in 1996. In an international perspective, this situation would be exceptionally good, if data were proven correct. It is actually a bit difficult to find children in the areas that I have visited, who are not enrolled in any kind of formal educational activity, apart from among the very poor and poor Tamil families in Hambantota Town. An important issue, which has not been in focus in this research, regards disabled children, which seems to be a category that is not successfully included in the education system. According to some principals, there are teachers who have been specially trained to handle children with "special needs", but these teachers are not used for this purpose, due to a general lack of teachers. Other principals, in rural schools, contend that their teachers did not receive any such training, while one rural principal admit that he does not even know much about disabled children living in the vicinity of his school. I have met with a few disabled children during my visits to rural areas and most of them were, for different reasons, not included in the education network.

Table 7.17 shows the number of teachers and students in the different schools in Sooriyawewa Division, as well as in the schools in Hambantota town.

Table 7.17 Number of students and teachers,
all schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, 1996-2004

School	No. of students					No. of teachers				
	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
Rural schools										
Ihala Kumbukwewa	16	19	15	12	10	3	2	2	2	2
Welliwewa	73	63	65	66	85	6	5	6	4	4
Mahagalwewa	327	307	310	253	206	17	13	12	15	10
Meegahajandura	626	664	633	643	561	22	21	22	20	15
Habariththawela	233	246	240	232	195	13	15	15	11	9
Wewegama	432	440	446	402	375	9	13	12	15	14
Bendigamtota	700	687	641	599	485	18	24	23	21	20
Viharagala 550	239	263	331	337	369	10	9	10	10	11
Hathporuwa	463	410	355	331	329	16	17	16	13	14
Andarawewa	263	382	340	318	348	7	11	12	15	13
Wedigamwewa	99	98	115	136	152	7	8	7	7	10
Ranmuduwewa	131	149	163	176	175	6	9	9	12	7
Viharagala	1,108	1,183	1,244	1,200	975	30	34	39	47	31
Namadagaswewa	395	546	645	782	871	7	18	24	34	27
Weeriyagama	538	655	706	674	702	7	17	25	29	29
Semi-urban schools										
Sooriyawewa NS	4,303	4,608	4,337	4,179	3,698	126	153	146	126	114
Division total	9,946	10,720	10,586	10,340	9,536	304	369	380	381	330
Urban schools										
Hambantota KV	1,319	1,954	1,360	2,076	2,130	45	58	45	66	66
St Mary's NS	1,803	1,312	1,635	1,354	1,352	66	58	62	58	45
Zahira NS	758	813	790	935	968	35	33	32	30	32

Source: Ministry of Education, Statistical Branch

The number of students in Sooriyawewa Division increased between 1996 and 1998, while it has decreased since that year. The decrease in the number of teachers is only since 2002 for the divisional level. In the schools in Hambantota town, numbers fluctuate a lot, both for students and for teachers:

As can be seen in Table 7.18 below, pupil-teacher ratios decreased between 1996 and 2004, in eight out of the 19 schools, while it increased in ten. In Ihala Kumbukwewa, the exceptionally low figures of ten students for two teachers gave the same ratio in 1996 as in 2004 (5:1). All three schools in Hambantota town had higher ratios in 2004 than they had in 1996. In Namadagaswewa and Weeriyagama, two of the schools that are meant to absorb the students who are not allowed entrance to Sooriyawewa NS, pupil-teacher ratios decreased rather drastically after 1996. In Namadagaswewa, however, the ratio increased again from 23:1 in 2002 to 32:1 in 2004. On the other hand, the ratio was as high as 56:1 in 1996, when the number of students was less than half than in it was in 2004. While both Namadagaswewa and Viharagala had similar ratios for 2004 as they had in Sooriyawewa NS, the other school in the division with possibilities for A-level education, Weeriyagama, had significantly lower figures than in Sooriyawewa NS in 2004. This is despite the fact that the number of students in Weeriyagama increased between 1996 and 2004, while the number of students in Sooriyawewa NS decreased. Ihala Kumbukwewa, finally, the school that was to be closed in 2002, has a very low pupil-teacher ratio, and the low number of students decreased further since 1998:

Table 7.18 Pupil-teacher ratios (P/T), all schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, 1996-2004

School	Status	P/T 1996	P/T 1998	P/T 2000	P/T 2002	P/T 2004	Classification
Rural schools							
Ihala Kumbukwewa	Type 3	5	10	8	6	5	VD
Welliwewa	Type 3	12	13	11	17	21	VD
Mahagalwewa	Type 2	19	24	26	17	21	D
Meegahajandura	Type 2	28	32	29	32	37	ND
Habaraththawela	Type 2	18	16	16	21	22	D
Wewegama	Type 2	48	34	37	27	27	D
Bendigamtota	Type 2	39	29	28	26	31	VD
Viharagala 550	Type 2	24	29	33	34	34	VD
Hathporuwa	Type 2	29	24	22	25	24	VD
Andarawewa	Type 2	38	35	28	21	27	VD
Wedigamwewa	Type 2	14	12	16	19	15	D
Ranmuduwewa	Type 2	22	17	18	15	25	VD
Viharagala	1C	37	35	32	26	31	ND
Namadagaswewa KV	1C	56	30	27	23	32	ND
Weeriyagama KV	1C	77	39	28	23	24	D
Semi-urban schools							
Sooriyawewa NS	N1AB	34	30	30	33	32	ND
Urban schools							
Hambantota KV	Type 2	29	34	30	31	32	ND
St Mary's NS	N1AB	27	23	26	23	30	ND
Zahira NS	N1AB	22	25	25	31	30	ND

Source: Ministry of Education, Statistical Branch

Generally, there are fewer students per teacher in the Not Difficult schools, as compared to the Difficult and Very Difficult schools, but this is primarily due to a low number of students, rather than to high numbers of teachers. As to the schools from which I have collected essays, it can be noted that there are rather big differences between the three schools in Sooriyawewa Division when it comes to the prevalence of teachers. The school classified as Very Difficult, in Andarawewa, had a significantly lower pupil-teacher ratio in 2003 than the school in Meegahajandura, while the National School in Sooriyawewa town had a figure somewhere in between. The two National Schools in Hambantota town had slightly lower figures than Sooriyawewa NS had, but all of them had higher ratios than in Andarawewa. Without attempting to explain examination results, it can be seen, in summary, that the relationship between examination results and pupil-teacher ratios often is that schools with *higher ratios* tend to perform *better*. Very roughly expressed: the bigger the chances of passing examinations, the higher also the inflow of students from other schools, further increasing the pupil-teacher ratio. In Andarawewa, as can be remembered, no students passed the scholarship examination and no one passed the O-level examination in 2003, despite the favourable pupil-teacher ratio. In Hambantota KV, St Mary's NS, Zahira NS, Sooriyawewa NS, and Viharagala, both pupil-teacher ratios and results at examinations are much higher than in Andarawewa.

The overall decrease in the number of students is often highlighted as a positive development, opening up windows of opportunity for improving the quality of education without increasing the number of teachers. Importantly, this is not the perception of principals in rural parts of Sooriyawewa Division, who generally see a need for more teachers, rather than for fewer students:

R - We have to increase the teacher population. If the students increase that is not a problem, but we have to increase the teacher population. The facilities are enough - we need teachers (SA4, Principal, Rural School).

Hence, the decreasing student population has a differentiated impact on schools. In overcrowded urban and semi-urban schools, like Sooriyawewa NS, there are enough teachers to cover most subjects, but classes are often very big. In these schools, lower numbers of students are likely to increase quality. This is partly related to the discussion about school rationalisation. If this programme had been successful, and if more schools had been closed, decreasing population growth would have had a bigger potential to increase the overall quality of education. On the other hand, closing schools would increase distances students have to travel to school, and it would also clash with ideals of having one school in just about every village around the country.

7.4.4 A lack of teachers to cover all subjects

The situation regarding teachers still seems very favourable statistically. Hence, the above discussion begs specification: what kind of a lack of teachers is it that so many

students, parents and school personnel are talking about in essays and interviews? In Sooriyawewa Division, most students focus on the lack of teachers, as they discuss the most pertinent hindrances for reaching their set goals with going to school:

I come to school with the problems I explained earlier, to fulfil my hopes. But I am sorry to tell you that we do not get the education that is needed to fulfil my target. My school has a lot of shortages. The main problem is that we do not have teachers in all subjects (SE09 - Rural Girl).

Despite favourable pupil-teacher ratios, there are, according to many students in Sooriyawewa Division, several hours everyday when they do not get any teaching what so ever, because of a lack of teachers. For students in Hambantota town, emphasis is rather on a lack of quality and commitment among the existing teachers, although also these schools have problems with the number of teachers.

I have tried to get a better picture of how many teachers that schools have and how many that are needed, and for doing this, there is a need to go beyond pupil-teacher ratios. Furthermore, the question put to all principals was, how many teachers they would need according to the government circular regulating the distribution of teachers, and in many schools, they see a need for more teachers than they are officially allowed for. Table 7.19 below shows teacher requirements in schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, as expressed by principals:

Table 7.19 Teacher requirements in all schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, 2004

Name of school	Status	Teachers existing	Teachers required
Rural schools			
Ihala Kumbukwewa	Type 3	2	+2
Welliwewa	Type 3	4	0
Mahagalwewa	Type 2	10	+4
Meegahajandura	Type 2	16	+13
Habaraththawela	Type 2	9	+4
Wewegama	Type 2	14	+2
Bendigamtota	Type 2	20	0
Viharagala 550	Type 2	11	0
Hathporuwa	Type 2	14	+2
Andarawewa	Type 2	13	+6
Wedigamwewa	Type 2	10	+2
Ranmuduwewa	Type 2	7	+2
Viharagala	1C	31	+13
Namadagaswewa	1C	27	-
Weeriyagama	1C	29	0
Semi-urban schools			
Sooriyawewa NS	N1AB	114	+22
Urban schools			
Hambantota KV	Type 2	66	+9
St Mary's NS	N1AB	45	+7
Zahira NS	N1AB	32	+18

Source: Information collected in the schools

Note: Existing teachers include principal

Even if there is a problem with big classes in some schools, the overall problem in most schools - especially in rural areas - is to get teachers for all subjects. In four schools they have the required number of teachers. In a few schools, they claim to manage although they have not been provided in accordance with the circular. In Bendigamtota, for example, the circular stipulates three English teachers, but the principal thinks that they can manage with the two that they have

At primary levels, schools need someone to do the English subject, in addition to class teachers. In neither Welliwewa nor Ihala Kumbukwewa – where students go up to grade 5 – there is any English teacher. In Welliwewa they have the required number of teachers (they need four according to the circular) but the principal is teaching English although he strongly feels that this should be done by someone skilled to teach that subject (SW2). In Ihala Kumbukwewa they have two out of four required teachers, but there was only one teacher working there at the time of my visit in 2004, taking care of all five classes. This includes English. The reason for being only one is that the second teacher temporarily is lent out to Meegahajandura (SIK2). It is only these two schools, Welliwewa and Ihala Kumbukwewa, that practice multi-grade teaching. According to the Deputy Director of Planning at the Provincial Department of Education for the Southern Province (KI45), teachers in Sri Lanka are generally not trained to handle multi-grade teaching. One Planning Director states: "In accordance with the circular, we send two teachers and one principal to schools with 40 students. But they need six teachers with the principal!" (KI29)

Higher up in the system, there is a need for more teachers than there are classes to be able to cover all subjects. In many schools there is only one English teacher, one Science teacher, one Maths teacher, etc, which means that only a few students can study these subjects at all levels. In the school in Andarawewa, for example, there is only one English teacher and she caters only for the higher grades (SA4). The rest of the students do not get any English teaching. When the school in Andarawewa was visited in 2004, they had 13 teachers out of a required 19, and there was no teacher for Sinhala, Religion or Aesthetics. Even though the school lacks teachers in these subjects, they try to teach them anyway, with the Music teacher teaching Sinhala and Buddhism, the agricultural teacher giving Maths classes, etc (SA3). In Meegahajandura, one O-level Sinhala teacher reflects upon his own contribution thus: "I am qualified to teach A-level students, not O-level, and in Economics and Logic, not in Sinhala" (SMe4). When asked for reasons behind the low performance at examinations, one rural principal expresses his frustration:

R - Last year only we got our first Maths teacher in ten years. Before that there was no Maths teacher. We need two Maths teachers, and the one who is here, is here because of a punishment transfer. Two months before the examination they transferred the English teacher. How can we improve the pass rate [at examinations] with this situation? (Principal, Rural School).

In summary, the pupil-teacher ratios might well be important in many respects, but they do not manage to capture the teacher-dilemmas of schools, especially not in rural areas where there rather is a problem of finding enough students¹⁰⁶.

7.4.5 The attendance rate among teachers

In the essays, many students stress that not only is there a lack of teachers, there is also a high rate of teacher absenteeism. Interestingly though, several rural students are rather understanding, and try to see the situation also from the teachers' perspective:

Actually, the teachers are not teaching well to us. Some teachers think about us, and they work hard. Some take vacations for weeks. When they are in the school, they do not come to the classroom to teach. I cannot understand that the teachers have so many vacations. When I see it from the teachers' side, they do not have any facilities in this school. I think that is the reason to why they do not want to come to our school. But what can we do? (SE09 – Rural Girl).

Our school does not have enough teachers. Some days they are teaching less than five subjects. Some days they are not teaching even that. The reason for this is that teachers are from very far away. They do not have enough facilities for coming (SE10 – Rural Boy).

The quotations above suggest that pupil-teacher ratios should be complemented also with figures saying something about whether teachers assigned to particular schools actually come to class. Many parents make a big fuss about the poor attendance of teachers, adding to the picture what several students suggest as well, that the problem is aggravated on Mondays and Fridays, as these days are so close to the weekends. The understanding attitude expressed by rural students is less pronounced among rural parents, as is it among both urban students and urban parents:

R – There is an English teacher, but sometimes she teaches only two periods per week, sometimes not in the whole week.

Q – What are the teachers doing when they are not teaching?

R – I do not know what they are doing! [Laughter!] Normally they stay in the restroom and chat with each other (SAH08, middle-level, rural woman).

This issue of teacher attendance is something that, at least partly, can be controlled by going through the attendance records of teachers. It is important to note, however, that students and parents suggest that some teachers do not come to class even the days when they have showed up in school. The problem of absenteeism is hence not fully captured by the attendance registers, as teachers who are in the school without attending class, still are likely to be registered as present. The special problems on Mondays and Fridays, furthermore, are partly that many teachers leave early (Fridays) and arrive late (Mondays), which is not captured in attendance books unless they have taken half-day leave which is done only in a few schools. When so, I have counted two half-days as one full day. Having noted these weaknesses, attendance records still

¹⁰⁶ In the Walasmulla Education Zonal Office, none of the respondents (KI29; KI30; KI31) was of the opinion that a decreasing number of students would increase the quality of education in rural schools.

reveal important dimensions, and I have collected it from all 19 schools for two years in a row, in order to increase the reliability of the exercise:

Table 7.20 Teacher attendance¹⁰⁷ (%), all schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town, 2002-2003

Name of school	Status	Attendance (2002)	Attendance (2003)	
Rural schools				
Ihala Kumbukwewa PV	Type 3	91 %	89 %	VD
Welliwewa PV	Type 3	82 %	86 %	D
Mahagalwewa KV	Type 2	77 %	76 %	D
Meegahajandura MV	Type 2	67 %	74 %	D
Habaraththawela KV	Type 2	72 %	70 %	D
Wewegama KV	Type 2	74 %	80 %	D
Bendigamtota KV	Type 2	84 %	81 %	VD
Viharagala KV	Type 2	75 %	83 %	VD
Hathporuwa KV	Type 2	81 %	82 %	VD
Andarawewa KV	Type 2	81 %	77 %	VD
Wedigamwewa KV	Type 2	71 %	84 %	D
Ranmuduwewa KV	Type 2	76 %	82 %	VD
Viharagala MV	1C	71 %	72 %	ND
Namadagaswewa KV	1C	77 %	78 %	ND
Weeriyagama KV	1C	76 %	79 %	D
Semi-urban schools				
Sooriyawewa NS	N1AB	75 %	77 %	ND
Division total		75 %	78 %	
Urban schools				
Hambantota KV	Type 2	83 %	82 %	ND
St Mary's NS	N1AB	78 %	78 %	ND
Zahira NS	N1AB	78 %	83 %	ND

Source: Teacher registers in the different schools

Apart from the rather low general attendance records in Sooriyawewa Division (75 and 78 percent), it can also be noted that, the more difficult the area in which the school is situated, the *better* is normally the attendance of its teachers. Taken together, attendance rates in Very Difficult schools are 81 percent in both 2002 and 2003, while corresponding figures for Difficult schools are 75 and 78 percent. In the Not Difficult schools in Sooriyawewa Division, teachers attended 73 percent of the scheduled time in 2002 and 76 percent in 2003. The schools in Hambantota town do not support this "geographical" pattern, since at least two of the Not Difficult schools in that area are above the averages for Sooriyawewa Division as a whole.

For the other schools from which essays have been collected, Andarawewa was well above the divisional average in 2002, while it was just below average in 2003. In Meegahajandura, teacher attendance is much lower than the divisional average. Sooriyawewa NS is on the average on both years, which should be seen in the light of that over 1/3 of the teachers in the division were from that school in 2004.

¹⁰⁷ The attendance figures reflect the average number of teachers attending school over a year, added for each day, divided by the total number of teachers enrolled in the school. These figures include all school days during 2002 and 2003 respectively, including their legitimate leave-days but not vacations.

7.4.6 A lack of commitment and quality of teachers

One basic problem is to get enough teachers to the school, and especially so in specific subjects and in rural schools, and another problem is to get the teacher enrolled to actually attend class. It is furthermore mentioned, not least by students, that many teachers are lacking in commitment and/or in the quality of their teaching. This is another dimension that cannot be fully grasped through the methods used here, especially regarding the quality of teaching. Yet, it is important to at least discuss it, as it is mentioned by so many of students and parents, and because it might also say something about possible strains in the relation of educational provision:

My sister studied well in class 1, 2 and 3. At that time, the schoolteachers paid good attention to the school children. But those teachers who come to our school now are not like that. They do not want to teach us – they want something else. If it continues like this, what will be our fate? (SE15 – Rural Girl)

When some teachers are teaching I cannot understand. Because of that I go to special classes [Private Tuition]. If we could understand what they were teaching, we would not have to waste money on extra classes (SE77 – Urban Girl).

Many of the parents stress these dimensions of teachers' quality and commitment as well. It is common to hear comparisons with how it was when they were in school, or how it was “before”, and how it is now: “When I was in school, the teachers taught well, but nowadays, I cannot see that situation” (SMH01, poor, rural man). A widespread feeling among parents is that teachers “today” see teaching more as a normal job – and hence work only for the salary – than what was the case “earlier”: “Those days, teachers were not working for their salaries” (SSH01, poor, semi-urban man). This is heard from several parents, but it is of course difficult for me to know whether it is really reflecting a decaying quality of teachers or if it is merely a sign of a mutual distrust in times of change. What can be clearly said is that there is a lot of scepticism regarding the commitment and quality of teachers among parents and students. Hence, there is a strain in the relation of educational provision, although school personnel and rural students generally seem more understanding of the problems that the other parties are facing, than parents are. Strengthening the case of a decaying teaching quality is, however, that parents are able to give examples of other things that have improved in the schools; everything was not, even for parents, better in the-good-old-days (see section 7.5 about school facilities).

Both of the men quoted in the previous paragraph (SMH01; SSH01) suggest that a reason for the bad performance of many teachers is that they are doing Private Tuition in weekends and evenings. This is proposed to open up for an incentive-dilemma, as schoolteachers need to get “customers” for the extra classes: “In the [Private] Tuition, their personal attention is higher”, says one of these men (SMH01). And the other man says: “Earlier, they also got a salary, but they gave a satisfactory service to the children. In my school time, there was no Private Tuition. These days, we have to pay them some extra” (SSH01). This is quite a common belief in contemporary

Sri Lanka, as in many other countries where the tuition industry has grown strong, but in my interpretation, it is not really supported by the student essays. The following quotation is from a student *who has* noted a difference between how the teacher acts in the government school, as compared to his teachings in the Private Tuition classes. Yet, this is the only suggestion of this kind found in any of the essays:

The schoolteachers teach us very little in the school time. It is the same teacher as in Private Tuition, but at that time, he teaches very well. What shall we do? We have to spend our parents' money for Private Tuition (SE52 – Semi-urban Girl).

To my mind, students should really be the ones who are best able to compare the performance of teachers in different teaching settings. A tentative conclusion is, hence, that this phenomenon not is as widely spread, as it is commonly believed to be. This might, in turn, partly be related to that many teachers in the district – especially in rural schools – conduct Private Tuition in other areas than the ones they work in, and hence do not meet the same students on the two occasions. Many teachers travel back to their native places in weekends, where they give Private Tuition classes. This would then reduce the incentive-dilemma, as well as the ability of both parents and students to compare performances and form informed opinions.

Yet another issue that is raised in essays and interviews regarding teachers' behaviour is how they treat the students. If students are late or do not bring the required parental contributions, they are sometimes reluctant to attend at all, as they feel that they will be scolded or even hit by the teachers. This issue is important, although it is not mentioned as frequently as many of the other teacher problems, neither by students nor by parents. Yet, it is still striking to read statements like, “Some teachers are hitting till the children get wounds” (SE40, Urban Girl), in the essays. Another student reveals that he sometimes is hit by the teacher, due to problems of coming to school on time during rainy days. Again, it is difficult to know the extent of this problem, but in interviews with principals, I get to understand that it is not uncommon to use corporal punishment to “improve” students’ behaviours.

The attendance and behaviour of teachers and principals are problems that are not handled within the Parent-Teacher Organisations (PTOs), which are found in basically all schools in the area. What they rather tend to focus on in these meetings, according to parents, are problems of lacking teachers and undisciplined students. Elsewhere, they merely meet to clean the schoolyard or attend to other practical matters in the school. One poor woman in Sooriyawewa town – who has noted that her son sometimes is afraid of going to school because he has no one to help him with the homework – says that she would never bring this up at a PTO-meeting:

R - [Laughter!] No one is brave enough to tell the faults of the teachers. The parents are afraid that the teachers would treat their children in a bad way [if they complained] (SSH04, poor, semi-urban woman).

I have never attended a PTO-meeting in the area, so I do not have any first-hand experience. Yet, my feeling from interviews with parents is that these meetings might well serve important purposes, but that there are many problems which parents identify that are not touched upon at all by the PTOs. In a very competitive environment, it is seen as crucial that the teacher is not inimically disposed. In some interviews I have experienced that students and parents do not want to speak out about the situation in the schools, as they are afraid that I will tell someone that they have been complaining. For example, in one rural family (SAH08), the daughters told me after having won their confidence, that the reason for changing their story about the school to the negative during the course of the interview is that they initially had been afraid of saying the truth. They had seen me talk to the principal in the school earlier and hence thought that I might tell him who made complaints about the school's quality. This is of course a major methodological dilemma, which the essays partly helped me to handle, as students who wrote essays could remain anonymous.

It should be mentioned that there are also positive things heard about teachers, at least from students. Urban students do not bring forward many positive aspects of their teachers' attitudes, behaviour, or competence, and most parents are very sceptical, but from rural students, appreciative comments are actually quite frequent:

According to my knowledge, this area is a very difficult area. Lots of teachers in this school take a transfer and go to other areas. But not all teachers – in our school there are good teachers. They try to open our eyes; we have to appreciate that (SE70 – Semi-urban Girl).

Although it is clear that teachers no longer are seen as much as role models in the local communities, as they might have been in the past, some still inspire students, and some still have the respect of parents. The many students - especially in rural areas - expressing a wish to become teachers later in life, might be an indicator of this. I have met many devoted teachers and principals during my stay in the field, but also many who feel tired and powerless.

7.4.7 The geography of teacher problems

R - It is very difficult to get a transfer. That is the reason to why I am here (Teacher, Rural School).

There are a lot of things to be said about the teacher problems mentioned in the sections above¹⁰⁸. Here, I will focus on the geographical dimensions of identified patterns. Rural parents perceive the main reason for the lack of teachers to be that their villages are so difficult, and parents in Sooriyawewa town express the same feeling. There is a lack of

¹⁰⁸ There is one important dimension, for example, which is not covered by the methods used in this study, but which is likely to be of some importance for explaining differences in the availability, commitment, and attendance rates of teachers between schools operating under similar structural circumstances. This regards the role of the principal, something that is thoroughly discussed elsewhere, for the neighbouring district of Moneragala (Baker 1988).

electricity and water, there is a lack of means of transport for teachers who live outside the area, etc. Some parents mention the lack of school facilities – especially teacher quarters – but to most parents, the problems are connected to the general level of “development” of the areas as a whole, rather than to the school. To them, this would then explain both why there is a general lack of teachers, and why the attendance and commitment of existing teachers is so low:

Q - Why do you think that there is a lack of teachers in Andarawewa?

R – The village is very difficult. The teachers do not want to come here.

Q – And those who are here - why [do you say that they] are not teaching well?

R – There is no transportation. The teachers come too late on Mondays, and on Fridays, they work only half days. On Mondays and Fridays they are normally not teaching (SAH03, middle-level, rural woman).

Q – How is it possible to change this [difficult situation in the school] – what can you do to make the school better?

RS – First of all we have to develop the village.

R – Yes, now we have started to build a road. In the future, teachers will come because of the new road. Before we develop the school we have to develop the village; roads, electricity...

Q – Is this so that teachers could come, or is it because it is more important [than are changes in the school]?

RS – If the village is developed, teachers will come to the school (SAH05, poor, rural woman and her son).

The connection between the lack of educational facilities – in this case: teachers – and area of residence, provokes a lot of frustration in the families. A solution, to some of the parents, would hence be to “develop” the village areas in order to attract more teachers. If roads were better, if there were roads and electricity, if there were proper teacher quarters, etc, there would also be teachers in the schools. More commonly, however, they blame the government for not being interested in developing rural schools, as the children of politicians are enrolled elsewhere (see section 7.8.).

When visiting schools, the picture provided by parents about the problem of low general levels of development is not contested. But teachers and principals add further reasons as to why they would rather want to work in other areas. In the school in Meegahajandura for example, as in many rural schools, the principal explains that although teachers should only have to do three years difficult-area-service after finishing their teacher training, they normally have to stay much longer. In his school, they often have to stay 7-8 years. That is another reason to why they do not want to come: they know that they will not get away from there in a very long time. As long as they have to remain against their will, they do their best to get away, and this is of course detrimental to the quality of the services that they provide to the students:

R - Those [teachers] who are from far away, they all want to get a transfer. They do not plan to stay here for a long time. When teachers get appointed they have to work three years in difficult areas. But it is not only three years; sometimes it is six or seven years. (...). If they were appointed to their villages they would teach well, but that does not happen (Vice Principal, Rural School).

R - Those [teachers] who are from outside have been here for 10-12 years - they are suffering! They need to go to their home areas! But if they get a transfer to their home areas, we will get a big problem with a lack of teachers (Principal, Rural School).

One rural teacher says that to him, the problems of difficult-area-service is not mainly about the salary, even though travelling eats up much of already meagre pay cheques. It is, he suggests, primarily about being able to settle down: "When we are away we cannot have a good family life; we get many problems. And we cannot spend time with our parents – we miss our families" (Teacher, Rural School). Neither is the problem primarily about the number of years that you have to do difficult-area-service. What this teacher wants is a fixed date, so that he will know and be able to plan for the future: "If they would only have a set period, like 'After eight or ten years you will have a transfer'. They said that we would get [a transfer] after three years, but it does not happen. It is not about eight or ten years. It is about having a set date". Of interest is that most teachers in rural schools talk about not being able to live close to their families, rather than about wanting to go to urban areas, even though many of them come from rural areas that are less difficult than the ones in Sooriyawewa Division. The rural principal quoted below notes that, in her school, there is furthermore a difference between young and old teachers, explaining why the teacher attendance has improved "drastically" in her school the last few years:

R - ...earlier we had teachers with a lot of problems; problems with children and with their families. They did not want to stay here - they travelled everyday! Now we have young teachers who have just passed out of training college; they can stay in this area (SWed1, Principal, Rural School).

But there is also the problem of "development", and the lack of it in many areas, and these two dimensions are intertwined. One rural teacher is frustrated, saying that her life is destroyed by the fact that she is not allowed transfer to another school. As it is now, she says, she cannot settle down and start a family, because she cannot live in the area where she is appointed with her boyfriend. Problems of maintaining close relationships or starting up family life is frequently brought up by principals and teachers appointed to - and kept in - rural schools against their will:

R - [Teachers] have a lot of problems. Many are not from this area, they come from Ranmuduwewa, Galle and like that. They have family problems: parents, children, husband or wife. They have to choose what to do - family or work. No one here is born in this area, all come from outside (SSN2, Teacher, Semi-urban School).

R - This is a very rural area. We cannot have a bath as we wish. There are no transport facilities. And I do not think that the education system in this area is satisfactory (Teacher, Rural School).

This latter quotation indicates that there are vicious circles in operation. Several teachers say that they do not want to stay in rural areas, because they do not want their

children to attend the schools that they are teaching in. Others solve this problem by having their children attend other schools than the ones they are teaching in. For example, I have only met *one* principal in the area whose children were enrolled in the same school as he or she is appointed to. This can of course have several explanations, but one of them is certainly the one expressed by this rural principal:

R - I have been nine years in this school and I travel from Embilipitiya every day. First, I lived in Sooriyawewa, but when my children were of school age, I wanted them to go to Embilipitiya where I studied. And when my children are there I cannot live here. Just because I teach here I cannot bring my own children into this suffering (SR1, Principal, Rural School).

Family-related problems are partly behind the problems of attendance, even among teachers who choose to board in or around the school. One female rural teacher, who boards in the village close to the school in which she works, leaves after half of the day every Friday. This is because it takes so long time to get to her boyfriend in her native place, and because she does not want to travel night-time, being a woman. These travelling problems are there not only for female teachers:

R - Eighty percent of the teachers here come from very far away. If I need a vacation in a Wednesday, only Wednesday, I cannot come the rest of the days that week because it is of no use. I need a day to travel in each direction. I need three days for only one-day vacation. If I had a chance to go like in Japan, one hour for going a long distance, then I could come every day. I do not mean that it has to be like in Japan, but some transport problems are there (Male Teacher, Rural School).

Workers in Sri Lanka have many holidays, some of them in the middle of the week. Furthermore, as dates for weddings and other occasions when people are socially obliged to attend often are set in accordance with auspicious times, there are few possibilities to plan in advance when to be absent from work. In one rural school, where they have all teachers that are required, the principal explains that he considers the worst problem to be teachers who travel back and forth everyday:

R - When there are new appointments coming here, I ask to get only those who come from very far, or who come from this area. I do not want teachers who travel everyday. Now teachers who are from far away cannot go home, so they stay here during the weeks (SBe2, Principal, Rural School).

There are no plans to increase the number of teachers in Hambantota District, as it is seen to be enough teachers in the district as a whole. However, the Zonal Education Directors of both Hambantota and Tangalle say that there is not enough teachers in the district – there is a lack – and in the Hambantota Zone, this is particularly for teachers in English, Maths, Science, and Aesthetics, as well as primary teachers (KI32; KI37). In Walasmulla, the Assistant Zonal Director says that there is no excess of teachers in the district. There might, however, be an excess according to the circular – in some remote schools, he says, they do not even have enough teachers to teach, but according to the circular they have in excess (KI31). There is an obvious tension between

different administrative levels regarding this matter, where higher levels identify problems of deployment to be internal to districts or zones. Zonal Directors rather see it as external problems beyond their control. At the national level, the solution is seen to be to move teachers from areas where they are in plenty to areas where there is a lack (see Chapter 5). A main problem experienced at the local level is, however, that there is not much trust in the transfer system. Chances for getting a transfer are generally perceived to be highly politicised:

R - Sometimes, [teachers] get appointed to this school, but they change it with some political push (Teacher, Rural School).

R - ...I am from Matara, and I was appointed to the Matara Central [School], but I could not go there because of political influence (Principal, Semi-urban School).

The feeling I get from talking to principals and teachers is that teacher problems have always been there, and that they are likely to remain, as long as most teachers come from far away. Moving around teachers between different areas will hardly solve anything, as long as, "...they are from far away. Maybe they have to board and then they get economic problems. And their families are from far away. They are not encouraged to teach, they cannot concentrate on teaching" (Principal, Rural School).

A longer-term solution would thus be to use locally mobilised staff. In many schools, they have had so-called voluntary teachers. These are normally A-level educated people without formal teacher training. Since a few years back, schools are, however, not allowed to use these voluntary teachers. This is partly due to that there have been protests from many of these voluntary teachers outside the Ministry of Education, where they have demanded appointments as teachers after having served a period of time voluntarily. As the policy has been not to appoint any new teachers, but to try to solve the situation by transferring and moving around already employed teachers, schools have received directions not to take any help from voluntary teachers. These instructions are met with quite some scepticism, and sometimes with silent resistance, at the school level, and it is not implemented in all schools. In 2004, more than half of the schools in Sooriyawewa Division still used voluntary teachers, adding a question mark to the figures presented in section 7.4.3. Some untrained teachers are used but they are not included in national statistics anymore. Several principals reason that, untrained teachers are better than none, and that they even might be better than trained or graduate teachers are. Voluntary teachers, who normally are from the local area surrounding the school, are considered more devoted to the work, and, primarily, they also want to stay in the areas in which they teach. If voluntary teachers would be given teacher training and permanent employment as teachers, several rural principals even think that teacher problems could be solved:

R - That would be a good idea! Then we could solve the problem with the lack of teachers. Teachers from far away take the whole week off if there is a

holiday in the middle of the week. Teachers from this area are not like that, they come to the school after the holiday (Principal, Rural School).

R - It would actually be a good idea. (...). If they could provide [local] teachers like that, then the teacher problem would get better because they are from this area. (...). There are enough teachers in Hambantota District but they are not well spread. Some schools have in excess; some have a lack. That is why they said that we do not need the voluntary teachers (Principal, Rural School).

At the Ministry of Education in the southern province (KI28), I was told in May 2004 that there is no lack of teachers in the province as a whole while there still are around 1,000 vacancies. The problem is, it is said, that there are vicious circles in operation. As long as the requirements to be recruited to teacher colleges are so high, there will mainly be teachers coming from around Galle and Matara, and vacancies in rural areas will persist. A longer-term solution could hence be regional quotas in admissions to teacher training. As suggested in Chapter 5, such a process has already started at the national level, with an increase in the number of teachers from difficult districts entering teacher colleges, but it is yet to be experienced at the local level:

R - We have proposed to the ministry to choose people from this area so that they do not want to get a transfer. Then they can work here without stress, but still it does not happen. And a lot of teachers from this area work very far away, like in Badulla and in the western province, and they want to come here. If they come here, they do not need to spend extra money on boarding and transport (KI37, Education Zonal Director, Hambantota Zone).

As always, however, it is a question about the appropriate administrative level on which to base such a quota system. The situation in Hambantota District illustrates that to solve the rural problems, it will be necessary to go *below* the district level.

There is no quick and easy fix to the teacher problems facing marginal areas in Sri Lanka or elsewhere. As to the lack of English teachers, for example, the main teacher problem in many areas, one rural English teacher explains that it is not only to ask local people from the community to join the teacher force. "In this area...", she says, "...we cannot find people with good knowledge in English" (SMe4). Another recent attempt – which was to be implemented just as I left the field during 2004 (KI37) – is to pay teachers extra salary for doing service in Difficult (ten percent extra) and Very Difficult (15 percent extra) schools. Several teachers and principals requested this, and it is hence likely to be a good idea, but my experience from discussions with teachers in these areas is that it will not suffice because it is not only, and not even mainly, a matter of money and salary levels.

7.5 School facilities in rural and urban schools

7.5.1 The situation of school facilities according to the principals

A following step is to look at what kind of facilities that exist in schools, and at differences between rural and urban areas. To get a more thorough picture of this, I decided to make an inquiry from schools themselves during the last phase of the field

research (2004) which meant that a questionnaire was used during interviews with principals. The results are summarised in Table 7.21, and in the accompanying discussion, the information from the 15 rural schools is compared with the situation in Sooriyawewa NS, as well as with the three schools in Hambantota town.

Table 7.21 The state of school facilities in rural schools, Sooriyawewa Division, 2004

	Satisfactory	Not satisfactory	Not existing	Not necessary	Total
Library	7	3	5	0	15
Toilets	7	6	2	0	15
Teacher quarters	5	9	0	1	15
Classrooms	5	10	0	0	15
Desks and Chairs	5	10	0	0	15
Textbooks	7	8	0	0	15
Uniforms	10	5	0	0	15
Science laboratory	2	4	9	0	15
Electricity	1	3	10	1	15
Water	3	1	11	0	15

Source: Questionnaire with principals

I will discuss the issues in the order that they appear in the table, and by the end of the discussion, I will also bring up what facilities the principals see as *most* important.

In five rural schools there is no library. Ten rural schools have libraries although three of these are, for different reasons, said to be in an unsatisfactory state. In Mahagalwewa, for example, there is a library building but not enough books in it. In Viharagala, on the other hand, Not Satisfactory means that they have books but not enough space for storage. In schools where they do not have a library, they often keep books in cupboards in the principal's office. In Sooriyawewa NS, there is a library but they need many more books. In Hambantota KV there is only a small library, which is Not Satisfactory, and the same goes for Zahira NS and St Mary's NS.

Most rural schools (13) have toilets although almost half of these are Not Satisfactory. This is, again, due to a number of reasons. Toilets are in many cases very old and in no good repair, while in most schools, they are also too few. In Bendigamtota they have only one toilet for 485 students, and the same goes for the 561 students in Meegahajandura. In these two schools, boys use the nature for their needs. In Ranmuduwewa, further, they only have facilities for children to urinate, not for "doing the big things". Sooriyawewa NS does not have enough toilets to cover the needs of all students. Among schools in Hambantota town, Hambantota KV needs more toilets, while the situation is Satisfactory in Zahira NS. In St Mary's NS they are unsatisfied with both quality- and quantity-dimensions of their toilet facilities.

Teacher-quarters are there in all rural schools, but in almost two-thirds (9) of them, principals are not satisfied with the quality and there is a lack of facilities in them. There is some diversity in the answers. In Ihala Kumbukwewa, for example, they do not need teacher-quarters, because both of the teachers live in the village, so they use the existing quarters as an office. In Viharagala they do not have enough quarters so many teachers have to board. In Bendigamtota they have two quarters, but as the

principal lives in one of them, there is only one more and that is for both males and females. In Meegahajandura they only have one quarter so men and women stay together, which is considered a problem, and they have the same gender problem in a few other schools as well. In addition, the quarters that they have in Meegahajandura are in need of repairing, even though they recently got the electricity for quarters they lacked earlier. A common grievance is otherwise that there is no electricity and no water for the quarters. I did not manage to visit many quarters, but the ones I did see were of quite varied quality. All were very simple but while some still seemed rather comfortable, others were in very bad condition, with up to around five people sharing the same shabby rooms. In Hathporuwa, for example, the principal says that, "There are teacher-quarters, but we cannot live in them" (SHat2). In Habarathhawela, quarters are old and no one uses them; teachers are boarding, but not in the village because there is no electricity or water. The principal in Sooriyawewa NS finds the situation regarding quarters Not Satisfactory, while both Hambantota KV and St Mary's NS, are Satisfied. In Zahira NS there is only one quarter and it is for the principal himself so the situation is found Not Satisfactory. It is, however, easier to find alternative accommodation of acceptable standards in urban areas.

As to classrooms, two-thirds (10) of the rural principals find the situation Not Satisfactory. Principals from several schools stress that there are no walls between classrooms, which creates difficulties for both concentration and communication. In Namadagaswewa, there are wall-dividers, and the principal is Satisfied with the classrooms. But, he adds, as the wall dividers are so low, the noise still travels between the classrooms. A big problem expressed in essays is to hear what the teacher is saying, and this is a problem that I experienced myself when trying to introduce the essay assignments. The teacher in one school says that it is very difficult to teach because of the noise of other students (SMe3). Visiting schools, it is actually difficult to see how any successful teaching can be conducted in many of these long halls. Many classes are seated just next to each other, and as there many times are no teachers around, there might be no one to control the behaviours of students. In Hathporuwa, further, school personnel complain that it sometimes leaks in through the roof, and it is stated that the main problem is the quality, not the quantity of classrooms. In two rural schools they have been promised new classroom-buildings by the former government, but in 2004, they did not know what would happen because there had been a shift in power. In a few of the rural schools, classes have to be held under trees, which of course is a problem during rainy periods. Others mention that there are problems in the dry season because the dust blows into the classrooms, which means that it is very difficult to get any work done during this period. In some schools, they say the same about the windy period around April/May: "At that time the dust comes with the wind and students cannot stay in the classrooms; we cannot open or eyes. We cannot work at that time..." (SMa1). A similar story is told in Viharagala (SVM1). The problem of leaking roofs seem to be common to all kinds of schools, while dust problems only are brought up in rural

schools. In Sooriyawewa NS, the situation regarding classrooms is found Satisfactory, and the same goes for Hambantota KV. Neither in St Mary's NS nor Zahira NS they are Satisfied with their classrooms; they are not enough and there are problems with the quality of buildings. In Zahira NS, the problem of wall-dividers is brought up.

Two-thirds of the rural principals are Not Satisfied with the situation regarding desks and chairs. In one school, it is mentioned that the chairs that girls use are so small, so they have problems sitting on them. Normally though, it is about not having enough, neither for children nor teachers. In Sooriyawewa NS, they are Satisfied with the desks and chairs that they have, and so is the case in St Mary's NS as well. In both Zahira NS and Hambantota KV the situation is found Not Satisfactory, but in the latter of the two, the principal says that the lack is particularly for teachers.

As to textbooks, slightly more than half of rural principals are Not Satisfied. The main grievance is that they do not come on time and at least ten of the schools had not received all books in May 2004, although the school term starts in January. Partly, this is due to changes in the curricula for grade 6, especially regarding some books, and it might hence be a problem that eventually will be solved. Yet, many of the principals state that this is the normal situation, and that it is not possible to be sure about the near future. In Sooriyawewa NS they are satisfied with the situation because they have received all the books except for grade 6. In none of the schools in Hambantota town, however, are they satisfied with the present situation, because they have not received all the books, and the ones that they receive they do not get on time.

As many as two thirds of the rural schools are Not Satisfied with the situation regarding the distribution of free uniforms. An attempt to let the local government official (GN), rather than schools, distribute uniforms was practised by the UNP-led government up to 2004, and this had not been very satisfactory. During my last field-visit, this practice was about to be changed by the newly installed PA-government. According to most schools, the scheme is not working properly when they do not handle the distribution themselves. In a few schools (e.g. Namadagaswewa) I am told that uniforms do not come in time but that this does not matter much because the students can use the old ones. In Weeriyagama they have only had two complaints from parents with the old system of letting the GN handle the distribution. In Ranmuduwewa and Mahagalwewa, principals rather stress that one uniform is not enough because the areas are so dry and white clothes need washing all of the time. In Sooriyawewa NS the situation has been Satisfactory even during the system where the GN distributes uniforms, and in both Zahira NS and Hambantota KV, they are Satisfied. In St Mary's NS, however, the GN-system has not worked satisfactorily.

Science laboratories are missing in nine out of fifteen rural schools, and in the six that have it, four are Not Satisfactory. In Namadagaswewa, for example, they have a new laboratory for O- and A-levels. The buildings are very nice, the principal says, but they cannot use them because they do not have any equipment. In Viharagala, it has been approved for them to get a laboratory but this was yet to happen in 2004. In

Viharagala 550, as in many other schools, they have a building but no equipment, so they are reluctant to call it a laboratory. Sooriyawewa NS is the only school in the division where they are supposed to provide A-level Science, but they do not have a laboratory for A-level and the situation is Not Satisfactory at the O-level. In all urban schools they are Satisfied with the situation regarding science laboratories.

Eleven rural schools do not have electricity. In Ihala Kumbukwewa, they do not need electricity, the principal says, but this is a school where they do not need teacher quarters and where they would not need electricity for the laboratory because it is a primary school. In some of the schools, e.g. Mahagalwewa, where they are unsatisfied with the electricity situation, they only have electricity for the office, not for the classrooms. In Namadagaswewa they need electricity, I am told, for using TV and radios in teaching, and they would also need a fan for the office. In Viharagala, they have electricity for the office and for the quarters, while they do not need it for the classrooms. In Hathporuwa they have electricity in the library but not in the classrooms and not in the office. In two of the schools where they have electricity - e.g. Meegahajandura - they have electricity but "the government" is not paying the bill so it is not working. In Sooriyawewa NS, Hambantota KV and Zahira NS they are satisfied with the electricity situation, but in St Mary's NS, the situation is Not Satisfactory, because there is not electricity in all buildings.

Water problems are stressed in many rural schools. It should be remembered that this is a very dry area, and that the government provides water to many households and schools through weekly tank-deliveries. However, in several schools, they say that this system does not always work. In eleven rural schools, there are no existing water facilities, while in Ranmuduwewa where it does exist, it is only a tube well from which they can take water when it is available, while the government brings water once a week. In Viharagala, parents have dug a well and one MP provided an engine for it, so now it is Satisfactory. Also in Hathporuwa they have water, thanks to parents, who had to contribute financially as well. In Sooriyawewa NS, as well as in all three schools in Hambantota town, they are Satisfied with the water situation.

In all of the schools, principals were furthermore asked what facilities that were of *gravest concern*, if they were only allowed to prioritise one or two of them. This exercise illustrates the problem of saying anything coherent regarding school facilities, because answers differ widely between different rural schools. In Welliwewa, electricity is mentioned to be most important, especially for teacher quarters so that they can get teachers to stay there. In Ihala Kumbukwewa, water and a playground is said to deserve priority, while in Mahagalwewa, the need for wall-dividers is stressed. In Namadagaswewa they prioritise furniture for the whole school, water and electricity, while in Viharagala, the principal is mostly concerned with security. She wants a fence around the schoolyard and a night watchman. In Bendigamtota teacher-quarters with furniture, water and electricity are prioritised. The Hathporuwa principal expresses a particular need for a science laboratory and classrooms with facilities. In

Habarathhawela, electricity and water are put on top of the list, while Meegahajandura puts a science laboratory and electricity highest on theirs. The principal in Weeriyagama stresses science laboratory, library and classrooms with facilities while the one in Ranmuduwewa prioritises toilets for children and teachers. In Wewegama, it is library and science laboratory which are prioritised, and in Wedigamwewa, desks and chairs, and electricity. The principal in Viharagala 550 mentions desks and chairs as main priorities. The vice-principal of Sooriyawewa NS prioritises a fence with a gate, so that they can keep control of all students. In Zahira NS they stress the need for more classrooms, while in St Mary's NS, a library and toilets are priorities. This principal adds that the security dimension is important, and that there is a big need for watchmen both days and nights. In Hambantota KV the question regarding priorities somehow never got asked.

In Andarawewa, finally, the principal says that nothing apart from teachers is important: "We can handle not having facilities, but we cannot handle the teacher problems" (SA3). This is the feeling that I get from most interviews with rural principals, even where they manage to prioritise between different school facilities: "Giving facilities means nothing to us; if they gave a teacher, that would mean something" (SR1). Also some of the semi-urban teachers identify other problems than the physical ones to be of gravest concern, as is the case with this Sinhala teacher: "...physically, [the school] is getting better. But the students' quality and behaviour is going down. I do not know the reason but I can see it happen" (SSN2). Actually, *all* principals, in *all* of the schools, say that the situation regarding facilities is improving.

7.5.2 Perceptions of students and parents regarding school facilities

Students do not mention school facilities much in their essays. They rather tend to focus on teachers, transports, and "family-related" problems like economic poverty and a lack of mobility. In Meegahajandura, two students bring up a lack of water. One mentions that only having one set of uniforms is not sufficient, one that textbooks are not coming on time, and another one that there is a lack of desks and chairs. The most common grievance about facilities, among students in this school, regards classrooms. One thing is that the number of classrooms not is enough, so that they have to fit several classes in the same halls. A few students also bring up the problem of leaking roofs during the rainy season. In Andarawewa, four students mention a lack of drinking water, while two bring up a lack of books for the library. Two bring up the lack of a science laboratory, one that they only have one uniform per year, and one the problem of classrooms. Moving closer to the urban areas, it is possible to detect some differences in the essays from Sooriyawewa NS. Lack of water is no longer mentioned as a barrier, and neither is the lack of science laboratory (probably because it is only O-level, not A-level, students writing essays). Four students bring up the distribution of textbooks to be a problem, while two mention distributional problems with uniforms. Three stress that the situation with the classrooms is difficult because there are too many students in

them, while one mentions a lack of desks and chairs, and another one a lack of books in the library. In St Mary's NS, very few discuss school facilities at all. One mentions the problem of getting textbooks on time and one that it is difficult when it rains because the roof leaks. Of the very few students who wrote essays in Zahira NS, no one bring up any problems relating to facilities.

Hence, these physical dimensions of schools are not interpreted to be a prioritised issue, neither to students nor parents. Several parents contend that the situation rather has been improved continuously, and that the main problem from their perspective rather rests with a decaying quality of teaching:

R - The physical appearance of the school is better now. But the teaching situation is much worse now than it was before (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

Basically, the same seems to hold true for students. In several essays it is even explicitly mentioned that they do not see the lack of school facilities to be among the main barriers to achieve their targets with education:

We do not have a lot of facilities. There are no teachers in some subjects. We do not care about the desks and the chairs, but we worry about the teachers (SE53 - Semi-urban Girl).

In summary, it can be noted that the director in the Hambantota Education Zone shares the opinions of principals, parents and students. He thinks that the situation regarding facilities slowly is getting better in most schools, although it could be more efficiently planned, while the teacher situation remains as difficult as ever (KI37). Everyone thus seems to agree that the situation regarding facilities is improving, and that it is not the most important issue if compared to the teacher problems. Nevertheless, there are rural-urban disparities, of which the most important ones might be the lack of science laboratories in so many of the rural schools. Still though, when principals are asked to prioritise, many of them prioritise other things than laboratories.

7.6 English as subject and/or as medium of instruction

Most parents identify English as being increasingly important for the children to be able to secure a good future. This means that it is interesting to look a little bit closer at how students in these marginal parts of the country are faring when it comes to opportunities for learning English. Especially in rural students' essays, it is common that they confront the felt need for English for leading a better life, with the problems they face for learning the language properly. Here are just two examples out of many:

The school in our difficult village does not have good English education. We do not have good English teachers. Because of that, we are missing English. English is very essential for the future. We are very interested in English but now our interest is going down. In our school there is no English teacher for my grade (SE24 – Rural Girl).

Our school is situated in a very difficult area. We cannot get teachers to all subjects, especially the English subject. We very much like to study the English subject but we do not have teachers to teach it. Because of that half of the students in school are going to [Private] Tuition class. But how can those who do not have money go to [the Private Tuition] class? (SE62 – Semi-urban Girl).

All but seven of the 16 schools in Sooriyawewa division lack teachers for English, and as stated above, there is no one at all to teach the English language in some of them. Of the schools in Hambantota town, only St Mary's lacks teachers in English, and that is only for A-level. There are hence major spatial disparities in facilities for English teaching. It is likely that low pass rates at English examinations are due to other factors than only a lack of English teachers (see section 8.4). It surely also has to do with cultural capital and the living environments of most children in Hambantota District, where there normally is no one who speaks English, in sharp contrast to the situation in Colombo where many children hear English all of the time. Yet, in the essays, it is only this network-dimension of the problem that is stressed by students.

A few schools in the district have started English-medium classes from grade 6 in line with the national education reforms. In the Walasmulla Zone, it is only in Weeraketiya NS that English-medium from grade 6 has been introduced. This school also tried to have English as medium of instruction for A-level Science, but it was not successful because there was not enough teachers (KI31). In the Tangalle Zone, as many as four schools have introduced English-medium education and it is said to work better (KI32). Apart from the need for English to improve the competitiveness of the economy and bridge ethnic communities, introducing English-medium education has been presented as a reform that is enhancing equality. This said because it allows students in government schools the same chances open to students in Private and International Schools. The experiences so far suggest that this equality-argument requires important qualifications. One problem with using English in some subjects already from grade 6 is that teachers in these other subjects are unwilling or unable to teach them in English. In the only one of the 19 schools visited where they managed to introduce English-medium education, they used only English teachers for this:

R - Now one class in grade 7 is doing their studies in English: health science, social studies, science, maths, and environmental studies. The English teachers conduct this - the other teachers are afraid of teaching because of their [lack of] knowledge in English. Those who are not good in English they mix it up. That is why we selected the English teachers. The problem is that they cannot teach English [to the other students] because they have to attend these classes (SHam2, Deputy Principal, Hambantota KV).

In the English-medium class in Hambantota KV, there are a lot of Muslims, both boys and girls, coming from families where they use English in their homes (Sham1). In 2004, the government still had not provided additional resources to this school, apart from textbooks. Yet, even if learning in the English medium would be good for these

students¹⁰⁹, it might hence mean that resources for learning English as a subject decrease for others. To successfully introduce the reform to more schools would perhaps mean to transfer English teachers from schools where they cannot introduce it, although this is not an outspoken ambition. There is also a lot of government and donor resources pumped into this reform, which possibly could have been used more equitably by increasing overall levels of English by teaching it as a subject.

A complicating factor is that most parents interviewed seem to think that having English as a medium of instruction is a good idea, at least if it starts already in grade 1. Principals also do not object to the idea of having it as a medium of instruction, but apart from in Hambantota KV, it is not seen as a realistic option in the rest of the schools in Sooriyawewa Division and Hambantota town:

Q - Do you plan to start up English-medium classes?

R - I have had an idea to do that but still, I have not been able to fulfil the Sinhala-medium education so how can I start English-medium classes? I would like to do it but I know that it would cause a lot of problems so I wait. I need time! (SN2, Principal, Rural School).

R - We cannot maintain the Tamil-medium even - how could we introduce the English-medium? (SZ2, Principal, Urban School)

7.7 Complementing and substituting the formal education system

7.7.1 The perceived need for Private Tuition

It is evident from both students' essays and interviews that educational success still to a large extent is measured by whether one passes the examination or not. For parents, passing examinations is perceived necessary, if so insufficient, for the children neither to end up as farmers or fishermen, nor garment- or migrant workers in the future. The apex of the education pyramid is narrow, and qualification-demands for “good jobs” are high. Together with the lack of, and the poor attendance, quality and commitment of, teachers, this has created a great demand for attending extra classes. As far as I am aware, there are no Private Schools in the district. But students can now get even more examination-oriented private tutoring at a cost, in diverse institutes that mostly are located in urban and semi-urban areas¹¹⁰. Among the reasons for attending Private Tuition, the most important is that without extra tutoring it is not seen as possible to pass examinations, as schools do not cover the whole syllabuses:

To pass the A-level, school education is not enough. A-level students in urban areas have a lot of facilities. They do not need to go to Private Tuition. But for students in our school it is essential to go to Private Tuition. It is not our teacher's fault – it is because of the lack of teachers. In this area few students

¹⁰⁹ A problem is, however, that as these English-medium students get older, the English teachers will increasingly have problems teaching subjects that they are not properly trained for.

¹¹⁰ Private tuition is not mentioned in Samaranayake's (1985) account of education in Hambantota District, and as noted in chapter 5, it is likely that the industry started to grow really strong during the 1990s. I believe that it is within the last 5 years that it has been popularised and started to attract also very poor students, which in turn partly is due to the diversification of the sector.

are going to Private Tuition. (...). From this school, very few students are going to the higher levels (SE70 – Semi-urban Girl).

In the education time, we have to face a lot of problems. But some people cannot get away from these problems. In difficult areas there is a lack of teachers; they are not teaching all the subjects. Those students who have some money they can handle this. They can go to Private Tuition to fill the gaps. They can make the problems disappear. Those who are poor get very little knowledge from the school. No one comes to fill this gap (SE38 – Rural Girl).

It is not correct to say that Private Tuition mainly is a rural phenomenon, as suggested by one of the students above; quite the opposite would be closer to reality. One teacher in a rural schools says, when asked, that she does not plan to start up Private Tuition in the area, because there is no effective demand for it: “The children in this school are not very wealthy. They do not have money. I do not think that they can afford the money for my classes” (SMe3). Instead, this teacher is conducting free extra tuition sponsored by an NGO, the Christian Children’s Fund (CCF), which pays her 1,200 Rs per month for doing this. In a few schools I am told that there is some extra tuition given for free, by teachers, but this is the only place in the areas visited where an NGO is doing this. One of the colleagues of the teacher above concludes in a similar manner that, “People [here] are very poor. They do not have money for Private Tuition” (SMe5). Hence, Private Tuition is mainly concentrated to urban and semi-urban areas, even though many students in rural areas go there as well. Interestingly, even principals and teachers admit that there is a need for extra tuition:

Q - Can you see a big difference between the students that are attending Private Tuition and those who are not?

R - Yes, we do not have teachers for all subjects so if the students do not go to [Private] Tuition they do not get any teaching at all in these subjects (SN4, Teacher, Rural School).

R - Now they are in competition. For that competition they have to collect extra knowledge. We do not have enough books or teachers, so I do not blame them for going to [Private] Tuition (Swi3, Principal, Rural School).

Almost all parents and students are of the opinion that Private Tuition is close to necessary for passing examinations. Yet, there are voices against the stream, although these normally are heard among parents that send their children to Private Tuition anyway; for learning more; so that they will study extra, etc. I have met with no parents saying that they are not sending children to Private Tuition because it is not necessary! Some parents say that Private Tuition is only a fashion, and that children only go there in order to associate with the opposite sex under more relaxed circumstances than the ones prevailing in schools. Furthermore, a few students say that Private Tuition does not give as good an education as do schools:

I cannot get what I hope from education from the extra classes [Private Tuition]. The school knowledge is a little bit difficult, but it is better (SE50 – Urban Boy).

My brothers and sisters are far away from home. They went there to continue with their studies. My younger sister, my mother and myself are staying at home. My father is working far away from home. No one is at home to help me with my lessons. When my sisters are back home I can ask about my lessons. That does not happen often. Sometimes I can go to [the Private Tuition] class, but I cannot get real knowledge from there (SE72 – Semi-urban Girl).

It is not obvious how these quotations should be interpreted. One possibility is that these students think that Private Tuition is too examination-oriented, and that education should be about more than just passing examinations (that is, "real" or "better" knowledge). It might, however, also be connected to that there are so many different Private Tuition institutes, of varying quality, with these students having ended up in some of the not-so-good-ones. Anyway, it is not clear from reading these few essays in what ways school education would be better than Private Tuition, and if so would be the case, it has certainly not reduced the overall demand for extra classes.

As could be expected, it is precisely in the subjects that parents have identified as being the most important for the future, that most of them send their children to tuition for – Maths, English and Science. Sinhala, or Tamil, if that is the first language, is also popular as a tuition subject as it is compulsory to pass it at the O-level examination to qualify for A-levels. What kind of subjects that are taught in Private Tuition might be subjected to both demand and supply factors that are not easily determined. Parents who cannot send their children to Private Tuition all the time at least try to do it before the grade 5 Scholarship examination, so that they can get a chance to come to a better school somewhere else. Many furthermore try to send their children to Private Tuition before the other two examinations. Other families send when they can – as for a couple of months after a successful harvest or fishing season – while the children have to be kept at home during the rest of the year when there is no money (e.g. SAH10). Yet others send only one or some of the children that they would have wanted to send to tuition (see section 8.2). The very poor do not send their children to Private Tuition at all, if they cannot find friends, relatives or NGOs who conduct it for free. In Meegahajandura, the CCF pays the ordinary schoolteachers extra to provide free tuition for children but I did not come across any other such organisation. Apart from for the few children who are attending this free extra tuition, it is hence to be considered of marginal importance.

All parents were asked about whether the children are sent to Private Tuition, and the answers are summarised in Table 7.22. The third category – None, although they want to send – includes those who have sent their children earlier, for a shorter period of time, but who have had to stop for one reason or the other:

Table 7.22 Parent's ability to send children to Private Tuition, selected areas, Hambantota District, 2004

Area	All they want to send are sent	Some, but not all they want to send	None, although they want to send	None (children too young or not in school)
Meegahajandura	3 (10)	0 (10)	4 (10)	3 (10)
Usgalle	2 (10)	3 (10)	5 (10)	0 (10)
Sooriyawewa town	7 (10)	2 (10)	1 (10)	0 (10)
Hambantota town	5 (15)	2 (15)	3 (15)	5 (15)
Total %	38 %	16 %	29 %	18 %

Source: Information obtained from interviews with parents

The sample is too small for any far-reaching conclusions, but a few spatial patterns of interest are revealed. The various reasons - more and less obvious - for not being able to send are discussed in section 8.2 below. One pattern in Table 7.22 is the difference between rural and urban families, with fewer rural parents sending their children to Private Tuition. In Usgalle village, only two families out of ten send as many children to Private Tuition as they would want. In Hambantota town, half of the parents who want their children to attend actually send all they want. None of these parents say that they did not want their children to attend Private Tuition, although in a few families, parents thought that the children were still too young. A possible future scenario is that, not far from now, almost all parents will send their children to some kind of Private Tuition in all of these areas, if the tuition industry continues to diversify to handle the differentiated effective demand.

7.7.2 De-facto privatisation of “higher levels” of education

At higher levels, the trend of sending children to tuition has been taken one step further. As could be seen in Chapter 6, Science is a popular subject as well as a favoured stream for A-level. In all but two rural schools visited, the lack of laboratory and equipment for practising Science is pressing, and in the National School in Sooriyawewa town, there is no laboratory for the A-levels. This means that students, who want to have a chance to pass the examinations have to go to Private Tuition:

Q – How can you have the A-level Science stream without a laboratory?

RD – For the small things they collect money from the students and buy in the shops. All bigger things they do in Private Tuition (SSH09, former student, Sooriyawewa NS, middle-level, semi-urban family).

Looking closer at students' attendance in A-level classes, especially for Science and Maths in grade 13, it is seen that this is the situation in all of these areas. In discussions at the Walasmulla Zonal Office, I am told that low attendance among A-level students is not a problem confined only to the divisions visited here. The same situation exists in divisions in the western parts of the district (KI29; KI30; KI31). In certain A-level streams, students have almost completely stopped attending the school they are enrolled in, as Private Tuition is conducted at daytime to be able to attract students also from rural areas. In Sooriyawewa NS, it was not even possible to get attendance records for the A-level students (grade 13), as records are not kept at that level, and in

Namadagaswewa, I could not get the records for 2003. In St Mary's NS, however, it is indicated that what is happening is a kind of de-facto privatisation of the upper reaches of the education system. In 2002, students attended school *five* and *eight* percent of the time in the Science and Maths streams respectively, while the figures for Arts and Commerce were much higher, at 50 and 37 percent respectively.

In the rural Namadagaswewa, the reason given by the principal for low attendance of A-level students is primarily that there are no teachers at that level. Hence, he says, students loose interest in coming because they start to understand that they will end up in the army or in a garment factory anyway (SN1). Reasons given for this low attendance in urban schools are different. According to a Maths teacher in St Mary's NS (SStM1), the trend of non-attendance for students in grade 13 started in the very end of the 1990s. To her, it is due to that students choose to go to Private Tuition during daytime, *instead of going to school*. She agrees that the scheduled time in school is not enough for passing examinations, and that it would have been possible only for very talented students to pass without attending Private Tuition. Students who can choose go to school in Tangalle or Matara instead of Hambantota, because in these areas they can get both school education and Private Tuition. Apart from the obvious consequences for economically poor students, this teacher sees a risk to be that, students do not get help with the problems they have in life, as Private Tuition is only oriented towards examinations. Again then, it is the custodial function that is stressed as the main role of the schools. The strict focus on examination is partly admitted by a Private Tuition teacher in the institute in Tangalle, to which students from St Mary's NS generally go. In the discussion with him, I also get to know that there might be very many students in one Private Tuition class:

Q – (...) - how can you teach 750 students [at one time]?

R – We do not have all the facilities [for doing that] here. In fact some students cannot even see the blackboard. But there are parallel notes from the lectures, that they can go through (KI11, Private Tuition teacher, Marga Institute, Tangalle).

There is a rule stipulating that students have to attend 80 percent of the scheduled time to be allowed to sit for examinations in government schools, but I am told that many parents are against implementing this rule, as they see the big need for Private Tuition. Where the rule has been enforced, like in a Girl's College in Beliatta Division, the principal soon got herself into trouble and had to stop implementing it (KI21). Importantly, this de-facto privatisation of parts of the education network is now forcing some parents to choose A-level streams for their children, with regard to whether they can pay for full time Private Tuition or not. Hence, this is further pushing those very poor, poor and middle-level students, who actually make it through the O-level examination, into the not-so-popular Arts Stream:

Q – What stream is your son going to [in Sooriyawewa NS]]?

R – Arts! We selected that because we do not have money to send him to Tangalle or Matara for Private Tuition, because that is very expensive. That is why we selected the Arts stream (SSH09, middle level, semi-urban woman).

One male A-level student in Sooriyawewa NS says that there are enough teachers in the school for Arts and Commerce, while there is a lack of teachers for Science and Maths. In his view, good teachers – many of whom would be university educated – have stopped teaching in the school, and now conduct Private Tuition instead: “From the beginning they [the graduate teachers] were teaching in the school, but then they registered to start Private Tuition” (KI22). In line with this, a former A-level student from Sooriyawewa town explains why she thinks that Private Tuition is better than school education, thus: “[Private Tuition teachers]...are educated people, graduates. Very qualified. They are not like the schoolteachers. (...). They can teach well and they know what the students want” (SSH09). I do not have any information about the quality or qualifications of Private Tuition teachers, as compared to the schoolteachers. Several sources, however, suggest that Private Tuition teachers do their best to undermine the legitimacy of schoolteachers, for example by telling students to ask difficult questions in English to their English teachers, which these teachers cannot answer. Nevertheless, my feeling is that the girl quoted above is largely correct when she stating that Private Tuition teachers, by stringently focusing on examinations, have understood what most students and parents want.

7.7.3 Visiting Private Tuition institutes

A number of Private Tuition institutes in Sooriyawewa and Hambantota towns have been visited, as well as a few in the neighbouring Tangalle and in Matara. Yet, there is no way of knowing how many Private Tuition institutes there are altogether, not even in these areas. One thing is clear though, and this is that Private Tuition is not a homogeneous activity, with supply being differentiated to suit the resources available to students from different geographical settings and social groups. With regard to Private Tuition, the most important of these resources are mainly economic capital and physical mobility. At the Marga Institute in Tangalle, the Private Tuition teacher does not agree with the common idea that Private Tuition causes a divide between "rich" and "poor". The way he sees it all students are going to Private Tuition, and to his particular institute, only the "poor" are coming: “Those who are rich go to group classes” (KI11). Parents, students, and school personnel do not support his perception that all students go to Private Tuition. However, I do think that more parents than what is commonly believed manage to send at least one of their children to tuition. At the same time, I get the feeling that many of the Private Tuition teachers spoken to are a bit ashamed of what they are doing, and thus try to legitimise their activities by presenting them as being in the service of poor and educationally weak students.

Much of the Private Tuition directed towards the poor is held in small houses, normally in - or just next to - the homes of the tutor. In those cases, the tutor is likely to be a former student, either waiting to go to the university or to sit for a second shot at the A-level examinations. This is the cheapest kind of Private Tuition and it attracts students from poor and middle-level families, and the costs are normally around 50 Rs per month and subject. Costs for sending the children to a bigger Private Tuition institute is between 50-100 Rs per month and subject, and they tend to attract the same groups, albeit with a bigger share being from middle-level families. In these institutes, the tutor might be a schoolteacher, maybe even a graduate, although it might also mean that there are around 750 students or more attending the same class. This is the situation in the Marga Institute in Tangalle, where the big gains for many students is to go through lecture notes because they cannot hear what the Private Tuition teacher is saying. When rich parents in Hambantota town invites tutors to their homes to give individual tutoring or tutoring for minor groups, I am told that it might cost something like 150 Rs per hour, or 1,000 Rs for eight times¹¹¹ (KI15). These costs are prohibitive to almost all of the families visited here.

Apart from the demand for extra tutoring emanating from the lack of proper teaching, and the big competition for passing examinations, another major driving force behind the growth of the Private Tuition industry is to be found on the supply side. In a discussion with a graduate teacher, who is also conducting Private Tuition in a small institute in Hambantota town, he explains that he gets around 8,000 Rs a month from teaching in the school. In comparison, he gets 10,000 Rs a month from doing Private Tuition in his free time (KI14). His colleague contends that:

R - I do Private Tuition because it is very difficult to live with only one salary. That way I can get more money. And also – I have already studied, so now I want to give my knowledge to other students for their future. In that way they can also get a good future, and give their knowledge to someone else (KI15, Schoolteacher and Private Tuition teacher, Hambantota town).

But the main reason for the rapid growth of the Private Tuition industry, as seen by this man (KI15), is connected to the picture that was given in Chapter 6. There are very high aspirations with education among parents and students with many students competing for a very limited number of places at universities:

R – The children come [to Private Tuition] when they are sitting for examinations. For 400,000 students who sit the O-level, less than 100,000 will pass to the A-level. And only 10,000 students can go to the university. These 10,000 have come for Private [Tuition] classes. They want to go to the university; that is why they come here (KI15).

¹¹¹ All figures here might vary considerably and are merely included to give an indication of how much money that is required for attending tuition regularly. To my knowledge, there is no detailed empirical account of the Private Tuition sector in Sri Lanka and it is also a sector undergoing continuous changes.

7.7.4 "Every family has a monk": The growth of Pirivena education

R - In this area there are a lot of Monks, because in that way, they [the children] can get a good education outside this area. Every family has a Monk! (SMe5, Vice Principal, Rural School).

An interesting trend today regards the role of Pirivena education; that is, traditional Buddhist institutions, which are formalised within the education system although with a somewhat different orientation. Having spent some time interviewing parents in rural areas, I realised that sending boys to Pirivena education, and quite often to become monks, actually is a common way for poor and very poor parents to get around the costs accompanying formal education (see section 8.2). This is rarely spelt out in other analyses of education in Sri Lanka. In Pirivena education, one advantage for parents is that the students do not have to pay anything. Another rationale for sending children to Pirivenas, mentioned by parents, is that they get a good behaviour and a good language there, and that the education generally is "better" than in normal schools. This latter might suggest that normal schools do not live up to the demands for them to foster "good citizens". Yet others stress that the rules for being eligible to A-level are less strict, and that Pirivenas are an alternative for that reason, for boys who fail in a core subject in the O-level examination (especially Maths)¹¹². In almost all of the families where they have sent one boy or more to Pirivena, especially where they have been sent as monks, there are many children totally in the family.

Some local administrators in Hambantota District expressed a lot of scepticism when I mentioned this as a trend at a workshop in Hambantota town in late 2002. What these administrators said was that enrolment in Pirivenas was not increasing, and for that reason, it was not a trend to talk about in their areas. This perception of administrators is then to be confronted with statements like the one from this student below. Although it is not common in the essays (this is the only student mentioning Pirivena), it is widely heard among parents and school personnel, as well as among monks and other teachers in Pirivenas:

In our family there were four members going to school. Two became monks but we have difficulties finding a solution for the other two (SE33 – Rural Girl).

At least in some areas, large numbers of boys have been taken out of government schools and put in Pirivenas, either to become monks or as lay students. The following is a conversation held with poor parents in Usgalle village, Andarawewa Division, just before receiving the statistics about trends in Pirivena enrolment:

Q – When did your son go to become a monk? R – When he was 10 years old. Q – (...) - what were the reasons for sending your child to become a monk?

¹¹² In one rural school, however, I am told that they have enrolled students in A-level without passing Maths first, but the normal situation is that this should not be possible.

R – He wanted to go. When he stayed here, it was difficult with his education. Now he gets good education.
 Q – So it was his choice?
 R – Yes, he also liked to go to the temple. At that time, this school was very small, and there were no teachers. We wanted to give a good education to him; that is why we sent him there.
 (...)
 Q – Are there any other families around here that have sent their children to become monks?
 R – Yes, yes! She has two [pointing at her sister-in-law]. And she has three [pointing at her sister-in-laws' sister].
 Q – OK! Is it only you or are there more from this village?
 RS – No more! Yes, in the neighbouring house there are three. And the next house has one.
 Q – Many people seem to be sending the children to become monks; is this something new or has it always been like that?
 R – It is new.
 Q – Why is it happening now?
 RS – For education! We are sending them to the temple for education.
 (...).
 Q – Do you send them to the temple for education because it is better or because it is cheaper?
 R – The costs are less and compared to the school education, the education is good (SAH09, poor woman and her sister-in-law).

Samaranayake (1985) has stated that in 1978, the number of Pirivena institutions in Hambantota District were five, while there were 362 Pirivena students. In the country as a whole, there were 19,882 Pirivena students at that time. Available statistics for more recent years about this matter are non-ambivalent: there has been an absolute enrolment increase in the country as a whole, and in Hambantota District, the increase has been rather drastic. The number of students in Pirivena education in Hambantota District increased by 67 percent between 1998 and 2002. In the country as a whole, however, the increase has been a marginal six percent. Yet, this was in a time of a decreasing absolute number of students going to government schools:

Table 7.23 Pirivena enrolment (no.) in Sri Lanka and Hambantota District, 1998-2002

	Clergy	Laity	Total	
1998	628	426	1,054	Hambantota
1998	26,425	25,491	51,916	Sri Lanka
1999	643	417	1,060	Hambantota
1999	26,942	22,715	49,657	Sri Lanka
2000	623	449	1072	Hambantota
2000	27,311	23,845	51,156	Sri Lanka
2001p	795	467	1,262	Hambantota
2001p	27,969	24,939	52,908	Sri Lanka
2002p	907	855	1,762	Hambantota
2002p	29,741	25,227	54,968	Sri Lanka
1998-2002 (%)	44%	101%	67%	Hambantota
1998-2002 (%)	13%	-1%	6%	Sri Lanka

Source: Statistics Branch, Ministry of Education, Note: P=Provisional

I cannot explain why the trend is stronger in Hambantota than in the country as a whole but it is likely that there is a neighbourhood-effect in operation at the most local level. There is a possibility that the capacity of Pirivenas in the district has increased compared to earlier, and that there merely has been a spatial shift within the network of Pirivenas, but none of the Pirivena personnel mentioned this in any of the discussions. In the Walasmulla Education Zonal Office, I am equally told that poor families increasingly send their boys for Pirivena education (KI31). I cannot explain why the local administrators mentioned above did not see it as a trend. It is, however, likely that many “insiders” do not want to provide “outsiders” with this kind of information, as it might be culturally sensitive as well as a bit disturbing to the image of how Buddhism is practised in Sri Lanka. In one school, one of the teachers asked his colleagues, in Sinhala, not to tell me anymore about poor boys being sent away to Pirivena, as it would not be good for “outsiders” to know about it. Yet, it *is* also possible that many people are unaware of this trend, if it is so recent. Nevertheless, to school personnel it is no news that poor boys are sent to Pirivena, although the principal quoted below does not appreciate it. He sees a big risk that boys start in a Pirivena only to eventually dropout. It is interesting, again, to also note how he reasons about what his school can – and cannot – offer the students:

R - No, we are against that. It is a business. They go back home – the system is bad. Very small boys go [to Pirivenas] and then they are loitering here and there. It is in their warm-blood period. If they are in school we can do something. We cannot find them jobs, and we cannot send them to the university, but we can take care of them for a short period. If they come back from the temple, they are only loitering. Today it is a business (SA2, Principal, Rural School).

It is not obvious in what way it is a business, apart from the fact that Pirivenas get resources in accordance with student numbers, and that they hence, just as schools, have incentives to increase enrolments. However, the quotation is a typical expression of how many schools perceive their role in marginal parts of Sri Lanka – custodial care - quite in contrast with the high aspirations of most parents and students.

7.7.5 Visiting Pirivenas

There is only one Pirivena School in Sooriyawewa Division – in Ali Olu Ara – so in order to get a better picture of what is happening, I also visited a number of Pirivenas in Matara District, as well as one in Hambantota Division. The main rationale behind these visits was to find out from monks and other personnel in Pirivenas why *they* think that so many parents send their boys to get educated by a Pirivena. At first, some Pirivena personnel were a bit unwilling to discuss the subject of poor children getting enrolled, but as discussions moved along, and as they got to understand that I had already visited many rural families, they got considerably more outspoken. A main reason for many

parents to send their boys there, it was clearly stated, is that costs for education have become too tough for many parents to handle:

R - Poor parents send their children to the Pirivena. When they are in the government schools they have to spend a lot of money for education. In Pirivena, education is free. That is why a lot of poor parents send their children to Pirivena (KI08, former Principal, Sri Ljunawima Pirivena).

Q - What is, in your view, the biggest reason for parents sending their children to Pirivena education?

R - The biggest reason is that the school education is very expensive; Pirivena is not. In Matara, many schools are asking for entrance fees and things like that.

Q - And the costs have gone up very much in the schools recently - has this meant that you also have more students now than earlier?

R - Yes!

Q - When did this increase start?

R - In the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s a lot of schools started to ask for a lot of things; some schools even asked for monthly payments. Pirivena is not like that. Now the cost of living is going up so students come to Pirivena (KI19, Principal and Head Monk, Sudarshana Pirivena).

Some parents send the educationally “weak” children to Pirivena, and another incentive mentioned, is that the Pirivena is less strict for letting students continue with their A-levels: “Maths is a core subject. Without Maths, they cannot go to A-level classes. In the Pirivena it is not like that, they can enter and then sit for a second shot. But they have to pass Maths before they sit for the A-level examinations” (KI08). Another issue of interest would be whether the parents are interested in a philosophy of education that is more inspired by Buddhism, than the one presently provided in government schools. The monk quoted below does not think that this is a reason for sending the children to Pirivena. He also does not think that it is because government schools have become too examination-oriented and competitive:

R - All parents and students want to go to the school, they do not want to go to the Pirivena. But if they have some kind of problems - if the children are poor, weak, or very stubborn - then the parents push them to the Pirivena. But they do not send them here if they do not have to (KI08, former Principal, Sri Ljunawima Pirivena).

Although this study does not allow such far reaching conclusions, the general idea is that the growth of Pirivena enrolment does not form part of some kind of Buddhist revivalism in rural areas. It is rather an enforced outcome of increasing (or at least high; see section 8.2) costs in the education system.

In the only Pirivena in Sooriyawewa Division, the head monk claims that the number of students have increased from 35 in 2002, to 75 in 2004, and to him, the statistics showing a general increase of Pirivena students in the areas come as no surprise. The reasons behind this increase, he says, is both that families are very poor and have many children, as well as that the quality of education in schools is so bad.

7.8 Finding responsible actors

A final thing to discuss in this chapter is what actors that are identified to be responsible for the spatial patterns described above. As will be seen, the students direct their frustrations in different directions, but a common trait is that they ask themselves, whom they could turn to, in order to improve their situations: "Whom should we tell this to?" (SE29). Some students ask very general questions about whom to blame, as if they did not know whom to turn to for help, while others direct their cries for change to an unspecified "they", or to all "elders" and "teachers":

The government gives us the printed books. When I was in grade 6, I got all the books at the same time. Now I am in grade 10. I have to get 9 books, but we did not get any books. Teachers also have problems teaching to the students. I do not think that the town schools have these kinds of problems. Who is the responsible person? I do not know. The teachers try to give good education to us without printed books. I have to tell you that (SE70 - Semi-urban Girl).

Others - especially in one of the rural schools - tend to put the blame on the Ministry of Education, and these students and parents are disillusioned from having asked for more teachers so many times, without getting more than "empty words" in return. From the rural school in Meegahajandura, parents have gone several times to the Zonal Education Office and to the Provincial Ministry in Galle to complain, but with little result, if any. The students below, all from the same rural school, stress that their problems are not due to the acts of the teachers or the principal. They rather identify actors outside the school to be responsible for the situation:

We informed the higher ones. They said, "We will give today or tomorrow". But we did not get any teachers. Who has to suffer for this? Think about it! It is we! This is happening all the time to poor people like us, how helpless are we not? Please think for yourself! Why do they do like this? Who is responsible for this? I think that it is the Education Department that is responsible, isn't it? I do not know if it is our Karma (SE13 - Rural Girl).

To achieve our aspirations with school education we have to face a lot of problems. Here, the main problem is the lack of teachers. We do not have teachers for all subjects. The Sinhala teacher is not suitable to teach Buddhism. He can teach only Sinhala. Whose fault is this? Is it ours? Is it the teachers'? No - none of these! It is the fault of the Education Ministry. In National Schools, there are extra teachers but in poor village area schools there are no teachers. Are we not students in school education? (SE17 - Rural Girl).

There is a lot of frustration with "the system" also among teachers and principals, who feel that subsequent governments are uninterested in developing rural schools. This quotation is from a discussion with two teachers in a rural school:

RW - Another thing is that they have given facilities, but they pay little attention to this kind of schools. When I go there and tell them about our problems, about salaries, and about transfer problems, they do not care about it.

R - At that time we get mentally troubled; we do not have a good mental situation for teaching.

RW - They have a new education system now. The Education Ministers and the Ministry do not come here to teach; the teachers do that. They have asked for

more work but they do not give us anything more for it (Male Teachers, Rural School).

The discussion above illustrates a widespread feeling among the school personnel that I have met during visits to schools. Many think that only the schools in urban areas are developed, and that the interest for doing something about rural schools is low:

R - According to the government circular we lack only two teachers. The government says that this kind of a school should only teach one Aesthetic subject; that there should be no choices. But this is unfair to the students. They have a right to learn what they like. It is unfair but the government thinks that it is right. And according to the circular they do not provide Physical Training teachers but we need one. (...). If they want to have a Physical Training teacher they have to go to town schools but the National Schools do not allow these children to enter. They say that they give equal education in this country but it is not equal. The government is not treating small schools well. The government's policy is that people should not move to towns but if they want that, they have to improve the facilities in this kind of schools. Otherwise they cannot stop this trend (Principal, Rural School).

The frustration is also related to the fact that they see that the transfer policy is not working. Among school personnel, the legitimacy of actors higher up in the educational hierarchy, as well as of politicians, is hence very low. Among parents, a widespread feeling seems to be that politicians are not interested in developing schools in Hambantota District in general, and rural schools in particular, because their own children go to school in Colombo or in one of the International Schools:

R - When those who study in Sooriyawewa go to parliament they are not sending their own children to a Sooriyawewa school. They will send them to Colombo and then to Australia or England. If they had sent their children to a school in Sooriyawewa, the problems would be solved because then, they would do something for that school (HH08, middle-level, urban man).

I will finalise this section by quoting the whole essay of one student - a rural girl - who mainly poses a lot of questions in her essay: what will happen to children in the kind of areas that she was born in, and whom should be blamed for this? To me, the essay illustrates the general feeling of helplessness, the importance of the relative dimension of educational opportunities, as well as the anger and frustration that many students - and especially girls! - explicitly direct towards politicians, grown-ups, teachers, and "outsiders" doing research about education. Though exceptionally well-written in many ways, it represents how many students have chosen to write their essays with a lot of questions, as if the unviability of the present situation would be evident to everybody, would they just start to think about it:

After grade 6 there was a lack of teachers. How can we study without teachers? Who is responsible for this? Who are the helpless? Think about it! We are the helpless, isn't it?

Why are only town schools developed? Only town children are coming up. Why do not village schools get even half of that? Why do they not see us? Why do they not help us? Why are teachers not coming to our school? Why? Do they think that we do not want to study well?

If we had teachers who were teaching well, we could come into good positions. Why do you not think about us? If you could give teachers to us, it would help in our studies. In our school there are no

teachers. We already informed about this to the higher place, but there was no reaction. They said that, "We will give teachers today or tomorrow". They cheated us. Finally, we climbed our school roof under the hot sun and [protested] for seven days. But we did not get any solution. Why do they do these things to us? Why do they make us stay with tears like an ocean? The town school children can go high. Only they get teachers. Only they will take care of the country's future. Why do only they become good citizens? Only they are given a hand. Is it not good to give us a hand to come up? Why, do they think that we cannot take care of the country's future? Why, are we not a part of the society? Is that a good thing to do? Why do they treat village schools and town schools differently? Why can they not treat us equally? We do not ask for the same facilities that they have in the towns - we ask for teachers in all subjects in our school.

I have come a short distance and I have a long distance to go. After I have walked and walked, I will end up in the desert. Can I come up from this desert? To come up from this desert, basically I have to get education. Why do we not get education in the real time? How can we get developed in the future? Why do they not think about us? How much do we not want to study? How happy would I not be if I could get a good job and do something for my country after I have studied? How can we fulfil our wish and get a bright tomorrow when we do not get good education? Please, think a little bit! We have to face a lot of problems, haven't we? Why does this happen? Why is this allowed to happen? Why cannot anyone think even a little bit about us? We are helpless children from poor families. In my house there are a lot of problems. It is full of problems. My mother and father are doing farming. They have to work very hard to send us to school. They work hard to give us books, pens, and pencils to come to school. I have sisters and brothers. They went to school with a lot of difficulties. They sat the O-level examinations. Now it is only I in the house who will write the O-level. If we had teachers in school, we could pass the O-level examinations the first time. We have to go to Private Tuition to write the O-level examinations because there is a lack of teachers. But we cannot go to [Private] Tuition. Why? We do not have money! If there were teachers in school we would not need to go to Private Tuition. If you can, please give teachers to our school! Why do you not think about us? You know about our school - you have been here. You could see that there are no teachers. I am very thankful for this opportunity. My only hope is that you can take something from me to your life. A lot of facts are flowing - I do not have enough time. Do you know why? I have other work in school. Because of that I stop. Thank you! (SE23 - Rural Girl).

7.9. Short summary of the chapter

A main point to bring for the next chapter is that although the aggregate, statistical situation points towards distinct improvements with regard to many indicators, the situation within the division shows that matters are more complex. It matters a lot what kind of a school students can go to and it is hence of interest to study more closely what resources that are deemed to be of importance for being able to go to different segments of schools. It is important to note that many of the National Schools that are available in the areas cannot be compared with good National Schools even in other parts of the district. The main problem identified in the education network is about teachers, and particularly of getting enough teachers to cover all subjects. It is in the subjects parents identify to be most important, most notably English, that the lack of teachers is extra acute. Other problems of importance regard the high absenteeism of teachers. Further, although pupil-teacher ratios are decreasing in an aggregate sense, the situation regarding teachers is generally not seen to be improving and low pupil-teacher ratios are not good indicators of quality in sparsely populated areas with many small schools. There are important spatial dimensions behind the distribution of teachers, and an actor-oriented perspective was found to be of particular help. Regarding school facilities, finally, the situation seems to be improving despite large rural-urban disparities. None

of the involved actors identify this aspect to be particularly important, especially not compared to the need for teachers.

There are three processes operating in the network that are of extra importance for the following chapter. One is that there is an increase in Private Tuition activities since sometimes during the 1990s. Private Tuition is generally seen to be necessary for passing examinations and hence in achieving aspirations with education, largely because the schools do not cover the whole curricula. However, the Private Tuition sector is not homogeneous; it is differentiated to suit the differentiated effective demand. For some A-level Streams, it is even appropriate to speak of a de-facto privatisation of education, because students hardly visit the schools they are enrolled in. A second important process regards the rationalisation of the school structure, intended to decrease wastage of resources and increase the quality of National Schools. This rationalisation can partly be seen as a strengthening of the area rule, as one intention is that students should go to the school closest to their homes (unless they pass the grade 5 examination). In reality, it also means that it is becoming more difficult to enter popular, urban schools, due to the attempts to stop the urbanisation of education stemming from a shift of the student population from rural to urban schools. The third process of importance regards the change in medium of instruction, where English-medium education is being reintroduced as an option in certain schools; that is, in schools that are able to introduce it. This reform is very recent and very few schools in Hambantota District have been able to change the medium of instruction so far. However, the reform is deemed to be important due to the high demand for English among families and among employers in the labour market. Further, it is an important factor for understanding linkages between what the government perceives as necessary for global competitiveness and what families identify as crucial for social inclusion.

8. FAMILY RESOURCES: WHO GETS WHAT, WHERE, AND WHY?

My main problem is that my school does not have enough teachers. Sometimes we cannot learn the whole subjects. Some think like this: “You can go to another school!” But for that, I have a lot of barriers and difficulties (SE37 – Rural Boy).

When we complain, they say, “Go and put them in another school!” But I do not have any other options (SOH02, poor, rural woman).

8.1 Introduction

In Chapter 7, I have given a picture of where schools, teachers and facilities are found and what kind of education that is provided in different areas. In addition to this, I highlighted the growing demand for Private Tuition and the growth of Pirivena education. In this chapter, focus shifts towards families. I address questions about what kind of resources that are important for getting access to different segments of schools, whether this is seen to be changing, and what especially parents do to fulfil their aspirations with education. The discussion is structured along the different family resources identified to be of importance for access to educational opportunities – economic (8.2), social (8.3) and cultural capital (8.4), as well as physical mobility (8.5). Towards the end of the chapter, there is an attempt to understand one of the crucial problems in marginal areas, the low attendance of students (8.6), while the chapter is summarised in section 8.7. The reason for having the section about attendance as a final part of the empirical chapters is that in order to understand why students are absent from school so often, it is necessary to use insights from both Chapter 7 and the other sections in Chapter 8. Empirically, the chapter draws mainly from interviews with parents, but I also use the student essays and key informant interviews to complement this information, and the attendance figures are from school registrars which were collected in all the 19 schools visited. Regarding educational costs, I depart from but also see a need to qualify the Household Income and Expenditure Survey from 2002.

8.2 Economic capital and the direct costs of education

8.2.1 Available expenditure statistics and a few of their limitations

Education is free in theory – apart from a small facility fee, decided at the central level – and as far as I am aware, there are no serious proposals for changing this state of affairs, at least not at primary and lower secondary levels. It is informing, however, that both parents and students stress money to be so fundamental for educational advancement in a country where there are almost no formal school-fees, and where

school uniforms and textbooks still are provided free of charge. Hence, not charging school-fees does not mean that there are few costs involved for parents.

According to the latest national Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES 2002), Sri Lankan households spend on average 315 Rs on education every month¹¹³. Household expenditures for education have increased more rapidly than any other post since the mid-1990s, apart from transport and communication, and non-consumer expenditures like insurance, payment of debts, etc:

Table 8.1 Average monthly household expenditure (Rs), major non-food expenditure group

	1980/81	1985/86	1990/91	1995/96	2002
Housing	66	148	340	825	1,661
Fuel and light	67	104	180	294	552
Clothing and personal effects	53	95	159	282	388
Personal care and health	36	80	148	309	581
Transport and communication	62	105	192	382	929
<i>Education</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>128</i>	<i>315</i>
Cultural & entertainment	10	-	33	69	149
Non-durable household goods	19	-	59	87	142
Consumer durables	25	39	53	121	318
Other non-consumer expenditure	22	202	153	256	1,957

Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey, HIES 2002: vi

The national picture needs to be complemented with a spatial perspective. A total expenditure of 13,147 Rs per month and household - which is the national average (HIES 2002) - is not relevant for understanding the situation for poor families in marginal areas. In Hambantota District, the average total expenditure per household is set at 8,844 Rs, which is also very high in relation to the income information that I have obtained for families in Sooriyawewa Division. Of this total average expenditure, however, 3,842 Rs are on non-food items. In Hambantota District, the average of 164 Rs spent on education every month, amounts to 4.5 percent of overall household expenditures. In comparison, the average household in Moneragala District spends 163 Rs (3.7 percent). The figures for Colombo and Gampaha Districts are 624 Rs and 471 Rs respectively and for both of these rich districts, an average of 4.6 percent of total household expenditures is spent on education every month. Divided by sector rather than district, urban households in Sri Lanka spend 711 Rs on education every month, rural households spend 268 Rs and households in the estate sector spend 120 Rs. As a percentage of total household non-food expenditures, this means that 4.5 percent is spent on education in the country as a whole, 5.1 percent in urban areas, 4.3 percent in rural areas, and 3.7 percent in estate areas.

It can be stated that the average education costs given in the HIES 2002 generally are low compared to the information that I have collected from parents. Among interviewed parents, it is not rare to hear that they spend around 500 Rs on education per month. One reason for the discrepancy, apart from the figures in the

¹¹³ To compare, the minimum monthly salary for garment factory workers was - in 2004 - around 3,000 Rs, and this is also what the majority of workers in the Sooriyawewa garment factory earn (KI26).

HIES being averages, is that "transport for schooling" is not counted as an educational expenditure in the HIES, but as transport and communication. At the national level, this is calculated at 19.6 Rs per month and *person*, which would have increased "educational expenditures" substantially if included. In reality, to send one child the 8-9 km by bus from Meegahajandura to Sooriyawewa town and back again, which is necessary for them to do A-level classes (as well as for Private Tuition), costed 22 Rs in 2004. This would mean around 100 Rs a week in transport costs only for one A-level student. And the normal fee for Private Tuition – of the cheaper kind – is 50 Rs per subject and month, for one child. Hence, for a rural family sending two or three children to Private Tuition for two or three subjects, which is not all too unusual, 315 Rs would not suffice, let alone 164 or 268 Rs. Another cost that seems to be underestimated in the HIES regards parental contributions. Important to remember is, furthermore, that some educational costs will remain hidden from official surveys, as they are paid "under the table". These two latter aspects are discussed in section 8.2.2.

Many students, almost all actually, bring up the costs of education as a major constraint to fulfil their aspirations. Costs are especially mentioned if there are many children in the families and/or if only one member in the family receives an income. As noted above, students are impressed by, and very grateful to, their parents for the way they handle costs and keep the children in school, in spite of financial difficulties. As will be seen, money is needed for several things, but this is not new. The main reason for suggesting that educational costs have *increased* in marginal areas is that the attendance in Private Tuition is becoming so widely spread since the 1990s. Even though the figures in the HIES are only averages, and hence difficult to compare with individual cases, I cannot see that they capture in full the need for economic capital for educational opportunities today. How much money that is actually spent on education does, in turn, not fully capture the importance of economic capital. More crucial is how much that *would have been necessary* to spend in order to achieve set goals. Many parents cannot afford to send all of their children to Private Tuition, or do so only for short periods of time. And the de-facto privatisation forces some parents, who have made it through the O-level, to pick the Arts stream at A-level, as they know they can never afford the costs for sending the children to Science or Maths. Hence, costs rule-out sending the children to popular streams, even if parents see fewer prospects for Arts-students to get jobs after finishing their education.

8.2.2 What are costs for?

Many of the problems relating to economic poverty and the importance of economic capital are better covered by other methods than essays and semi-structured interviews, but it is *also* important to grasp popular perceptions. Nevertheless, in the HIES, the by-far biggest educational cost for households is for Private Tuition, followed by exercise books and stationery, school fees (private), and pens/pencils and equipment. According to students, money is primarily needed for Private Tuition, as well as for the many

smaller costs coming up just about all the time. These latter costs include exercise books, pens, pencils, school bags (in a few cases), colour plates, etc. A big number of students bring up transport costs for coming to school as a big burden for their parents' economies. It is up to the school to decide how strict it will be about, for example, wearing shoes in school, and in one of the rural schools, it has been made compulsory. Several parents, from around that school, bring up this shoe-problem, and it is mentioned in several essays: "The minimum cost for shoes is 500 Rs. This is a one-week income for my parents" (SE03 – Rural Girl). It is possible to find shoes that cost less than 500 Rs, but they are still a big expenditure for many families. Yet, most principals perceive shoes only to be a necessity in bigger urban schools. In most rural schools, students wear slippers, which are much less costly.

Parental contributions is another common phenomena in all areas, although more so in urban and semi-urban, than in rural schools:

Our parents do not have money to buy everything we need for school. Sometimes, they [school personnel] ask us to bring something to the school. If we cannot bring, the teachers scold us. I cannot explain the worries I have at those times (SE27 - Rural Girl).

Some schools ask for money very frequently, basically as soon as there is an additional expenditure facing them. This can be for repairs, excursions, and watchmen, just to mention a few. In a way, this is understandable, given that schools do not have any other sources of income, unless they have well-endowed "old-boy" or "old-girl" associations attached to them. None of the schools in the areas visited here have that. A poor, rural mother with five daughters says that, altogether, she spends around 1,000 Rs a month on education; sometimes more, sometimes less. A part of this is when the school asks her daughters to bring something:

R – Sometimes the school asks for money. If they want to build a fence, the students have to bring 100 Rs.

Q – Did this happen, with the fence?

R – Yes!

Q – And did you have to pay 500 Rs? [This woman has got 5 children]

R – No, they did not ask for 100 Rs from each here. They asked us to bring some piles for 250 Rs. But for the watchman in the school, the parents had to pay the salary. Then I had to pay 10 Rs for each. And for diesel to the water machine the school asks for money. And sometimes the classrooms need painting; all the costs – for painting, clearing, brooms - the parents have to cover (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

As noted above, many parents and students are not satisfied with the schools closest to them. Many would hence like to enrol in a school in a nearby urban area, or preferably, further away. This brings me to the costs that face students who want to go to better schools somewhere else. One thing regards the costs for transports, which depends on whether it is a government or a private bus trafficking the roads to the other school. If it is a government bus, students get subsidised season tickets, and that will be less expensive. If it is a private one, they have to pay the full bus-fare every day. The

bus-service is however not reliable, especially not in rural areas. Rich parents hence see to that there are school-vans taking their children to the school and back, even though this is likely to end up rather costly. In one rich family in the rural Meegahajandura (SMH03), for example, where the parents send their child to a popular school in Hambantota town, the parents say that the whole education project (including the school-van), costs them around 2,000 Rs a month. And this is only for one child. Another rich man, in Sooriyawewa town, who is sending his child to a school in Ratnapura District, claims that he spends a much higher amount:

Q – If this school is as bad as you described it to be earlier, why do not all parents go to the minister [to try to get their children into a good school in another area]?

R – It depends. This school is very difficult, and some study with big difficulties. We think about our children. It is very difficult, very expensive. I have to spend 5,000 Rs per month (SSH02, rich, semi-urban man).

If you do not know anyone living close to the school you want your child to attend, boarding costs will have to be covered as well. This is the case with the rich man from Sooriyawewa town, just quoted. But there are also other costs involved in sending the children to better schools in other areas, as exemplified by a poor woman in Meegahajandura. She has contemplated sending her children to a school in Hambantota town, but she has now found the costs to be prohibitive, even as there would be a government bus taking her daughters back and forth to the new school:

R – This school is not good. There are no facilities for education. We have gone everywhere, to people who make the decisions, but no one cares about this school.

Q – Is it possible to put the children in another school?

R – I would like to send my children to the school in Hambantota [town]. But I have economic problems – I have five girls who are all going to school. My youngest daughter is very interested in English, and so are the others, but there is no English teacher in the school. She is in year three. In this years test they got low marks for English, because there is no English in the school.

Q – You say that there are economic problems with sending them to a school in Hambantota – can you explain a little bit?

R – Yes, economic problems! One or two girls I can send to the Hambantota school, but not all five. In the Hambantota school they have to have everything perfect; shoes, uniform, books, and like that. In this school it is not like that. Sometimes they can go with slippers (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

It is important to stress that it is not allowed to charge fees in government schools, apart from the small, centrally decided facility fee, which many schools do not even get. Where other fees are taken, this could thus be categorised as bribes. Whereas students normally do not mention bribes in the essays, it is a bigger thing in discussions with parents, especially urban parents. The following quotation is, however, from a female student, who wants to go to a girl college in Matara, as she feels that she is treated badly in the school in Hambantota town where she is enrolled:

To enter that school, I would have to pay 5,000 Rs, and 900 Rs in hostel charges. I heard about this from my friend. She is studying in that school. She does not have money problems (SE41 – Urban Girl).

This most probably means that this girl cannot enter the school in Matara at all (even though she does not explicitly say so in the essay). And in many popular schools you would have to pay much more than 5,000 Rs to enter, provided that you cannot prove that you live in the area by showing electricity bills, water bills, etc, from the neighbouring area, to make the area-rule applicable. This is common knowledge in Sri Lanka, especially in areas around Colombo, but as it is illegal, it is difficult to get any evidence about the extent of the problem. The following quotation is however from an interview conducted with two parents in Hambantota town, who could afford to send one of their children to a school in Matara. The element of bribing is obvious:

Q – How was it possible to send your eldest one to the school in Matara?

R – We paid!

Q – Is it a private school?

R – No, it is a government school. They ask for money to enter the school. And we have to pay extra for boarding. The cost is normally one Lakh [100,000 Rs] to enter the schools in Galle and Matara.

Q – Is that for boarding?!

R – No, this charge is a very secret one.

RW – The school belongs to the church. They did not ask for very much money, only 20,000 Rs. They say that it is charges for new buildings. That is why they asked money from us. But in other schools it can be one Lakh; in Rahula, in St Thomas...(HH08, middle-level, urban man, and his wife)

I know from informal discussions with friends, taxi-drivers, tuc-tuc drivers, etc, that this is common praxis in Sri Lanka. In very popular schools you have to produce fake documents (electricity bills, water bills, etc), showing that you live within the restricted area, and apart from this, you have to pay entrance money. The example above merely shows that this is happening also for families living far away from Colombo, and the other big cities, although it is impossible to suggest anything about how widespread it is. I do not think that the element of bribing exist in this way in any of the schools in Sooriyawewa Division or Hambantota town but it might well become a problem as they are now restricting intakes to popular semi-urban and urban schools. It is, anyway, obvious that high and increasing costs for education is adding to the economic problems of parents. A pertinent question is, therefore, what effects these costs generate, in terms of educational opportunities of different groups.

8.2.3 Increasing costs: Indebtedness, vulnerability and prioritisation

There is a link between education and indebtedness and it is common that students describe how their parents borrow money to cover costs. Two rural students mention how *other* people mortgage their lands to finance the education of their children (SE08; SE05), but I have not been in any family where this has actually happened. It is furthermore clear that educational expenditures compete with other necessities, like food and medicine, which might serve to address more immediate needs:

It is very difficult to buy the books for studying. My parents borrow money from everywhere. We do not get aid to pay back the borrowed money. My parents' daily income is enough only for buying food. My elder brother has got Asthma. We need 500 Rs a month for his medicine. Normally the moneylenders scold us twice a day about this borrowed money (SE01 – Rural Girl).

More than half of the parents claims to have borrowed money for education at one time or another; from relatives, from the local shop (credit), or from moneylenders. This is related to that many parents make money seasonally, from farming or fishing. Costs for education are, however, spread throughout the year, although the lion's share of the costs for school equipment are concentrated to January, when the school year begins for students in primary and secondary education. The following quotation serve as a reminder that the economic levels in many families are just above mere subsistence, and that many do not seem to have any money at all for buffering:

Q - Do you sometimes have to borrow money to cover the costs [with education]?

R – For example, if we go fishing today and get 50 Rs, we can manage. If we go tomorrow and get nothing, then we have to borrow, because we have to give money for the children's education. If I have an income of 2-300 Rs a day, then I do not have to borrow.

Q – Fishing is a seasonal job – how do you cover the costs the other periods?

R – Those six months it is very difficult. Sometimes we do not eat lunch or dinner. If you ask to borrow from someone you do not ask the same man again. You ask someone else (HH03, poor, urban man).

Being vulnerable to contingencies might be one of the most central characteristics of being poor, apart from having a low income. When analysing the material, it becomes clear to me how all of a sudden problems just seem to emerge for the families, ruining plans and, at least temporarily, hopes for the future. In these marginal areas, vulnerability is often related to weather (or perhaps climate) changes and to the heavy dependency of many families' budgets on good and reliable rains. The *story* below is from a 15-year-old boy in a rural school, and it serves to illustrate several important dimensions of the role of education in marginal areas. The stressful situation for parents is obvious, as is the sometimes very tense relationship between different family members. It furthermore shows the importance of sudden chocks – e.g. weather changes, insects in the paddy, or cattle destroying plots in the garden – for the vulnerable family budget. I have therefore chosen to include the essay in full:

My brother came home after school. He asked for a book from father. He did it with a very sad voice. Father got up from his chair and went to the door. He rested on the doorframe. Father looked two times at my brother's face and because of this, brother went close to my father. After that, I told father that I wanted to buy a pen. After that, father sighed and came to me. After that, father said, "Son, you study well. I will do as well as I can. I will ask the village headman for old books".

Next morning when younger brother and I were ready to go to school, it started to rain. After a second, there was a big storm. The cadjen leaves in our home started to move here and there. Then it started to leak. A branch from a tree close to the home flattered against the roof. We got scared. At that

time, father came to the door: "Next fare I will borrow for 20 cadjen leaves from Simon. Now the rainy season is starting. I do not know whether it is possible to borrow it", he said to mother.

That day father went to the fare. He did not bring cadjen leaves. He entered the home with an angry face. At that time younger brother was playing. He came to father, "Did you bring a book for me?" he asked. At that time father scolded him. After that mother moved close to father, I think she knew what had happened. After that, father went to brother and said, "Do you have to have that book tomorrow?" After that, younger brother asked father, "Father, you do not have money to spend, isn't it?" After that father said, "When the paddy is ripe, I will bring clothes, books, and pens for you". He went away. I know father said like that to console younger brother. The day before, father told mother with sadness, "There is an insect problem in the paddy field". After that, father knew that the paddy was useless. The following day, there was rain early in the morning. He planned to grow Betel. He asked for some Betel [branches] from Simon, and he planted them. After that mother came and asked father, "Are you starting a new thing again?"

Father said, "The small ask everyday for a book and a pen. I can give that to them from this". After that I poured water on the small Betel plants everyday after school. The betel leaves got bigger and bigger. The Betel grew beautifully. The next day, younger brother forgot to close the gate. He went to sleep. When he woke up, the whole garden was full of cattle. They destroyed the Betel. They spread it everywhere; they crushed the Betel with their cobs. He was sure that father would hit him. He went to the corner and started to cry. At that time my father came and he saw that the cattle had destroyed the garden. He was sad. He entered the house and hit his head against the table. At that time he saw the crying brother. He got up and hugged younger brother (SE25 - Rural Boy).

This boy is one of the few students who have chosen to write his essay as a story. Yet, I do not think that I am the only one to believe that this story might closely resemble something that has happened in reality.

Many of the students bring up changing weather conditions as major problems. During later years, the areas have been affected by both floods and rather serious draughts, and it is clear from essays that there are close connections between this and educational opportunities of children living under vulnerable circumstances:

My parents' occupation is farming. If the rain does not come on time, the farming is destroyed. In situations like that my family's economy is going down. We have to have money to buy books for my education, and also to buy the household's necessities. If farming is successful, we can do all these things. If our main economic activity is gone, I do not need to tell you about what happens because you can understand it (SE09 – Rural Girl).

Sudden, forceful rains can be as problematic as a lack of rain, as illustrated by this semi-urban girl: "The last few months it was raining heavily. Our vegetables were destroyed. That was the only income we had" (SE53 – Semi-urban Girl).

Poor health and lack of nutritionist food is not only a result of a lack of economic capital but there are important connections. Physical weakness is not brought up by many of the students. This might both be a result of the general health situation in Hambantota being better than in many other places and by the number of people living in extreme poverty being so "low". But the nutritional situation among school children is still difficult. Parents see illnesses as the main reason for sometimes keeping the children at home during schooldays and some children have to stay at home from school when there is nothing to serve for breakfast. A few students mention that they do not take breakfast before leaving the home in the mornings: "Some days I have only plain tea before I go to school" (SE04 – Rural Boy); "It is difficult for us to buy rice.

Some days we do not have rice in the mornings. Those days we go to school hungry” (SE66 – Semi-urban Girl). My experience from visiting schools is that this phenomenon is not all too rare. In one school, for example, I had to accompany a young schoolgirl to her home, in the middle of the school day, as she was too tired to stay in the school. Her older brother told me that this is because she had not eaten anything at all that day. However, not staying longer periods with one child, or in one school, conceal many of these problems to me.

Parents normally do not mention nutritional problems as affecting their own children, but many bring it up as affecting educational opportunities of *other* people’s children. It is, however, likely that they would not feel comfortable “admitting” if they could not provide enough food for their children, as this might lead to doubts about their commitment to the children’s wellbeing. Yet, diseases of other family members is one of the most common factors – second only to economic problems – by which parents explain why they themselves had to stop school prematurely. Regarding the health situation of other family members, it is only mentioned in one essay that the poor physical condition of the father is causing problems for education. In a few essays (e.g. SE01), diseases of siblings are brought up as generating expenditures competing with the ones for education. Yet another matter is that many girls have to stay at home from school when their mothers are sick, as they have to take care of the household and their younger siblings (SAH08; SMH09). Although no particular gender effects are found with regard to expenditures for education within families, the gendered division of labour in families seem to stay firm, placing burdens disproportionately on girls. This brings me to the time restrictions and these are more common in rural areas, as rural children more often help their parents with different kinds of work, such as farming. In summary, many students mention that a big work load constrain them in their studies by way of reducing their time:

Sometimes I do not have time to do the homework, because I am the eldest in the family. I have to do all the housework (SE60 – Semi-urban Girl).

In Maha and Yala we do farming so that we can live. It is difficult to spend time studying. I have a lot of homework (SE19 – Rural Boy).

An interesting question is whether increasing costs for education lead to higher dropout rates. Somewhat surprisingly, the tentative answer from this fieldwork would be no. There are no indications in my findings for dropouts to have increased. It is difficult to measure dropouts at a disaggregated level, because there is no system in most schools of separating between students who have dropped out and those who have just moved to another school. Boys dropping out of a government school to join a Pirivena are - for good reasons - also not registered as dropouts. However, only a few principals mention dropouts as a serious problem in their areas. The school in the sample that seems to have biggest problems with dropouts is Zahira NS in Hambantota town (SZ1; SZ2). Yet, this principal does not really see it as a recent trend and he tends

to blame it on a disinterest in education among Muslim fishermen, rather than on increasing costs per se (even though the two of course are interrelated). Generally though, parents seem ready to sacrifice a lot to let the children stay in school, which I interpret as an indication of that they see the alternative to be even worse; not going to school is barely an option even in these very marginal parts of the country. Hence, parents who lack economic capital struggle with all kinds of resources available to them to keep their children in school, even when they might have to pick one or two “winners”. Further, costs are important factors keeping down student attendance in school, although they do not strongly affect enrolment figures.

Costs for education is thus generally not pushing young students out of school – apart from the ones who go to Pirivenas. The various costs rather serve as dividers of opportunities *within* the education system. The perceived need to attend Private Tuition intensifies the feeling of being excluded from educational opportunities among those who cannot go. No matter how small the chances are for passing the grade 5 scholarship examination, for example, it is still seen as one of the few opportunities that parents have for getting their children into better schools in other areas. But if your child cannot attend Private Tuition – for one reason or the other – the chances of passing the grade 5 examination are seen to decrease even further:

Q – Why is it difficult to send [your children to Private Tuition]?

R – Because of the income! And it is far away! We have to send them to town because there is no Private Tuition in this area. Now this one is in grade 4. Next year she will sit for the grade 5 [scholarship] examinations, but we cannot send her to Private Tuition because it is very far. We would have to send her to Sooriyawewa [town].

Q – If she passes the grade 5 examinations, would you then want to send her to another school?

R – Yes! [Laughter!] We hope that she will pass, but if we do not send her to Private Tuition it is difficult, because she does not know anything (SAH09, poor, rural woman).

In families with many children, this perceived need for Private Tuition is increasing the internal competition for scarce resources. However, neither in Sooriyawewa Division, nor in Hambantota town, is it girls as a group who are losing out the most in this competition, as has been the case in many other countries where parental costs for education have increased. If there is a systematic bias, at all, it seems to be that parents put their resources on the older children, while sometimes neglecting younger siblings. The following ways of reasoning are often seen in essays, and it is heard among both boys and girls in both rural and urban areas. Important to remember is that essays are written close to the first big examination; the students were to sit for the very competitive O-level examination the following year:

Because of the lack of teachers in our school, all are going to [Private] Tuition. I also went to Private Tuition, but now I have stopped it because my elder brother is going to Private Tuition for the O-level, and my other brother is going to [Private] Tuition for the A-level, and my parents cannot afford money for me (SE42 – Urban Girl).

We have to pay much money for my sister's [Private Tuition] class. It is difficult for my mother to spend for this. Because of that, my sister is now staying at my mother's uncle's place. (...). My mother visits my sister every second week. She gives the money that she earns from the labour work to my sister. My sister will pass the O-level examination with high results. I do not have money to go to [Private Tuition] class (SE19 – Rural Boy).

We are doing chena. My elder sister was also studying in the school. Now she is the Ruhuna University in the Arts stream. My brother and my second sister are both going to sit for the A-level in April. My mother and father all the time try to fulfil their needs – they miss my brother and myself! (SE53 – Semi-urban Girl).

There are many such examples in the student essays. Prioritisation within families is hence obvious, and many parents are forced to “pick winners” that they put all resources and hopes for. One poor, rural woman concludes, after a long discussion, that, “Yes, we have to pay a lot of money for him. [Pointing at her eldest son]. It is unfair to the others” (SAH05). And another poor family, in Hambantota town, has decided only to send their youngest child to Private Tuition, to try to give him a good education from the beginning, because: “He is a lucky boy!” (HH03). In some families, this selection process is less out-spoken. For example, one poor, rural woman considers not to send her *five-year-old* son to an urban National School – where his elder sister is going, but where costs are almost unbearable to the family – because he, “...does not like education much. He likes to play. Sometimes he says that he is going to buy a tractor” (SMH06, Revisit 2004). When I was in the same family in late 2002, she said that the son would go to the same urban school as his sister was.

8.2.4 Policies to reduce parental costs

In many ways, Sri Lanka is still exceptional in the way that it provides official assistance, which serves to ease economic burdens for parents. Although the main point that I am establishing here is that costs are increasing, leading to indebtedness and prioritisation between children, it is easy to forget that the situation could be distinctly worse. Several students and parents mention the assistance that they receive, at least in passing. In several essays, it is for example stressed that the school equipment that is provided by the government is of great help:

It is a relief to us that they gave us books and uniforms. Otherwise my parents would have to face a lot of problems (SE29 – Rural Boy).

No one gives us books, pens, or pencils for studying. The school gave us uniforms and books. That is a very big help for us. It makes it a little bit easier. Even if we have a lot of barriers, somehow we are going to school (SE19 – Rural Boy).

This way of putting it in the final of these two quotations is telling - somehow, the absolute majority of children in all areas actually go to school, albeit with a lot of barriers and very seldom with outcomes that meet their high aspirations.

Apart from providing free uniforms and textbooks – with the caveats of distributing them mentioned in Chapter 7 - another policy introduced to open up opportunities of “able” students from poor families are the grade 5 examinations. This is for receiving a small scholarship, which is given to children living under a certain income-limit, if they pass the examination. It is furthermore, and more importantly, to give successful students the possibility to enter National Schools. As shown, this scholarship is given to very few students each year in a division like Sooriyawewa – in most schools no one passes the grade 5 examinations at all. Nevertheless, it has still stimulated increased attendance in Private Tuition even during the first years of education, as it is often regarded as impossible to pass this examination if Private Tuition has not been attended. As to essays, the scholarship-opportunity is not mentioned by many of the students, which is quite natural given that they have passed their chances of obtaining it. One boy in Sooriyawewa NS, however, explains that he got the chance of entering another school through such a scholarship, but that he now is back in his old school, due to economic problems:

My aspiration is to be a doctor. I have had this wish since my childhood. To achieve my aspiration, I have to face a lot of barriers and challenges. When I look on the education side, the first one was the grade 5 scholarship examination. I passed it successfully and then I went to a school in Matara. In that school I never forgot my hopes and dreams. But our economy is weak and because of that, I came back to this school again. When we look at the economic side, we are very helpless (SE56 – Semi-urban Boy).

Similar stories are heard in a few interviews as well, and it means that not only are chances of passing the examination very limited for most children, but so are the opportunities of handling the situation in the new school. Partly, this has got to do with the higher costs of attending National Schools and partly, it has got to do with transport costs. In Wedigamwewa, one student was allowed to enter the very popular Weeraketiya NS, but he is now studying in Ambalantota town instead, because it was found too expensive for parents to cover transport expenses to Weeraketiya.

8.3 Social capital: A source of relief and an instrument of exclusion

8.3.1 Social capital as a source of relief

Social capital is about the way social networks can serve as valuable assets for families. It is obvious from interviews and essays that relatives, friends, and other close connections like neighbours, are of big help for many educational matters in many families. If there are people around with a higher education level, for example, they are likely to support others (substituting cultural capital):

Sometimes the school’s homework is very difficult to do. My parents are not well educated. Because of that, I have to go to other persons and ask them to help me do this work (SE60 – Rural Girl).

This is, however, not commonly heard. In Usgalle, one poor family gets help from relatives in Namadagaswewa. The better-educated brothers of the children's father pay for Private Tuition and systematically help the children with homework. Another strategy regards letting children stay with relatives, at least during weekdays, so that they can go to a school other than the one closest to their home (substituting physical mobility), something that is more commonly expressed. In the family in Usgalle mentioned above, one child is living with the parents of the mother while the others can stay with the fathers' brothers and attend the school in Namadagaswewa, because the parents think that the school in Andarawewa is too bad. Many students mention how their siblings are living with relatives near or in urban areas, either to attend these schools or to be better able to attend Private Tuition (e.g. before the A-level examination). A third thing mentioned by many parents is economic assistance from relatives, which is sometimes said to be easier to get for educational costs than for other things where it would have been necessary. This might both be due to the investment character of educational expenditure and to the widespread notion in Sri Lanka that all children have a right to go to school. But some of these opportunities for transforming social capital into economic capital are partly at risk. Several middle-level and rich parents, who say that they have to sacrifice things to cover their own educational costs, also say that what they tend to sacrifice, are social obligations:

R - We give up to help our family members. Some of them are very poor. Our parents even, and our brothers and sisters. We cannot help them because we have to spend everything on education (HH08, middle-level, urban man).

R – Now we do not borrow money from others because we have a business. But sometimes we have to neglect other necessities to be able to pay for education.

Q – What kind of necessities do you have to neglect?

R – Our service to others; to relatives, funerals and weddings...(SSH07, middle-level, semi-urban woman).

Nevertheless, borrowing money is still mentioned by many parents to be of big importance. As expected, however, this kind of social capital is important for keeping children in school, but it is normally not substantially increasing opportunities of fulfilling set targets with education. The most important help in this direction would be the ability to access a better school far away through the help of relatives, but as costs are higher in these schools, it is not an option for all children even if such relatives are available. Most commonly, the importance of social capital for the poor and the very poor is primarily about covering day-to-day expenditures with education.

But there *are* examples suggesting that this kind of social capital radically has transformed educational opportunities of economically poor families. Due to that people in the areas have moved around a lot, their social capital does not seem to be as geographically concentrated as one would have expected, which can open up for access to more distant urban schools. Related to this, as possibilities for social mobility have

been relatively open to the rural poor, being poor does not necessarily mean that also your relatives are poor or without influential connections. There are examples where recent flows of labour to the Middle East have improved the usefulness of the social capital of the poor, also for more strategic purposes, if these relatives have settled down in urban areas when returning. For example, the brother of a poor woman in Usgalle, who has come back from the Middle East, now has a business in Sooriyawewa town and this family now has got important connections with teachers and principals in the National School. It has not happened yet, but she strongly believes that these connections can help them enrol her children in that school, although she knows that it is actually "closed" for admissions (SAH09, revisit 2004). Even though going to the Middle East to work as a housemaid may not generate much money apart from for constructing a brick house¹¹⁴, men who go for work as drivers can make up to 7-8 times the salary in a rural garment factory.

A final example of how social connections substantially can transform educational opportunities and life chances of the poor comes from the older rural woman who has been exceptionally lucky with all her children's education. They could all come to good schools in Matara town, despite the fact that she lives in a marginal village, and despite that she was poor at the time of her children's education. According to herself, entrance to the popular schools was possible in much because one of her sons became a Monk in a Matara Pirivena. This meant that he could provide her with social connections that helped her to send the other children to popular schools in Matara as well (including opportunities for them to board). Now the grown-up children are all sending her parts of their salaries every month, and she no longer describes herself as a poor woman (SMH05, middle-level, rural woman). Another poor, rural family who earlier has sent one of their sons to a Pirivena says that he is now qualified to become a teacher and that he gives a lot of help (cultural capital) to the younger siblings with their education (SAH09, revisit 2004).

These cases are rare, but they show how social capital *can* take people a long way towards their educational aspirations, even in a situation where economic capital is scarce. In addition to this, the area rule still operating in the country see to that the urban poor and very poor actually can access the popular schools in Hambantota and Sooriyawewa towns, due to their institutionalised right to attend the school closest to their home. One example regards that those very poor children of fisher families in Hambantota town, who actually go to school, end up in one of the popular ones in the

¹¹⁴ Mothers leaving for the Middle East are most often perceived as a threat to the education of their children, with ideas about absentee mothers and husbands who are incapable of taking care of the children. The mothers themselves rather claim that they have gone to the Middle East to work for their children to be able to get a better future. In all of the families visited where the mother has been or is abroad (e.g. SMH02, SMH06; SMH07; SMH10), this actually seems to have been of great help, even if it is also true that the woman's relatives normally are engaging in taking care of the children. It also seems common that the money that is sent home for the education of the child go straight to the parents of the woman, rather than to her husband.

urban area itself. I have not investigated how this area rule works in the most popular schools in the district, like Tangalle Balika NS and Weeraketiya NS. Further, I strongly suspect that urban slum children in Colombo would not go to any of the very popular schools, even if it was the one closest to their homes.

8.3.2 Discrimination within urban and semi-urban schools

Social capital is a double-edged sword and what binds some groups together might well exclude others if they lack so-called bridging social capital. A common grievance - especially among urban and semi-urban students - is for example that teachers treat rich and poor children differently within the school:

When teachers give marks to us they have different systems for the poor and for the rich. The rich and the teacher's friends' children get the highest marks. Poor children like us have lower marks (Student Essay, anonymous girl).

One reason for this mostly, if not solely, being brought up by urban and semi-urban students might be that it is not happening in rural schools. This might, in turn, be a result of students in urban and semi-urban schools coming from more diverse socio-economic and spatial backgrounds. Many urban and semi-urban parents also suggest that students from different family backgrounds are treated differently in school, while rural parents do not bring it up as a problem. Here is an example from a poor, semi-urban woman, who is worried because she thinks that some teachers pay more attention to students from better-off families:

R – The school is good. But the teachers always give attention to those who are good in school. Those who are clever go up and up and those who are weak they go down and down.

Q – Why would teachers do like that?

R – Not all! But some teachers get some benefits from the parents. Then the teachers give more attention to their children.

Q – What kind of benefits [do teachers get]?

R – Yes! Those who are rich give some presents and money to the teachers. The teachers give good attention to their children. Some cannot give, and the teachers do not give good attention to the poor. Not all teachers – some teachers! (SSH04, poor, semi-urban woman).

Whether connected to parental contributions or not is less obvious, but some urban principals actually acknowledge differentiated treatment within the school as something of a problem. This is so at least if they can point to that it is not a fault of theirs, but of the structure or the history of the school. In one National School, the principal tells me that students are separated partly according to the occupation and status of their parents. This is said to be due to, among other things, these parents being influential, and that they want special treatment for their children:

Q - We hear in some of the interviews that rich and poor students are treated differently in the school; is this something that you have heard about as well?

R - Yes, it happens, but it is not my fault; it is the history of the school. There are groupings in the new entrances; those who are working in the government

sector, teachers and Mudhulalis [businessmen], they are forming a separate group.

Q - I do not understand - can you explain that again?

R - (...). Some parents do not want their children to get together with the bad students because of their bad culture. They want to keep them away from these children.

Q - Is this actually happening or is it what the parents want?

R - Sometimes it happens. Normally those who are good in school go to A, B, and C. Sometimes the parents want to put their children there. Sometimes the teachers want to put the good children together, away from students with a bad culture (Principal, National School).

Where this is actually happening, it is of course particularly frustrating for children who have managed to “get out” of rural schools only to see themselves being at a disadvantage compared to better-off students in the promised land of the new school. The quotation below is from an essay of such a boy in another National School, whose parents sent him away from the rural school he was enrolled in first:

My education life started in the village. From there I could not get a good education. My parents gave me the chance to enter a town school. From there I have had a lot of bad experiences and a lot of difficulties. (...). I had a lot of hopes to come to a town school but the situation is so bad. We are divided between rich and poor. But in the village school there is relationship and friendship. They [rural students] can go forward through these barriers. I hope that I will not destroy my parents hope. I hope that I will win (School Essay, anonymous boy).

This combination of constraints would be particularly harmful for students, who have managed to come to a school in a richer district, only to receive bad treatment and thus potentially even less possibilities of reaching the university due to district quotas.

Regarding sentiments of discrimination within the school domain, quite a few students stress gender issues. All of these students are girls and most of them belong to the same urban school. To them, gender problems in schools are, however, first and foremost about being treated badly by other students, by the boys, whom they as a group identify as a great barrier to their education. In addition, many of these girls feel that “the society” in general, and teachers in particular, treats them as inferior because they are girls. This is why I discuss this issue as social capital; the girls feel that they are treated worse because they belong to a particular group. The fact that these girls consequently address my female field-assistant, and not myself, serves as a reminder of the risk for information to get lost due to the gendered position of the researcher:

Sister, the boys in this school are very bad. I do not like to send my sister to this school. Sister, I am very sad about this situation. It is very bad for my mind. The elder boys harass us – we cannot study like this (Student Essay, Urban Girl).

The teachers look down upon girls. When we ask a question, they scold us. Sister, you can understand – how can we get answers without asking question? (Student Essay, Urban Girl).

The society looks down upon girls, and sometimes they are treated badly for their clothes. As a girl I have had this experience. At those times I regret that I was born as a girl (Student Essay, Urban Girl).

It has not been possible to "confront" principals and others with this information as I regarded it as too big a risk that the girls would be further punished. They also stressed the importance of not revealing their identities, which constrains my ability to give illustrating examples. It is, however, evident from reading the essays that some of the problems regarding how some male students treat girls in school are much worse than just the kind of boy-girl quarrelling that might possibly be to expect from children aged fifteen. This can partly be related to the debate about ragging in universities, frequenting Sri Lankan media. Many of the girls from one of the schools stress gender discrimination as a major – sometimes as *the* major - barrier in their education. A few of them contend that they would prefer to start in a girl college, for this reason, were they given the opportunity. They even feel that their freedom of moving around in the school is seriously constrained by fears of harassment.

8.3.3 Social connections for entering “good schools”

Other important examples of how bonding social capital bind groups together to the exclusion of others, regards how connections and influence makes it possible to enter good schools in better served areas. A lack of these resources, on the other hand, *increasingly* keeps also physically mobile students in the school closest to their homes. Several schools are being upgraded so as to be able to cater for students from surrounding villages for longer periods of time. Yet, as seen in Chapter 7, there are serious problems with covering all subjects in these schools where O- and A-level classes have been started. The gain for rural families, in terms of having a school closer to home, must hence be set against the potential loss of access to urban and semi-urban schools. It is increasingly difficult to enter popular schools. In relation to this, there is a widespread feeling, expressed by many parents, that connections is what makes the big difference, for those who want to enter a popular school:

R - Sooriyawewa [town] has a leading school, but we have none [in this rural area]. Because of some difficulties I cannot send the children to the leading school. I tried to get my children into the better, leading school but permission from political authorities is needed. The poorest people cannot get permission because of their poverty (SMH01, poor, rural man).

Q - How do you go about to get your son into a school in Ratnapura?

R – He has to pass the examination and [you also need] connections with MPs. MPs will select who can go to another school.

Q – You have to go to a politician?

R – My wife went. She took a letter from the MP here. She went to the Ministry of Education in Colombo (SSH02, rich, semi-urban man).

Others do not see a need for political connections in these parts of the district, but see it as necessary to be able to enter very popular schools in other parts. Below follows the

voice of a woman who did not try, but who would have wanted to send her children to a school in Hambantota town, had she been able to cover the extra costs:

Q – Apart from all the costs you mentioned – is it also difficult to enter the school in Hambantota [town]?

R – No! If they pass the O-level [examination] it is not difficult. In Tangalle it is difficult to enter. For that you need money and connections. Not in Hambantota! (SMH08, poor rural woman)

Tangalle is a town about the size of Hambantota town, located to the north-west of the latter, along the coast. At least for people living in Hambantota town, but also in many of the villages in and around Sooriyawewa Division, Tangalle is the closest place for finding schools where the pass rates at grade 5 examinations, and at O- and A-level examinations, are very high (see section 7.3.4). Yet, interviews with principals give at hand that connections are useful also for entrance to schools in Hambantota town.

The discussion about connections is really about issues of power, and it is difficult to verify to what extent parental fears correspond with reality. In a way, it means a lot merely that feelings are there, and it shows that if practices of admissions in any way resembles the way parents describe it, it is illegitimate, let alone illegal. Bringing in the voices of school personnel, the picture does however get a bit clearer. In discussions with principals in urban schools, I get strong indications that there are actors in the system who could be used to increase the accessibility of these schools:

R - The thing is that I have stopped the entrances, but sometimes I cannot do it because they [parents] bring letters from the ministry, from directors of education, and from high people like that. And there are a lot of government servants' quarters here; I have to give them a chance to enter this school. This year I said that I would only take children from this [subdivision], but all brought electricity bills from this [subdivision].

Q - I have heard about that from Colombo; is it happening here as well?

R - Yes, it is happening. I know they are not living in this area, but they have the proof. The government servants want to send [their children] to more popular schools. They know that in here, their children can pass the grade 5 examinations easily (Principal, Urban School).

The principal in another urban school says, when asked, that apart from the grade 5 examinations, it is only through political connections that there is a chance of entering for children from other areas. This principal adds that if MPs were not allowed to interfere in admission procedures, they would let the whole school suffer:

R - If I refuse one MP who wants to get someone into my school, they do not supply buildings or any other things [to this school] (Principal, Urban School).

The importance of connections is partly connected to the urbanisation of education, where more and more students try to get into semi-urban and urban schools, with greater chances of passing examinations. The attempts from above to stop this process of urbanisation or bipolarisation make political connections and/or influence from other important actors increasingly important, as the number of positions to compete for grow

scarcer. From discussions with parents and principals in urban schools, it is seen that it was easier before - provided rural parents could cover expenses and distances - to get rural children enrolled in urban schools. Recent shifts in the school-network have thus made the strategy of shifting school more delicate and increased the value of particular forms of social capital. These forms of social capital are often, but not always, lacking in poor and very poor rural families.

8.4 Cultural capital and the importance of language

R - Now there is no freedom for the students, because now, they are competing with each other to pass examinations. That is why they cannot go to religious places; the Sinhalese cannot go to the temple; the Muslims cannot go to the Mosque. And they do not do much of sports activities either; very few students do that (KI15, Teacher and Private Tuition teacher).

As suggested by the teacher quoted above, educational activities take up a big part of most children's lives. Especially urban students have serious problems with regard to not having enough time. Rather than feeling that their parents do not support them, several urban students express that their lives are too oriented towards education; the pressure from parents is seen as too hard. Sinhalese students feel pressured to attend Private Tuition, as well as the Buddhist Sunday school (Dhamma School), apart from doing ordinary schooling and the related homework. I choose to quote one urban student at length, who wants to illustrate the pressure she feels from her parents:

Our parents try to bind us with education but they do not care about our mental situations. After school I go home unhappily. When I get home, then again I have to go back to Private Tuition. In the evening when I get home I am too tired. But I do not have time to let my body relax – I have to do my homework. When I finish the work around 10 or 11 and take my dinner, I cannot eat well because I am tired. I am not sleeping more than six hours because I have to get up early in the morning and get ready to go to school. In the darkness I move to school. I skip my breakfast. (...). Do you think we are free in the weekends? No, not at all! From Saturday morning till evening, we have Private Tuition. Sunday morning we have Dhamma School. Our new problem is that our teachers asked us to do field books. In all subjects we have to do field books. We have to spend a lot of time finding facts. Because of that I miss my Sunday evening. I like music very much. But I do not have time to listen to music. My ambition is to be a reporter. Somehow I will get good education. If I can be a reporter I will write about child rights. I will fight for it (SE48 – Urban Girl).

Even if this essay might well be a bit of an exaggeration, I can fully understand if students feel pressurised from having to spend so much time on education. When rural students bring up the time dimension, it is rather about not having enough time for homework, and when they mention the pressure from parents, it is almost always about the high aspirations parents have with the outcomes of education.

Despite high aspirations with education among parents, quite another matter is of course whether there is anyone at home who can help out with homework. The idea that children are "learning to leave" might also lead to that there are no older siblings at

home to help out with homework. Most students do not mention this as a problem, although a few bring up that they have to rely on relatives or neighbours to help them. Parents, whom themselves are poorly educated, bring it up somewhat more often:

R - In my case, my husband is not always at home. When my son asks me about something, I also cannot understand (SSH04, poor, semi-urban woman).

This illiterate woman above (SSH04), furthermore says that her son sometimes has been afraid of going to school, because he says that the teacher hits him if he has not done the homework. Sometimes, his father can help him, she says, and sometimes he gets help from literate people in the neighbourhood. A small number of little-educated parents even say that Private Tuition is good, because it can help their children to get extra help with their homework: "...when the children come here after school, we do not have good education, so we cannot help them. That is why it is good to send them to Private [Tuition] classes" (HH12, poor, urban woman). In this way, economic capital - when available - can substitute the lack of cultural capital. It was equally suggested in section 8.3.1 that social capital, when available in its relevant forms, can substitute the lack of cultural capital, if relatives or neighbours can help the children with homework. The problem of lacking home-support is however aggravated when teachers do not have time for students with learning problems. This is mentioned by many parents and students alike, especially in the big, semi-urban school, and many teachers agree to that it is difficult to handle "weak" children, if classes are very big: "...the chances are very small for that" (SMe3, Teacher, Rural School). This illustrates the value of cultural capital, and my experience from having conducted all of these interviews, with parents as well as in schools, is that children of teachers and principals seem to gain greatly from supporting home environments. Yet, this is precisely the kind of cultural capital dimension that I really do not manage to capture with the methods used here.

In relation to the lack of home-support, further, there is an immense demand for learning English, also in areas where it is a completely foreign language. This was thoroughly illustrated in chapter 6. English is not only seen as a key resource for access to "good" jobs - and hence for getting out of poverty traps - it is also seen to be necessary for performing the most basic citizen-activities. English is used as an example here, not only because it is identified to be so crucial among parents, but also because it is seen to be connected to a brighter future for the national economy. In this way, it is important for understanding tensions between educational projects at different levels of scale (that is, the government and the household levels).

English is now being reintroduced as an optional medium of instruction in a number of schools around the district. As seen above though, the equality-argument for doing this is flawed, as there are so few teachers in the English subject in the district as a whole. Rural schools are not capable of conducting English-medium education, a rural English teacher argues, and to her, introducing it as an optional medium of

instruction will serve to divide the country on a spatial basis. This is both due to the lack of English teachers, as well as to a lack of the required cultural capital:

R - The only time they [students] hear English is in the schools, forty minutes a day. (...). Villagers cannot speak English, and foreigners never visit their places. They cannot listen to English in TV or in the radio. They only hear English from the English teacher.

Q - What is your view of the introduction of English as a medium of instruction?

R - I do not think it is suitable in this kind of schools. It will suit only the cities, not the rural areas. Schools like this one will not have the facilities. From last year only we have electricity. The students here have not seen computers even, so how can you introduce that?

Q - Do you think that English is important for the future?

R - Yes, I think that everyone needs English, because if we want to develop our country, we need English. In the near future, if a person has no knowledge in English, he will not be able to travel in buses even, because the boards will also be written in English. If we buy food in a shop, everything is written in English. The ingredients! So if a person cannot read English he will not know how to choose in the shop. He will get poison instead of food if he does not know English. [Laughter!] (...).

Q - But you do not agree with making it a medium of instruction?

R - If they do not have basic knowledge in English, how could they handle other subjects in English? (SMe3, Teacher, Rural School).

This policy therefore seems to be formulated mainly for larger urban areas, where more people already can handle the English language, even among the poor. In Hambantota KV, where they have introduced this policy shift, most of the children choosing English-medium education come from homes where English already is used on a daily basis (SHam1). It is important to remember, further, that the difference between rural and urban areas in the district, in terms of English language proficiency, is considerably less than between Colombo and the rest of the country. This was indicated with examination results for the English subject above. On the whole, it would be a bit too speculative to draw any far-reaching conclusions about the results of the new policy of reintroducing English as an optional medium of instruction, especially based on such limited observations that can be found in Hambantota District. Nevertheless, there is an evident risk that it will disadvantage rural and semi-urban students, as well as poor students in urban schools, lacking the necessary cultural capital and/or other resources necessary for entrance to schools where it can be introduced.

8.5 The importance of physical mobility: Leaving to learn?

R - The poor and helpless send their children to schools in the district; those who can send them outside the district, to Matara, Galle, Colombo or Kandy (SN3, Principal, Rural School).

Parents do not point out distances to schools children *are enrolled in* as big problems. Most issues brought out by parents regarding distances and physical mobility - in this context - concern having young children, whom they have to follow to school in the

morning and go and get in the afternoon. Distance also restricts many parents from sending their children to better schools somewhere else, partly due to a lack of time:

Q – Is it [that other school that you mentioned] better than this one?

R - Yes, it is better! But if there were more teachers here, this one would also be OK. The thing is that there are no teachers. But my son is in grade two, and we have to take him back and forth to the school. If it was good, this school would be very good for us because we are farmers, and sometimes we do not have the time to take him to another school (SMH09, poor, rural woman).

Accompanying these young children takes up valuable time for parents, which could have been – and sometimes is - used for other purposes. Often though, older siblings can accompany younger sisters and brothers, if they are enrolled in the same school.

Rural and semi-urban students give quite a different picture than do the parents. Apart from the general lack of money and the low quality - as well as low frequency - of teaching, students very often highlight distances to school as barriers to achieve their aspirations with education. For one, many mention having to walk to school every day - normally between 2.5-4.5 miles, one direction and several stress that bicycles would have made a substantial difference in these endeavours. In some families, going by bicycle is how the children transport themselves to school, often with several siblings using the same bicycle. It is furthermore revealing that many students confront the trouble they have with getting to school, with the lack of teachers, as if many times, the trip does not feel worthwhile. Here is just one example:

I leave from home around 6.20 to go to school. When I come to the school the time is 7.45. We do not have a vehicle to come to school. Some days we come by bicycle. This is the way we come to school, but in the school, there are no teachers to give a good education, and no things for education (SE27 - Rural Girl).

Distances to schools, although not insurmountable, affect school attendance among students (see section 8.6), and the friction of distance intensifies with the absence of proper teaching. Distances are likely to become more important would the policy of closing down small schools be further pursued in the area. The upgrading of rural schools, on the other hand, is partly meant to decrease the importance of physical mobility as a divider of educational opportunities. In one rural school where they have tried several times to offer education up to O-level, the principal says that these attempts have reduced dropouts after grade nine, especially among girls (SMa2).

Problems of restricted mobility are primarily mentioned by parents as a serious constraint for going to better schools in other areas, or to Private Tuition. In Wedigamwewa, for example, one boy passed the grade 5 examination in 2001 and entered Weeraketiya NS. Yet, his parents could not afford the costs, especially for boarding, so now he is enrolled in a less popular National School in Ambalantota instead, to which he can commute. Families well-endowed with economic capital see to that there is a vehicle taking their children to school, even though this might turn out

very costly; they let them travel by bus if such are available; or pay for boarding. Families who have connections or relatives living close to better schools can use their social capital in order to access these, but if they do not have this, children are more or less stuck in the school closest to their homes, no matter how bad its quality. In addition to this, distance and the related time dimension is a big problem for attending Private Tuition, which almost exclusively is confined to urban and semi-urban areas:

R - (...). We would like to send them [the children, to Private Tuition in the English subject], but who would take them to Private Tuition and back? (...).

Q - Why do they [your children] say that they want Private Tuition in English?

R - Their friends are going to an English class in Sooriyawewa [town] on Fridays. They [their friends] have elder sisters and brothers who can take them to town and back home again (SAH06, middle-level, rural woman).

Restricted mobility is important especially for families in rural and semi-urban areas, adding to the dilemmas relating to a lack of teachers for all subjects in rural schools. The stated reason for conducting A-level Private Tuition *at day-time*, even as tutors know that it is competing for time with the ordinary, government schools, is that also students from rural areas should be able to attend these classes:

R - The big problem is that a lot of students are coming from far away. They have big transport problems, and if we conduct [Private] Tuition in the evenings, they cannot go back home. It would be too late (KI11, Private Tuition teacher, Marga Institute, Tangalle).

Some parents mention long distances to schools and Private Tuition institutes as being particularly problematic for girls. They say that they do not want to send the girls alone on roads or on buses, suggesting that there might be gendered restrictions to physical mobility, relating to a geography of fear:

R - If students want to get Private Tuition they have to go to Ambalantota. (...) There is a security problem, especially for sending girls (SMH02, middle-level, rural woman).

Q - Why did you choose the school in Hambantota among all the good schools?

R - Our daughter cannot live without us. If we put her in another area she has to live there. My sister's daughter goes to [a school called] Anula Vidyalaya in Colombo. If I want, I can put my child there, but I do not want to. She needs our protection (SMH03, rich, rural woman).

A rural O-level girl acknowledges this gender restriction in an interview: "The parents do not want the girls to come home very late. For boys it is not a problem" (KI24). Gendered restrictions to physical mobility are mentioned in a few student essays and interviews with parents, and it is mostly in relation to going to better urban schools or to Private Tuition. Several of the rural, female students also stress that they are being harassed on the way to or from the school, and this is sometimes connected to the high alcohol consumption in the villages. It is, however, not clear how often this fear of letting girls travel alone actually translates into girls being kept at home, and as seen in

section 8.6 below, girls have *higher* school attendance than boys do. It is also not that boys attend Private Tuition more than girls do in the institutes that I have visited; quite the opposite. In a big Private Tuition institute in Sooriyawewa town for example (KI25), I get to know that more girls than boys are coming. The Private Tuition teacher in this institute has heard the argument that parents are afraid of sending their daughters alone, but it is not seen in his classes.

A big issue for those who cannot walk to school regards transport costs, which in much depends on whether there are private or government buses operating in the areas. Students can use season tickets on government buses, but on private alternatives they have to pay the full fare, which keeps many children out of school when money is not available. Furthermore, many students highlight the absence of a functioning bus service to bring them to school regularly and in due time:

I am going to school by bus. The bus comes two days a week. Some days the bus does not come. We do not have economy to pay for the bus so I am not going to school everyday. I am going to school two or three days per week (SE16 - Rural Boy).

One poor, rural mother is paying 22 Rs a day for one of her daughters to travel to the school in Sooriyawewa town. The reason to why she does not use season tickets is that she would anyway have to pay for the private buses all of the days when there is no government bus (SMH08, revisit 2004). Yet another issue regards whether it is possible to drive the bus on the road after heavy rains. In late 2002, this was not possible for students in Usgalle who wanted to get to the school or to Private Tuition in Sooriyawewa town, although the road has been improved since.

Comparing distances to school for rural students in Sooriyawewa Division with distances for rural students in many other parts of the South, the situation in the former probably seems quite favourable. There are probably also many exaggerations in the essays, exemplified with this rural girl: "If we walk to school it takes two hours. My house is two miles away from the school" (SE28). Yet, restrictions to mobility and distances to schools are pointed out as prioritised problems by students. Having to walk a long way to school is also mentioned to seriously diminish the time students have for doing homework as discussed above.

I am told in one of the National Schools in Hambantota town, finally, that some rich students do not attend school at all. Yet, they are still enrolled there, as it will give them better chances of entering the university through district quotas. In reality though, they go to Private Tuition in Colombo, where they are boarding. This is one of the problems with the system of district quotas, where rich parents in poor districts turn out to be the big winners. But this kind of quota-hopping also involves students coming from outside the district. In another of the schools in Hambantota town, I am told that there are children enrolled merely to allow them access to university quotas, while they physically are not present in the school. However, as suggested in section 8.2.1, if there

are relatives living close to better schools in other areas, children may substitute the lack of physical mobility (that is, problems of commuting) with their social capital, increasing their educational opportunities.

8.6 Low attendance rates – not only about opportunity costs

R - The students are not attending class every day. Therefore it is difficult to study, as they do not know what happened the previous lesson. I do not have time to explain again and again (SMe2, Teacher, Rural School).

8.6.1 The average, statistical situation regarding student attendance

Being enrolled in school is not the same as attending it. Apart from having problems of enrolling the remaining out-of-school children in education, a problem for the government is to get those who are enrolled to attend more frequently. Among school personnel and other key informants, low student attendance is commonly explained either with parents being poorly interested in education, or, most commonly, with children having to stay at home to help out with farming or fishing. It should be obvious to anyone by now, however, that I believe this matter to be more complicated. Increasing attendance will require undertakings of various kinds and by various actors and merely "blaming parents" would by no means suffice.

A first thing to do is to see what the attendance-situation really looks like; something that is not usually done on a grand scale. Drawing from school registrars from the 19 schools, Table 8.2 below shows attendance rates for students in grades 1-11, for year 2002¹¹⁵. On average, attendance in schools within Sooriyawewa Division is lower for boys (75 percent) than for girls (80 percent) and lower for students in rural schools (76 percent) than for students in Sooriyawewa NS (80 percent). In rural schools, the gender difference is even more pronounced, to the advantage of girls. There is a great diversity in the pattern. In some rural schools, attendance is very high, for example in the small school in Ihala Kumbukwewa. In others, it is rather to be described as very low, as for example in Meegahajandura, where boys only attend 58 percent of the scheduled time. Students in Sooriyawewa Division are – on average – away from school between 20-25 percent of the scheduled time, which I consider to be rather much. Was the situation the same for each child, it would mean that every child was away from school at least one day per week, apart from holidays, weekends and other school-free days. In reality, it is of course not evenly distributed among students:

¹¹⁵ In reality the figures are probably a little bit higher as some months (i.e. April and August) have less school days due to vacations, and these are also months when the attendance is particularly low. Furthermore, some registers were not available, but these were very few, and it particularly regards a few classes in the big schools in urban and semi-urban areas.

Table 8.2 Student attendance, 2002, Grade 1-11, % of the school time

Name of the School	Class.	Boys (%)	Girls (%)	Total (%)
Rural Schools				
Ihala Kumbukwewa	VD	95	95	95
Welliwewa	D	65	73	70
Mahagalwewa	D	73	77	75
Meegahajandura	ND	58	68	63
Habaraththawela	D	83	88	85
Wewegama	D	74	78	76
Bendigamtota	VD	77	82	80
Viharagala 550	VD	73	79	76
Hathporuwa	VD	74	83	78
Andarawewa	VD	69	78	73
Wedigamwewa	D	73	77	75
Ranmuduwewa	VD	74	80	77
Viharagala	ND	76	81	79
Namadagaswewa	ND	75	81	78
Weeriyagama	D	71	77	74
All Rural Schools		73	79	76
Semi-urban Schools				
Sooriyawewa NS	ND	78	83	80
Sooriyawewa Division		75	80	78
Urban Schools				
Hambantota KV	ND	84	85	84
Zahira NS	ND	79	82	81
St Mary's NS	ND	82	83	82

Source: Student attendance registrars in the different schools

Among schools where students have written essays, Meegahajandura is well below the rural average, while in Andarawewa, it is higher but still below average. Sooriyawewa NS is a bit above the divisional average, but as can be seen, although it is a National School, it remains rather close to average both in terms of teacher and student attendance, which is not what I had expected initially. The big difference is, again, likely to be between the different National Schools but I do not have data to falsify this assumption. Urban schools in Hambantota town all show better attendance records than the rural schools, but again, the difference is not very big.

There is a tendency for *higher* attendance in Very Difficult schools, as was the case with teacher attendance. This might be connected to these schools generally being much smaller and it might also suggest that there is a connection between high teacher attendance and high student attendance. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, in several of the Very Difficult schools there is a higher proportion of younger students, who tend to attend more frequently. Gender-wise, girls have better attendance records than boys do. This gender pattern further supports the conclusion that girls' education is perceived to be at least as important as boys' education is. It is interesting to note that, also in the school with predominantly Muslim students (that is, Zahira NS), girls' attendance is higher than that of boys' is. In the following sections, I will discuss the most important factors behind the low attendance among students.

8.6.2 Opportunity costs and low student attendance

Students consider their parents to be very keen on them performing well in school and it is not common, at all, that they mention that they have to stay home and work instead of going to school. However, attendance records seem to suggest otherwise. By students, helping parents is mostly seen to constrain time for homework and leisure. Yet, the following kind of statements are found in essays: "Some days I am absent from school to go with my father and help him with the chena..." (SE04 – Rural Boy); "During the study period we are doing farming. When my parents are working hard I cannot just watch them do that. I have blisters on my hands" (SE29 - Rural Boy). Two girls who have recently stopped their education in Sooriyawewa NS say that boys are absent from school also to work in *other* people's paddy fields (SAH09, revisit 2004; SSH09, revisit 2004). In addition, a lot of girls bring up household chores as restrictions to their education, and this is the same for all areas: "Sometimes I do not have time to do the homework because I am the eldest in the family. I have to do all the housework" (SE60 - Semi-urban Girl). It is, however, not clear how this issue of household chores is connected to attendance rates.

Hence, two types of home activities are brought up in the essays, and there are obvious gender dimensions here. Girls either write more generally about doing "housework", or bring up having to cook food, wash clothes, watch younger siblings, etc, and this is the same for all areas alike. Only rural boys mention that they have to help parents in the fields, but from my observations, it is clear that both boys and girls are involved in agricultural activities. In Hambantota town, I also observed between 15-20 boys of school-going age helping their parents with fishing in the mornings, although it is likely that many of these actually go to school after doing this morning exercise. Fishing seems to be an activity where mostly boys are involved.

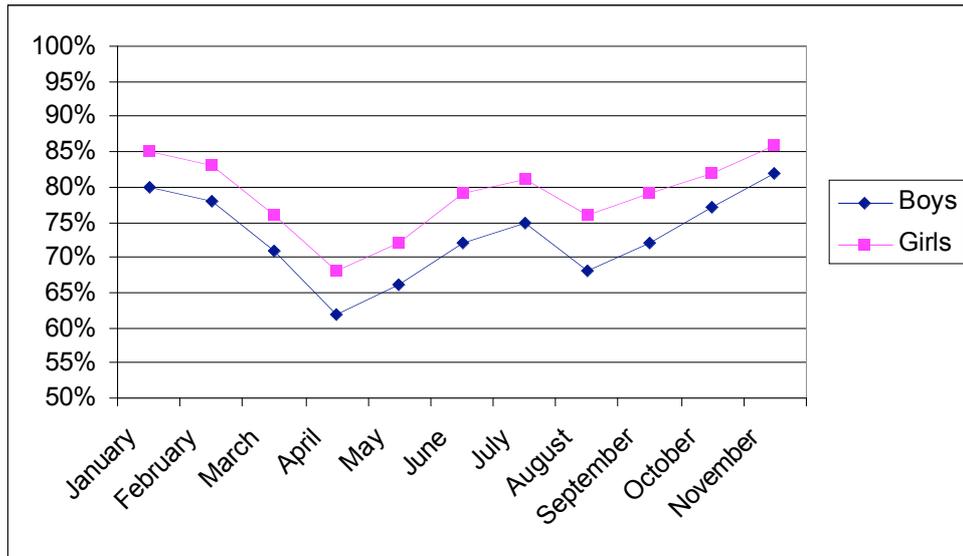
My interpretation of interviews with parents is that, also to them, the need for children to work is not the prime reason for students' low attendance in school. Yet, there is the aspect of what is politically correct for parents to say, forcing me to remain a bit suspicious. Furthermore, children *are* used in farming and for selling things on streets and in markets, which could be observed when I travelled around the district during school-time. A low attendance on Fridays for both boys and girls is also affected by Saturdays being the market day in Sooriyawewa town, a day around which parents are in need of extra help. This Friday-pattern is very strong, and reasons behind it are confirmed by both observations and in interviews.

What I will do in the following is to look at how attendance rates vary over a school year and between age groups, and two broader issues should be kept in mind. First, if child labour affects attendance patterns, absenteeism from school should be partly be related to the agricultural patterns of the areas surrounding the schools. The problem is that the agricultural periods are not fully clear, and they are not the same every year depending on when rains fall. There is some confusion, among farmers, as to when rains actually come. As a point of departure, however, rains usually come around

September, which means that farmers start preparing the fields in August, to start cultivation in September or October. The harvest period for chena cultivators is normally around December to February (or mid-January) when the harvest is marketed, which also requires additional labour. Where facilities for irrigation are available, as in parts of Meegahajandura and in Sooriyawewa town, paddy cultivation can start again in April. This makes it difficult to understand attendance patterns, because even in areas where there is no irrigation, many parents work as day-pay labourers in paddy fields of others. Taken together, the cultivation periods hence lasts almost the whole year around. Second, to support the relationship between child labour and low attendance, absenteeism should be higher for students from higher grades than for younger students. This is because older children are more likely to be kept at home, to watch siblings, or to help out in the garden or in the fields.

During my second stay in the study areas, in 2002-2003, I collected the attendance rates from all schools, and when coming back in 2004, I could show the figures to principals in all schools, in order to get their help with understanding the overall patterns. As to the monthly attendance in the fifteen rural schools (Figure 8.1), there are two periods when attendance is going down – April and August – although the total figure never goes above 85 percent for any month. April and August are the months when schools have shorter vacation periods, in addition to the whole of December for Sinhalese schools as well as November for Muslim schools. In some rural schools, I am told that it is difficult to get students, especially older students, to come back after the vacations, as that is the time when they are supposed to clear the school ground (SMe1). Furthermore, in April, teachers in big schools are busy with the A-level examinations, which means that they have less time for taking care of the other grades. In Wewegama, a teacher tells me that it is not chena cultivation that is the main problem for student attendance. Problems rather arise when parents temporarily have to move to other areas to work as day-pay labourers. April is a time when there is a lot of work in the paddy fields, and many parents leave for other areas to work in other people's paddy fields (SWe2). Generally, attendance is lower for boys than for girls, but the patterns are very similar for the two sexes over the year.

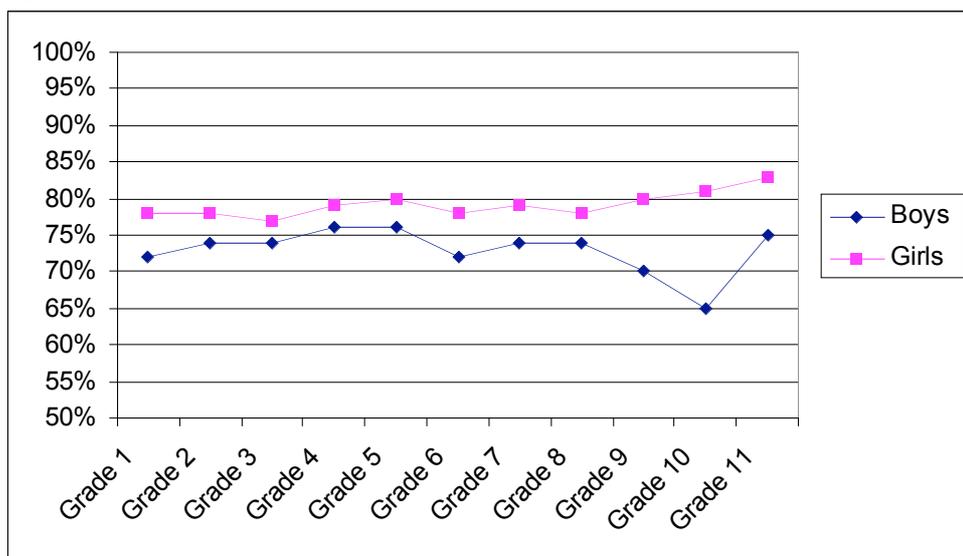
Figure 8.1 School attendance in different months, 2002 (%), fifteen rural schools



Source: School registrars

As to differences between grades (Figure 8.2), in the same 15 rural schools, noticeable is that there are big changes after grade eight for both sexes. After grade eight, the attendance of girls increases somewhat, while it decreases substantially for boys, only to increase again for the highest grade. This pattern would support the idea that boys are used for work when they are older, only to be sent to school more regularly again, close to the O-level examinations after grade 11. There is, however, nothing in this pattern that would suggest that girls have to stay at home more often as they grow older; quite the contrary.

Figure 8.2 School attendance in different grades, 2002 (%), fifteen rural schools



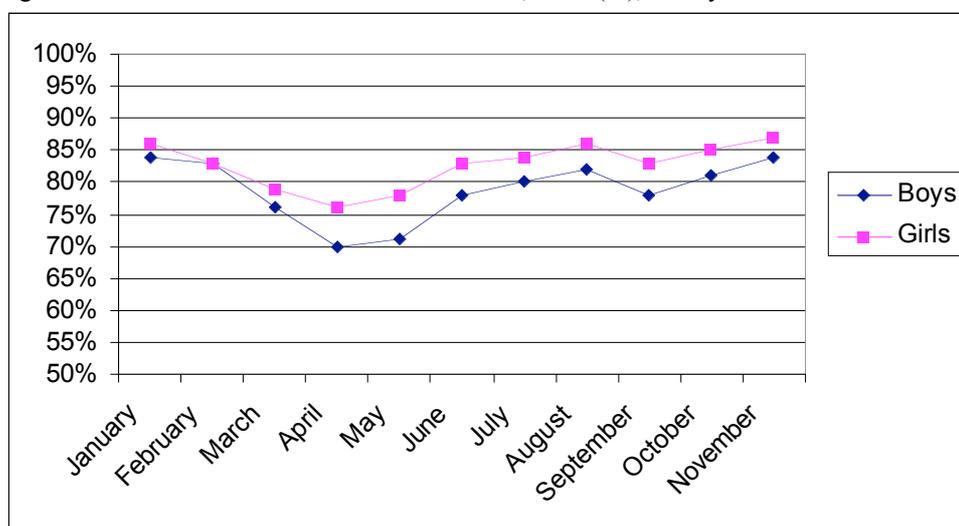
Source: School registrars

Against the interpretation that it is child labour that is the main factor keeping students away from school, is that attendance is low for the youngest students as well. The

conclusion then, for rural areas, would be that yes, low attendance is partly connected to the agricultural seasons, but that it is necessary to include other factors as well (see section 8.6.3).

In Sooriyawewa NS, with 4179 students in 2002, the pattern deviates somewhat from rural schools. As to the different months (Figure 8.3), there is the same pattern of low attendance in April, which is understandable considering that many parents are cultivating paddy around this school. But there is no drop in August; quite the contrary. The trend is downward after January all the way to April, to increase after that up to August, where there is a smaller drop in September, only to increase again the last two months. Apart from the downward around April, I do not get much help with explaining this pattern from school personnel.

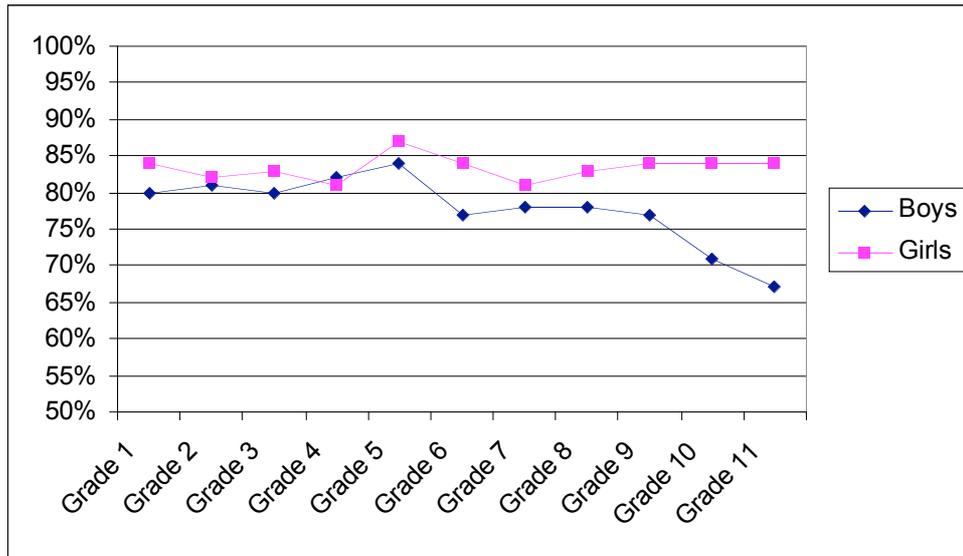
Figure 8.3 School attendance in different months, 2002 (%), Sooriyawewa NS



Source: School registrars

When it comes to differences between the different grades (Figure 8.4), in the semi-urban Sooriyawewa NS, there is a more pronounced drop after grade 5, which resonates with the perception of the principal of that school (SSN1). He suggests that, in his school, parents are less motivated if children fail the grade 5 examination, as they see fewer possibilities to get to a better school somewhere else:

Figure 8.4 School attendance in different grades, 2002 (%), Sooriyawewa NS

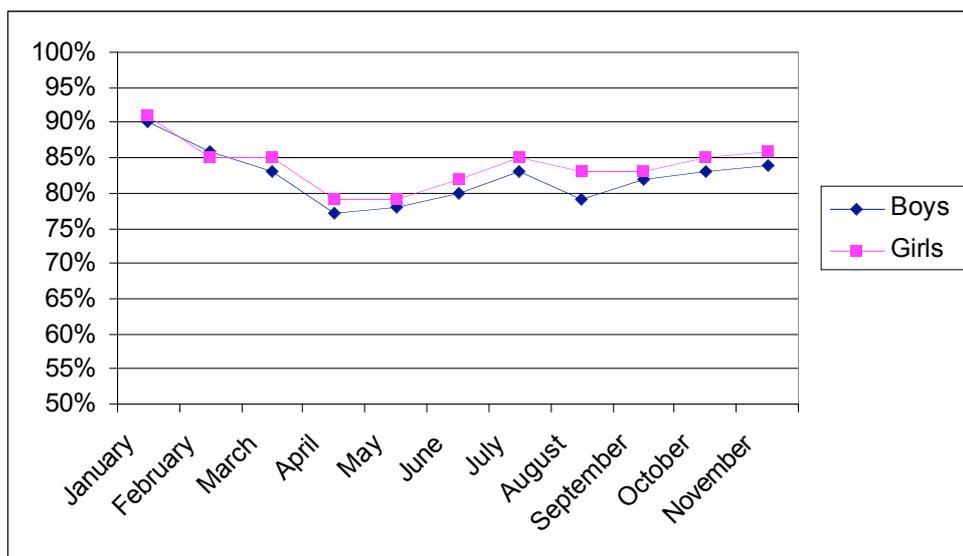


Source: School registrars

In Sooriyawewa NS as well, the attendance of boys drops significantly after grade eight, but unlike in rural schools, there is no increase for the final year, to sit the O-level examination. This is compatible with the ideas of one poor, semi-urban father, who says that it is difficult to keep his son from trying to make some money on his own, as he grows older (SSH01). Alternative income opportunities of boys are bigger in a semi-urban area like Sooriyawewa town, than they are in rural areas.

The urban schools in Hambantota town show a similar monthly pattern as do the rural schools (Figure 8.5), with a temporary drop in April and in August:

Figure 8.5 School Attendance in different months, 2002 (%), three urban schools



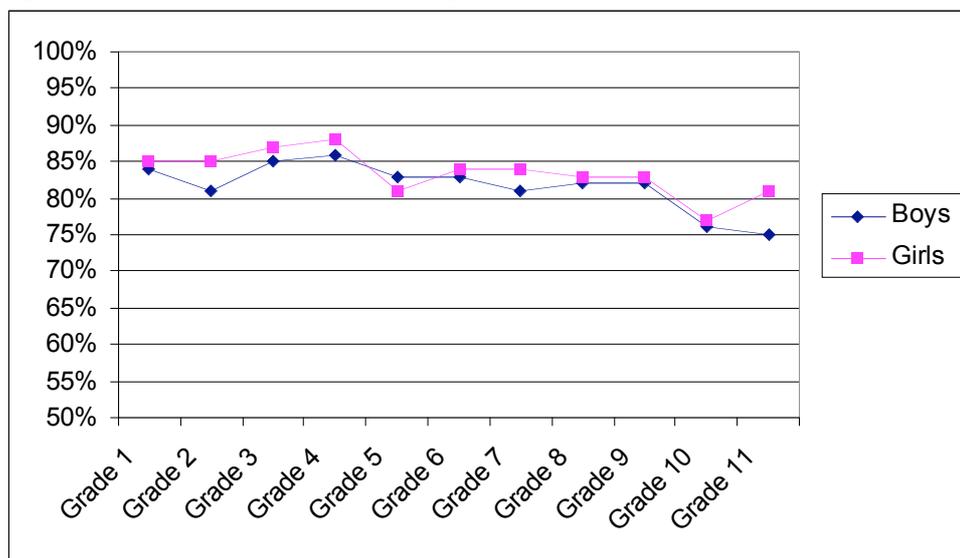
Source: School registrars

But the overall attendance is kept at a higher level and differences between boys and girls are much less pronounced. As seasons differ for different fisher families, it is even

more difficult than in rural areas to bring in the dimension of child labour into the analysis. Yet, as this solely is a male activity, it does not seem to have a big impact.

As to differences between grades, there is a steady but small decline from grade 4. Here also differences between the sexes are very small, apart from in the final grade, when girls' attendance increases somewhat, while that of boys rather decreases:

Figure 8.6 School attendance in different grades 2002 (%), three urban schools



Source: School registrars

From observations, as well as from a few essays and interviews, I know that the problem exists; some children do have to help their parents with work during school-time. Attendance data arguably supports this to some extent, but they also leave room for other, complementary interpretations. In many rural areas, parents are harvesting and marketing their products in January and February, but these are not months when attendance is particularly low. The situation is hence more complex than merely saying that opportunity costs and low parental interest explain the low attendance of students, although it is likely that the former of the two is more important than parents themselves want to admit. Even if these two explanations are the most immediate ones to emanate in discussions with school personnel, this might merely reflect the popular understanding of the situation, and many of them change their opinions as discussions move along or when confronted with statistics. Further supporting the interpretation that it is *not only* opportunity costs keeping students away from school, is that principals cannot see how adjusting the school year better to the agricultural calendar could solve the problems. Here is just one example of this:

Q – Do you think that you could increase the students' attendance by changing the vacation period?

R – Yes! If it became more relevant to the cultivation and harvest periods, that would be good. It would help a little bit to increase the attendance. But the main problem is the attitudes. The students think that, “Today they will only teach two or three periods; I do not go”. We have to change this attitude! (SN1, Principal, Rural School).

Trying to identify *one* factor behind the low attendance is impossible, and the patterns are due to a combination of factors. In the following, three other factors behind the low attendance among students will be discussed: high costs, problems relating to physical mobility and disincentives stemming from a low attendance of teachers.

8.6.3 Economic capital, physical mobility and teacher attendance

The most common reasons for non-attendance of students, as expressed by parents, is that children are kept at home when they are ill. Some rural parents further admit that the oldest daughters are kept at home when the mother is ill (e.g. SMH08). What students in rural and semi-urban schools primarily stress are the direct costs for going to school. These include the required parental contributions, but also exercise books, pens, pencils, etc. If children cannot bring these, they might stay or be kept at home, because it is not found useful to attend school without school equipment:

We lack money for our school equipment, and because of that, we have to stay at home weekly. In this way, we are absent from school many days. And when we start school again we have difficulties understanding the lessons. But how can we go to school without school equipment? (SE38 – Rural Girl).

Normally we come to school between 7.30 and 8.00, but a lot of days we do not have a chance to come to school because we do not have books, pens or pencils (SE33 – Rural Girl).

Yet another, but related issue regards that students are ashamed or even afraid of coming to school without bringing what has been requested by them in terms of contributions. As suggested by this poor man in Meegahajandura: “...teachers tell the children to bring this and that. But some of the parents cannot provide what is required. Because of this, the children cannot bring, and therefore, the children do not like to go to school” (SMH01). It is rather common that parents mention costs with education when explaining why children are sometimes kept away from school:

Q – How much do you spend on education every month?

[Discussion with her husband]

R – Maybe 700 Rs per month for private tuition and all expenses! If the teachers ask them to bring something, it is 700. If they do not ask them to bring money it is less. And these are expenses for both. This is too much for us.

Q – Do you sometimes have to borrow money for education?

R – Yes, sometimes we ask for money from others. If we cannot find money, we keep them at home (SAH09, poor, rural woman).

Q – How often do the children go [to school]?

R – Everyday – they never stop!

Q – Also in the off-season, when you [say that you] do not have enough money to eat?

R – For that six-month-period we try to send, but if we cannot get anything, they have to stay. But I try very hard (HH03, poor, urban man).

Apart from supporting the link between costs and non-attendance, this latter quotation illustrates how the immediate answer of many parents is that they send children to

school everyday, even though this is not always the case. Hence, there has sometimes been a need for me to be a bit "pushy" in interviews, to get the whole picture.

Furthermore, students in Sri Lanka are compelled to wear uniforms, provided freely by the government. To many students, one uniform is not enough, because as uniforms are white, they need to be washed very often. This sometimes causes problems for attending school: "We have to wear the same uniform for five days. Some days we stay at home because the uniform is not dry" (SE33 – Semi-urban Girl). And a few parents also mention this: "He has only one shirt. I have to wash it everyday. If we cannot wash it, he has to stay at home" (SAH10, poor, rural woman). In the rural school where wearing shoes has been made compulsory, several parents mention shoes as a big expenditure, sometimes keeping children from school for weeks, as parents save money or await a market day in order to buy affordable ones.

Costs are, hence, the most common reason for low attendance mentioned by students. The second most common explanation for low attendance, brought up by students, regards restrictions to physical mobility; either problems of transportation (buses), or because roads get "muddy" when there are heavy rains:

In here we have a problem. When we miss the bus we cannot come to school. There is only one bus. If it is not working, we have to stay at home. That is a main problem (SE06 – Rural Girl).

We have to walk around 2 miles to school. Rainy days, there are no ways to come to school, because the road gets muddy (SE19 – Rural Boy).

I can understand that uniforms get wet and dirty if it rains and children have to walk to school. Further, travelling around the area, I have experienced that it is either difficult or impossible to travel on many roads by vehicle, if there has been heavy rainfall. Among the schools from which I have collected essays, this was particularly so with the old road to Andarawewa. It is perhaps more difficult to understand, for me, that it is *impossible* to use the roads also for pedestrians, as suggested by the boy above. Regardless of what, it could be observed through school visits that attendance is very low on rainy days. One day when arriving in Sooriyawewa NS, around 50 percent of both students and teachers were absent according to the principal. The explanation given by the principal was that it rained heavily the day before.

Another thing, finally, that is heard among several of the parents is that there is no reason for students attending school all of the days, as the teachers' attendance is so low. This is implicitly indicated in many essays, as suggested above, when students confront the trouble they have for coming to school with the difficult teacher situation. Equally, some parents justify keeping their children at home to work, at least once in a while, with the situation of teachers being the way it is:

Q - The student attendance in the school is very low – what do you think is the main reason?

R – The teachers are not coming regularly. The students know that teachers are not coming to school on Mondays, and not on Fridays, and they do not want to come to school without teachers.

Q – Many people say that parents are not interested in their children's education; that they bring them to the chena instead of sending them to school. Is that not the main reason?

R – Some are doing like that. Some keep the children at home to do chena and paddy. This time [the cultivation period] the students go very rarely. Before grade 5 they cannot work in the chena or paddy. The reason to that their attendance is going down, is the teacher problem (SMH08, poor, rural woman).

One middle-level, semi-urban woman says that she have never kept her children away from school for doing agriculture, but admits that, "...some days we wanted them to stay at home because there were no teachers" (SSH09). One rural girl (SE13) writes that when students in her school realised that promises of getting more teachers proved to be only "empty talk", students got "lazy" to come to school. A final thing relating to this discussion is that several students are afraid of being punished by teachers, for example if they cannot bring the required contributions, and thus stay home for reasons of fear. This was exemplified and discussed to some extent above.

8.7 Short summary of the chapter

This chapter has discussed the various resources of importance for educational opportunities, mainly in terms of access to different segments of schools. Economic capital is seen to be of increasing importance for educational opportunities, particularly in relation to the perceived need for Private Tuition to pass examinations. Costs in urban schools are often higher than in rural schools, and to enter very popular schools (particularly outside the district), there is often a need to pay "entrance fees". High and increasing costs with education do not seem to generate higher dropout rates, but it is causing prioritisation between children within the families and many parents borrow money to cover educational costs. It is noticeable that this prioritisation does *not* seem to lead to increased gender discrimination. Social capital is mainly important for covering day-to-day expenditures with education and it is presumably important in keeping such a high percentage of children enrolled. Yet, social capital is a double edged sword and especially with increased competition for educational resources, it serves to exclude some groups from access to superior segments of schools when principals start selecting and rejecting students to stop the urbanisation of education.

Quite naturally, the importance of English skills is increasing with the reintroduction of optional English-medium education, while the importance of physical mobility is seen to decrease with the need for other resources to access popular schools. However, in combination with these other resources, most notable money and particular forms of social capital, physical mobility is still important to access good schools, and the lack of physical mobility is an important factor behind the low student attendance rates. The most important factor behind the low attendance of students is, however, a lack of economic capital in many families, due mainly to the direct costs for education

and to the opportunity costs. Moreover, attendance rates are related to school quality, particularly to the lack of, and the low attendance rates of, teachers.

9. FINAL INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section (9.2), the research questions relating to attitudes to, and the accessibility of, education, are addressed. Due to the empirical nature of these questions, the first section is to a large extent an analytical summary of the main findings presented in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. In the following section (9.3), I use the information from the research questions to address the two aims of the study. Section 9.4, in turn, attempts to put the research findings in larger perspective by linking them to the dilemma of educational planning in Sri Lanka. In addition to this, more general implications of the research findings are contemplated in this section through a reproblematisation of the Sri Lankan case. In section 9.5, finally, there is a note regarding the proceedings of the research process as well as a few reflections based on my findings about the future of Sri Lankan education.

Before starting to address the research questions and fulfil the aims of the thesis, it might be of help to recapitulate what these aims were. Two aims were presented in Chapter 1: (i) to better understand how the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas are affected in times of global transformations, and (ii) to better understand how the accessibility of educational opportunities is related to processes of social inclusion and exclusion in times of global transformations. The second aim is subsidiary to the first. To address these aims, two empirical research questions were asked about attitudes to education among poor families in marginal areas, while two questions were asked about what educational opportunities are accessible to these families, and how all of this is affected in times of global transformations.

9.2 Attitudes and opportunities of poor families in marginal areas

9.2.1 Attitudes to education in times of global transformations

The first question about attitudes regards what role poor families in marginal areas perceive education to have for leading lives they value, both in terms of what they aspire to and in terms of what they expect to get out of it. As to aspirations, it was made clear in Chapter 6 that basically all interviewed parents see a potential value with education. In this sense, the proposition that poor, little-educated peasant farmers are unaware of the importance of education is irrelevant for the families visited. Students do not complain about low parental interest in education; quite the contrary. Moreover, although there are school personnel that seem to support the proposition above, what most of them mean is rather that poor parents *cannot afford* to invest in education, due

to high direct, indirect and opportunity costs. There are strains in the relation of educational provision, especially in the sense that parents and students are critical towards the role of teachers. One of the main reasons behind the anger expressed about teachers is related to high absenteeism, but there are also suspicions concerning their involvement in the Private Tuition sector although it remains unclear whether the latter negatively affects their teaching in the school. I cannot see why the perspectives of school personnel should make me want to question the interpretation that basically all parents understand the potential value of education. Most important is the fact that so many parents suggest that they are poor today because they did not get enough education themselves and that they want their children to be well educated so as to be able to "face society" and live as "good citizens". Here we can conclude that poor families in these marginal areas do see education to have a potential role for leading lives they value. More pertinent questions are what kind of a role and for what kind of lives.

Regarding these latter issues, I did not obtain sufficient information from students to formulate any far-reaching conclusions, apart from the fact that the urban, semi-urban and rural students generally tend to see at least a successful A-level examination as a prerequisite for meeting their high aspirations with education. What is striking, regarding both students and parents, is how many of them bring up the risks of having to stop education "in the middle" or "half way", and how many of them aspire even to university education. It is also striking that so many tend to stress similar kinds of school subjects as being most important. The parents generally prioritise Maths, English, Science and Sinhala; the students almost exclusively mention English in their essays. Going back to the subjects generally stressed to be of importance for global competitiveness, as well as to the strategy of the Sri Lankan government for increasing the contribution of the education system to global competitiveness, there are significant similarities regarding what is seen to be important. However, this is also likely to be related to supply factors, and to the fact that English and computer skills are subjects in particularly short supply in marginal areas (Chapter 7).

Both of the points made above - the need for "higher education" and the need for these particular skills (most notably English) - are related in important ways to the kind of lives parents and students see as valuable and to the perceived requirements for qualifications to lead these kinds of lives. Most importantly, the livelihoods that are valued are neither farming nor fishing, nor any of the other widespread job opportunities in marginal areas, such as garment factory work, joining the military, or travelling to the Middle East as a housemaid. This is presumably because these jobs, generally, are not seen to take poor families *out of* their present social positions, although they (quite naturally) are seen to be better than no work. The reason for this, as I interpret it, is that the salaries from these occupations are too small to save while they are also seen to be too insecure and as of little use when it is time to retire. These perceptions of available job opportunities are supported by much related research

(Chapter 4), and provide a foundation for the discussion about the linkages between the accessibility of educational opportunities and processes of social exclusion and inclusion below. Parents almost invariably want their children to leave marginal areas after having finished their education, something which has to be taken into account when contemplating what education would be the most relevant for students in these areas. One conclusion is that the parents primarily see education as a vehicle for physical and social mobility, which in turn is seen to mean that the same educational opportunities should be accessible to rural and urban children. In other words, parental aspirations with sending children to school is generally to ensure that the children are sufficiently educated to not need to take the kind of jobs that are most commonly available to rural people, so that the children do not need to remain in the area.

There are "voices against the stream", but they are very few and mostly heard in poor and very poor Tamil and Muslim fisher families in Hambantota town. These are all families that are very deprived in a general sense and there are widespread problems with alcohol, particularly among the urban Tamils. Even though there are parents who, for example, do not strive for their children to be educated above O-level and who make distinctions between the need for education of boys and girls (to the disadvantage of girls), there is no evident spatial dimension to this pattern. Other groups in the same areas and similarly poor groups in other areas are very keen on educating both girls and boys, and up to very high levels. Rather, lower aspirations for education among these few parents seem related to religious interpretations, especially regarding girl's education, to a lack of economic capital, and to perceived discrimination on the labour market with regard to possibilities for getting "good jobs".

To get "good jobs", then, which parents want their children to get after school, most parents identify a need for an A-level education or above, while only a few contend that an O-level is a minimum requirement to get out of poverty. I have not collected sufficient information about qualification requirements for all of these wanted jobs, but an A-level is needed to become a trained teacher (that is, for entrance to Colleges of Education). For many of the other "good jobs" that are mentioned there is a need to go beyond the A-level, but this discussion is a bit beside the focus here as the question is what kind of education families *perceive* to be required. It is important to note, however, that there is a need for at least an O-level examination to get an unskilled job as a machine operator in the local garment factory in Sooriyawewa town, with a salary level of around 1 US dollar per day, not adjusted for purchasing power.

In Chapter 6, the need to distinguish between aspirations and expectations was illustrated, in the sense that it is evident that although parents and students almost invariably have high aspirations with education, this is not necessarily what they believe will happen. My findings are in line with earlier research suggesting that aspirations often are illusory, while expectations often are pessimistic. Yet, my research methods do not allow me to state to what extent pessimism equals realism. Importantly, however, this pessimism about fulfilling aspirations is also evident among middle-level

parents in urban areas. This is a point that I will get back to in section 9.3, because it is primarily for these middle-level parents, regardless of geographical setting, that the processes presently operating in the education network are negative in terms of losing opportunities that these kinds of families have had earlier. An apparent paradox is that although parents and students see how "significant others" fail in their educational endeavours, as well as in their attempts to secure a "good job" after finishing school, they still strive by all means to get as high up the educational ladder as possible. In my view, this is mainly due to the two reasons that were discussed in Chapter 6. For one, even if the children do not get a "good job" afterwards, getting an education might still be valuable in terms of "facing society" and "becoming good citizens". This would support the idea that poor parents may see a value with education regardless of its contribution to employment opportunities. Most importantly, however, education is seen as one of the few means available for substantially improving the situation, and parents therefore perceive themselves to have few if any alternatives.

The parents therefore see a high value with education despite the fact that their expectations with it are very low in terms of passing examinations, entering the university, getting "good jobs", etc. Attendance rates among students, however, suggest that the low expectations do have practical implications. Low attendance rates are not interpreted to be related to parents not being able to see a value with education, for reasons already elaborated, but rather as due to a number of interrelated factors. The most important of these other factors regards the lack of economic capital, which means both that children sometimes are needed for work in families where they cannot afford to employ labourers to work in the fields and that children are kept at home when costs cannot be handled. This is not surprising and fits well with the explanations provided by school personnel. Yet, there are also other factors that deserve attention. Restrictions to physical mobility are important, and both of these factors (poverty and lack of physical mobility) are interrelated with the fact that schools are seen to offer an education of low quality and with high absenteeism of teachers. In other words, the custodial function so many school personnel express to be what they can offer poor families in marginal areas is not deemed sufficient by these families. One conclusion is that low expectations among students and parents matter; not in the sense that students drop out, but in the sense that they attend less than they would have had their expectations been higher. In fact, had it not been for the neighbourhood-effect, which in this context refers to other people in the community "controlling" the activities of these families and hence affecting their behaviours, attendance rates would probably have been even lower.

The second research question addresses the issue of how aspirations with education among poor families in marginal areas, are affected in times of global transformations. All but a small minority of the parents suggests that education is becoming increasingly important. However, it is mainly when parents explain *why* they perceive education to be increasingly important that I am fully convinced that these are

their actual perceptions. A serious problem in answering questions about changes over time is the lack of a longitudinal perspective by way of being able to compare the results with earlier studies asking the same kind of questions in the same areas. What can be concluded from Chapter 6 is that parents generally perceive education to be increasingly important, which, in turn, is likely to affect their behaviours. Student essays do not give much information regarding changes over time. The reasons as to why education is seen to be increasingly important by parents can be divided into two kinds, although many parents point to both these reasons. The two parental explanations both relate to the main title of this thesis: (a) education for all (b) in times of global transformations.

The first reason as to why parents regard education as becoming increasingly important has to do with the fact that so many other parents send their children to school, and the fact that so many people are educated in society, which increases competition for qualifications and jobs. Although there has been an expansion of job opportunities in marginal areas, it is not commensurate with the expansion of the educated labour force, as indicated by the rise in qualification requirements for the available jobs. This qualification escalation was discussed to some extent in Chapter 4. It is not strange that demands for qualifications are on the increase, but it is still a necessary contextualisation of the high aspirations with education among parents, and it is likely that the government is underestimating the actual demand for education in marginal areas. Furthermore, with increasing levels of education among the population at large, the need for education to "face society", to be treated with respect by others in society, is seen to increase further.

The second explanation among parents as to why education is becoming increasingly important regards the diversification of rural livelihoods, relating to - but far from only stemming from - global transformations. Most important is that parents explain the increasing need for education with the increasing difficulties of farming in an economically viable way and with the allegedly increasing costs of living. A quest for government jobs is evident, but very few mention that the possibilities of obtaining these jobs are decreasing, although many parents believe that it is the private sector that is likely to expand in the future. Looking at the statistics provided for Sooriyawewa Division in Chapter 3, the share of government jobs in the division is not decreasing, although the absolute number of public sector jobs are decreasing in the country as a whole. However, this second explanation also concerns general notions of a rapidly changing society, where technological sophistication is increasing and where there is a perceived need for English and computer skills even in marginal areas. It is also worth noting that so many parents stress not only the increasing need for English to get "good jobs", but even the need for English to perform the most basic citizen activities. All of this is also linked to the generally rising life aspirations and the ideas that "a decent life" necessitates geographical and social mobility away from marginal areas and the

life opportunities open to people living in these areas. The extent to which this is something recent was not sufficiently illuminated.

The four tendencies relating to global transformations were identified as the changing requirements for global competitiveness in the knowledge-intensive economy, increasing fiscal dilemmas, diversification of rural livelihoods, and increasing socio-spatial permeability. Regarding aspirations with education, it is primarily the latter two that are of major importance. The idea in this study has not been to suggest a causal link between global transformations and educational aspirations. Yet, to the extent that rural diversification and increased socio-spatial permeability are global phenomena, it is likely that parents in many parts of the South see education to be of increasing importance and that they identify similar kinds of "global skills" as increasingly important requirements for leading valuable lives. The following set of questions addresses how these high aspirations fit with the kind of education that is accessible to poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka.

9.2.2 The accessibility of opportunities in times of global transformations

The accessibility of educational opportunities was conceptualised to be about the accessibility of different segments of schools. The accessibility concept was, in turn, seen to have two interrelated dimensions: distribution and entitlements (Figure 2.2). The former is about the spatial distribution of schools, teachers and school facilities, while the latter is about family resources in the shape of economic, social and cultural capital, as well as physical mobility, which are important for access to schools from different segments. In this section, these dimensions are mainly discussed one by one while section 9.3 takes a closer look at their interlinkages by returning to the main aim of the study.

As to the question of accessibility of educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas, a number of points could be made in relation to this. It was shown in Chapter 7 that Hambantota District as a whole is *not* unfavourably endowed with educational opportunities, as compared to the national average, neither when it comes to the number of schools and teachers (per student), nor when it comes to the availability of "good schools". In a comparison with Colombo District, however, the latter is disproportionately endowed with "good schools", although it does not have as low people-teacher ratios as Hambantota District. In many ways, it actually seems as if the situation in Hambantota District is improving more rapidly than it is in Colombo District. Yet, looking at the situation at lower levels of scale, it turns out that both of these proxies for quality are in need of qualification to such an extent that the aggregate comparison fades in importance. For one, there is a need to distinguish between different "good schools". National Schools in Sooriyawewa and Hambantota towns are *not* high performers when it comes to examinations (although they typically show better results than most rural schools). Further, several of these marginal National Schools do *not* provide A-level Science in the way National Schools, per definition,

should do. In addition to this, low pupil-teacher ratios are questionable proxies for quality in sparsely populated areas with many small schools. This is because even if there are few students per teacher in many classes and schools, a major problem in the schools visited here is to get enough teachers to be able to *cover all subjects*; few schools face the problem of having too many students per class. Further, many schools seem to have low pupil-teacher ratios because they are not seen to be good enough. In this way it actually seems as if the parents are using pupil-teacher ratios as proxies for quality, but not in the conventional way of identifying lower ratios as signs of good quality. This is, again, related to the kind of education they are aspiring to for their children, and to the need for teachers in all subjects. Big differences are seen between Hambantota and Colombo districts when looking at examination results, particularly at the O-level and in the subjects parents identify to be most important.

Looking at schools and areas in focus for this thesis, it can be seen that in rural schools, the main problem is getting access to schools with sufficient teachers to cover all subjects. The biggest discrepancy between poor families' aspirations and the realities they are facing is in English teaching, and in several rural areas there are many students with no possibilities for learning English in school. This picture is also compatible with the results at examinations presented in Chapter 7, where rural schools, with a few exceptions, perform worse on general examinations than semi-urban and urban schools, which in turn perform worse than some of the National Schools in the western parts of the district. This latter addition is important because the big difference with regard to pass rates at examinations, and with regard to possibilities for A-level Science, are not primarily between rural schools on the one hand and semi-urban and urban schools on the other. The big differences are, rather, between *all* 19 schools visited and the "good" National Schools, some of which are found in urban areas in the western parts of Hambantota District (such as in Tangalle). A comparative analysis of the eastern and western parts of the district, which was initially intended in this study, would have been more informative in this sense. The main reason for not including western parts of the district as well was that it proved both complicated and time-consuming to understand in-depth what was happening in just a few areas alone.

The teacher problem is the one that is identified to be of most concern by all actors in this study and there are several geographical dimensions behind the distribution of teachers. As suggested, the pupil-teacher ratio is not a good indicator in a situation with many small schools and where parents and students feel that it is important for schools to cover all subjects. In fact, one factor behind the problematic teacher situation is that the government has decided on a system of widely distributed small schools without providing the means for supplying these schools to fulfil what is actually required. It is important that even if the teacher situation had been in line with the present government circular, similar kinds of arguments would probably still have been heard in these schools and in the local communities surrounding them. This is because even the government circular fails to take into consideration the ability to

provide teachers in all subjects. Another major problem is to get enough teachers to schools in rural areas to even match the requirements stipulated by the circular. It is only in four schools, all of them rural, that they have the required number of teachers. I have not been able to follow these processes close enough, but it is evident that the system of teacher transferring is not working, something that is admitted by all interviewed actors at all levels of scale. This, in turn, is extra problematic in a situation where high requirements for students to enter Colleges of Education have contributed to a situation where students from marginal districts allegedly are underrepresented in these institutions. Many teachers have to remain in "difficult areas" long after the stipulated period of three years of difficult-area-service, while many teachers allegedly never show up for their appointments because they have some kind of political connections. Many teachers express a deep frustration about being forced to remain in marginal areas, especially when they can see that other teachers can get away or never end up there in the first place. These are not new problems in Hambantota and they are not problems confined to Hambantota but they are problems that need urgent solutions due to the fact that they damage both the possibilities to provide education and the legitimacy of the system. To use locally mobilised staff seems to be *one* way of handling problems relating to the availability, attendance and commitment of teachers. There is a recent policy of recruiting more students from difficult districts to Colleges of Education but the findings in this study suggest that this system must be based on smaller regions than the district to have an effect for students in Sooriyawewa Division.

The importance of Private Tuition is a key factor regarding the accessibility of educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas. All actors - school personnel, parents and students - seem convinced that there is a need for this kind of extra tutoring to pass examinations, mainly because the schools do not cover all subjects or the whole curriculum. Many parents also see Private Tuition as a prerequisite for passing the grade 5 examinations, which in turn is becoming increasingly crucial for sending children to a National School (Chapters 7 and 8). The experiences so far do not seem to suggest that Private Tuition is sufficient in this regard, as very few students pass this examination in rural schools. Regardless, there is a risk that the mere existence of Private Tuition works as a disincentive for the government to do anything substantial about rural schools, and that the continued role of these schools will be to provide custodial care while students who want to pass examinations and climb the educational ladder need to pay extra to do this. While almost all children go to school, it is not all that can attend Private Tuition; this is a main divider of educational opportunities.

Private Tuition institutes are mainly located in semi-urban and urban areas, which means that apart from the economic costs of attending them, there are restrictions of physical mobility (particularly when parents have to accompany younger children). However, more families than was expected manage to send at least one child to Private Tuition, and my explanation for this is that it has to do with the differentiation of the industry, to suit the differentiated effective demand. Hence, it is

not enough to talk about Private Tuition as such; there is also a need to clarify *what kind* of Private Tuition children attend. It could be of great importance if the tutoring is conducted by a student who has failed the A-level examination, if it is run by a qualified teacher in a formal institute with hundreds of students per class, or if it is conducted in expensive small groups. Another important factor is that some Private Tuition is conducted in the daytime, lowering attendance rates in government schools, while also increasing the possibilities for rural students to attend Private Tuition institutes in urban areas. Finally, a high demand for Private Tuition in all families supports my conclusion above that parents see a value in education, although they might not expect the accessible school to deliver in accordance with their aspirations.

As to the other dimension of accessibility, relating more directly to family resources, economic capital is of great and increasing importance for educational opportunities, primarily because of Private Tuition. Yet, there are also many other costs involved with sending children to school. Costs in schools in urban areas seem to be higher, although this is not because of fees (apart from when there is a need to bribe), but is rather largely due to more restrictions on what to wear, more excursions, etc. These costs, however, do not lead to higher dropout levels, but they do mean that priorities have to be made within families (such as deciding whom to send to Private Tuition), and they do mean that many parents borrow money to cover the costs. Furthermore, the high costs of government schools mean that an increasing number of children in the areas are sent to Pirivenas. The recent growth of Pirivena education does not seem related to a wish among parents for an "alternative" kind of education, but it rather seems related to the lower costs, to the better possibilities for continuing up to A-level, and, for some parents, to Pirivena education being seen as better. However, it would be interesting to see more research on this matter. Costs also come into the picture when children are to be enrolled in better schools somewhere else, in terms of both increased transport costs and the money that is often paid "under the table".

In combination with all the other costs for education - including the quite substantial parental contributions discussed in Chapter 8 - the perceived need for Private Tuition means that there are necessary prioritisations to be made in many families. In a way, providing one child with better educational opportunities might be a rational strategy for the family, and in the long run, it might raise the material status of the family as a whole. But it is clear from essays that siblings who are not prioritised feel excluded from central life chances enjoyed by others. Indeed, this resembles the dilemma faced at the national level, where an elitist system might be more rational in terms of increasing global competitiveness, while it might simultaneously lead to social exclusion for people who are left out from substantive capabilities. One important difference, however, is that redistributive obligations – for those who are allowed to succeed – are much stronger at the family level than they are at the national level.

An important finding when it comes to family resources regards the increasing importance of social capital. For the poor and the very poor, social capital is important

as a means to cover day-to-day expenditures for education, which I see as one of the main reasons behind why dropouts are not a bigger problem in these areas. Social capital can often substitute other forms of capital that are scarce, such as when parents can get help from relatives and friends to cover costs, or when children can get help with home-work. Social capital is also important for transforming opportunities through the opportunity of the urban poor and very poor to go to the school closest to their homes, through connections making it possible to enter "good schools", and through the chance to stay with relatives living closer to urban schools. More importantly, however, social capital also serves to exclude groups who lack influential connections from opportunities to enter "good schools". It is important that future discussions about the importance of social capital for educational opportunities include this conflict-dimension of the concept as well; not only how it acts as a relief for poor groups.

Cultural capital dimensions were not properly covered by the methods used in this study, mainly because I could not follow in depth what went on in the schools. As already discussed, there is no lack of parental support as parents are interested in education, although some have problems helping their children with homework. The importance of language competency is evident, particularly for the possibilities of entering classes where English is used as a medium of instruction and for the possibilities of practising English when not in school. Most of the children in all four of the areas live in environments where English is rarely spoken. Hence, I strongly believe that the English teacher quoted in Chapter 8 is largely correct in suggesting that the new policy of having English as an optional medium of instruction will serve to divide the country on a spatial basis.

As to physical mobility, in my interpretation this is primarily a factor to take into account in understanding attendance rates and, most importantly, for getting access to "good schools" in other areas. The distances to the closest school might not be big problems in themselves but the friction of distance increases with the lack of quality in most of these schools. Physical mobility is also important for access to Private Tuition, which is mostly confined to semi-urban and urban areas, with the exception of cases where older children can accompany their younger siblings so that parents do not have to spend valuable time doing this. Social capital might be very important to substitute physical mobility and in 2004 it was still quite common to hear that one or more of the children lived with relatives in urban areas to be able to enter urban schools or to be able to go to Private Tuition regularly.

9.3 Transformation of opportunities and linkages to inclusion and exclusion

In this section, I will first discuss how educational opportunities are affected for poor families in marginal areas, and this discussion will depart from one of the analytical models presented in Chapter 2. Four possible scenarios were outlined in the model: polarisation, stratification, equalisation, and increased prospects for educational mobility. Polarisation was seen as a process where quality differences between

segments of schools in the education network increase in a way which makes inferior segments absolutely worse off and superior segments absolutely better off. The opposite of polarisation was presented as equalisation, signifying here that the quality difference between segments decreases. Increased prospects for educational mobility, in turn, says nothing about the quality of the different segments, but do entail increased possibilities for some families that have access to inferior segments of schools to get access to superior segments. Stratification is about access to superior segments being increasingly restrictive.

As a start, it is important to remember that the education system that has made Sri Lanka famous as a "success story" was by no means equal (Chapter 4). At around independence there was an unevenly distributed network of good and bad segments of schools, where students were mainly divided in accordance with where they lived (urban/rural) and their resources in the shape of economic and cultural (mainly English language) capital. After independence, the government increased the opportunities of all children to go to school as well as the prospects for educational mobility for successful rural students enrolled in inferior segments of schools. The introduction of local languages reduced the importance of cultural capital (namely English) for access to superior segments while free-education reforms together with a number of policies such as providing school-meals, uniforms and textbooks for free, all served to decrease the importance of economic capital. A rapid expansion of the school network, together with subsidised transport, decreased the importance of physical mobility for access to any school, while the introduction of Central/National Schools decreased the importance of physical mobility for access to good segments of schools. District quotas decreased the importance of physical mobility for entrance to the university and the small size of the country is likely to have been favourable for enrolling such great numbers of both boys and girls in the education system. However, as argued in Chapter 4, the "success story" was mainly a success in terms of education for poverty alleviation and social mobility, not really in terms of equalising educational opportunities. It is against this historical background that it is interesting to discuss what is happening in the system today by analysing the findings from marginal parts of Hambantota District.

Three major processes were identified in the education network in Chapter 7, and in my view, each of these strengthen the need for particular sets of unequally distributed family resources in the quest to move from inferior to superior segments of schools. The first have to do with Private Tuition and the de-facto privatisation of parts of the education system, which leads to a more clear-cut division between those who have abundant economic capital and those who have a lack of it. Physical mobility is another important resource for access to Private Tuition institutes, especially the good ones, because many parents are reluctant or unable to send their children on long journeys on their own (particularly girls). Second, there is a reintroduction of English as an optional medium of instruction, strengthening the importance for particular forms of cultural capital, mainly English competency. Also of importance here are family

resources that make it possible to enter schools where English-medium classes can be started. The full implications of this reform are yet to be experienced but another risk is that if more resources to strengthen the teaching of English are not forthcoming, this policy might even decrease possibilities for students who are not enrolled in English-medium classes to learn English.

Third, the urbanisation of education, and the related process of school rationalisation, increases the value of particular forms of social capital for entrance to schools that are perceived to be good, as principals in these schools increasingly are selecting and rejecting students. It is not possible to conclude that political interference in school admission procedures is increasing, but it is clear that its importance is larger when the positions to compete for in popular schools grow scarcer. One intention with the school rationalisation is that students should go to the school closest to their homes (unless it is too small to be economically viable), further decreasing the importance of physical mobility. In a few schools it was highlighted that this was important for decreasing dropout rates, especially for girl students after O-level. Yet, the other side of rationalisation is that there are decreasing opportunities for *using* physical mobility as a resource for families to access better schools, if the closest one is not perceived good enough. Lack of economic capital is another factor keeping many children away from National Schools, although there is no information suggesting bribing to be an issue in any of the 19 schools in focus in this study.

My main argument here is that what is happening primarily can be described as a *stratification* of the system and, in several ways, as a return to more of a dual system of education built around place of residence as well as on access to social, economic and cultural capital. Physical mobility is becoming less important unless families have either the relevant social capital or sufficient money to bribe themselves into urban or semi-urban schools. By this is meant that physical mobility is less important as a resource in itself, while it is of course still important in combination with other resources.

It is important to note that for many families in marginal areas this stratification might not mean much in terms of changes in educational opportunities, because most of these groups were already unable to gain access to better segments of schools and have therefore always been excluded from good educational opportunities. There is no easy way of making this division but broadly speaking, among the different categories included in this study I would say that in terms of educational opportunities they have had earlier, rural poor and very poor groups are largely unaffected by the stratification for this reason. Very poor and poor families in semi-urban and urban areas still have good opportunities for entering the schools in their own towns and urban areas. If the process of rationalisation were to become successful in increasing the quality of "bad" National Schools, the educational opportunities of poor and very poor urban and semi-urban families would be improved. Rich rural families might still have the relevant resources of social and economic capital for entrance to better National Schools.

Indeed, rich families in all geographical settings will most probably manage well, and with increasing privatisation there will be greater possibilities to provide their children with a good education provided they can cover the costs. However, middle-level rural groups who have previously been able to use their economic capital and physical mobility to enter semi-urban and urban schools, are facing greater restrictions. Moreover, middle-level semi-urban and urban families, who as a group have been able to access also good schools in larger urban areas, are facing greater restrictions. Some of these middle-level families can overcome these challenges, but this largely depends on their endowments of the required forms of social capital.

Consequently, my conclusion is that through the identified process of stratification, it is primarily middle-level families in different geographical settings who increasingly are cut off from educational opportunities this particular group previously had access to. This conclusion draws on an understanding of what resources these families generally have, seen in relation to what is found to be needed for access to superior segments of schools. This is not to say that the same families are experiencing these changes over time, but the discussion is rather based on what kind of groups that *generally* are endowed with the new set of required family resources and what resources that were sufficient earlier.

There is little evidence in this study to support the idea that a polarisation of educational opportunities is accompanying this process of stratification. The quality of schools is generally not deteriorating, and in my view, there is not an absolute worsening of educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas (apart from some middle-level families). This conclusion is built mainly on the statistical description in Chapter 7, that is, the distribution of schools, facilities and teachers, as well as on the information provided by school personnel and other key informants. This is, however, from the partial perspective of educational opportunities that has been used in this study and on the basis of material which stems almost exclusively from inferior segments of schools. My interpretation is that the rural schools *generally* are getting better in a physical sense (in terms of facilities), while the teacher situation is about as difficult as ever in most schools even if pupil-teacher ratios are decreasing in an aggregate sense. The principals and several of the key informants (Chapter 7) share this interpretation. Statistics regarding the distribution of teachers suggest that the pupil-teacher ratio is increasing in more than half of the schools, but this is not sufficient for convincing me that it is part of a generally deteriorating trend. As seen, in most rural schools increasing ratios are not even a problem since classes are rather small.

However, it should be acknowledged that many parents *claim* that the quality of education is going down in their areas, particularly regarding the teacher situation. Among the areas where I have conducted interviews, parents in Meegahajandura and Zahira NS often claim that the quality of schools is going down, while there is no clear pattern in interviews with parents in Sooriyawewa NS and St Mary's NS. In Hambantota KV and Andarawewa, parents rather feel that the schools are improving

even though this is from a very low level in the latter of the two. Still, in 2003 *no* student passed the O-level examination in Andarawewa, and the fact that parents say the school is improving is not to say they want their children to be enrolled there. Furthermore, the principal in Andarawewa still suggests that in the main what the school can offer the children and the parents is custodial care (Chapter 7). It may be that the quality of education actually *is* decreasing in *some* schools, such as in Meegahajandura. Of particular concern are the educational opportunities of Tamil-speaking families in Hambantota town, who lack opportunities to do Tamil-medium A-level Science in the district. As this opportunity has previously been open to urban Muslims and Tamils in Hambantota town, the perceptions among these parents that educational opportunities are worsening are understandable. However, in a general sense, parental perceptions of decreasing educational opportunities are in my view more related to increasing aspirations with education, and the perceived increasing educational requirements for leading valuable lives (see below).

A few alternative interpretations of the situation are possible, and some of these can only be proven false with the course of time. The ideal behind school rationalisation *could* be interpreted as a move towards an equalisation of the system, or at least of providing more children with prospects for educational mobility, although the full results of the policy are yet to materialise. There are three main reasons why I believe these are unlikely to be valid interpretations. To start with, realising this would require much more resources be spent on education, which so far does not seem to happen (Chapter 4). Unless significantly more resources are forthcoming, I doubt the intention of the government is to increase the quality of all schools in an equalising manner. Second, this would require many small schools to be closed, so that resources can be pooled, which is also not seen to be happening anymore. Third, although this reason is even more speculative, I do not see it as an immediate concern of the government for educational opportunities to be equalised. To further explore this final point I will return to the "new" dilemma of educational planning in section 9.4 but first, there is a need to look a bit closer at the linkages to social inclusion and exclusion.

The way it has been defined in this study (Chapter 2), social exclusion is about some people being deprived of substantive capabilities for leading lives they value, and have reason to value in the societies where they live. Furthermore, there are important dynamics-dimensions to this, concerning future prospects. A third and final aspect to take into account regards whether identified processes of exclusion are active or passive. Many of these aspects have already been covered and this section is mainly an attempt to focus the discussion on this particular issue, as well as to add a few additional aspects that have not been covered above. The discussion of whether identified processes are active or passive lacks direct empirical connections, and is therefore primarily based on my own analysis of the situation.

Perceptions of decreasing educational opportunities, despite the quality of schools not being found to be decreasing, are fully compatible with the sense of social

exclusion resulting from increasing aspirations with education, as well as with the perceived need for both more and different kinds of skills for fulfilling these aspirations. This conclusion is based on the information provided above that parents do not want their children to lead the kind of lives they themselves are leading, and hence identify the kind of educational resources that are seen as necessary for the children to "get out of this position". Many parents feel that the schools that are accessible provide them with little more than custodial care and sufficient qualifications for getting the kind of jobs that are available in these marginal areas. However, parents generally send their children to school so that they should *not* have to end up in these kinds of occupations. Consequently, the educational resources identified for "getting out of this position" are many, and many parents feel that they are excluded from substantive capabilities by not being able to obtain these in order to ensure that their children will not end up in similar situations in the future. In addition, there is much written about how many Sri Lankan youths get frustrated as they remain unemployed despite having gone through quite a few years of education which have increased their expectations for "good jobs". The focus of this study has been on educational rather than employment opportunities, but the essays add to the existing information that many rural, semi-urban and urban youths are already frustrated when still in the education system. There is already a substantial difference in grade 10 between what students aspire to and what they perceive possible to get, resulting in anger towards the system for being treated like second-class citizens ("wild flowers").

Whether processes of social exclusion of many poor families in marginal areas, which are seen to be strengthened by the stratification of the education system, are active or passive is a tricky question to answer. One way of answering it would be to look at the different mechanisms that provide the foundation for the process of stratification. With regard to rationalisation and the reintroduction of English-medium education, I would say that both of these reforms are examples of active exclusion in rather sophisticated ways, in so far as they are linked to the attempts to increase global competitiveness (section 9.4). Making English-medium education optional leaves it open for any school to introduce such teaching, and for any student to attend, provided they have the resources. However, it should be obvious to the government that all schools do not have these resources and that many families lack the resources to access these classes. School rationalisation, in turn, is part of an attempt to increase the number of students who go to good quality schools, while the manner in which this is done is by excluding many poor families in marginal areas from access to these schools. Again, the reform is presented as an attempt to increase the quality of schools but this is done by restricting intakes to the popular schools and therefore by actively excluding many people from accessing them. Finally, the growth of Private Tuition is rather interpreted as a passive process, although there have been few attempts by the government to stop it from happening. The growth of Private Tuition is mainly seen as the combined result of increased competition among families for access to perceived

good education, and, consequently, for university places and/or good jobs, and the limited resources provided to education by subsequent governments in times of severe financial restrictions. The following section provides one interpretation of the reason behind these processes, by returning to the "new" dilemma of educational planning.

9.4. The "new" dilemma of educational planning in Sri Lanka

To fulfil the goals of accumulation and legitimacy there are a number of concerns that policy-makers need to take into account when formulating education policies, as summarised in the dilemma of educational planning and illustrated in Figure 2.1. These concerns are global competitiveness, local relevance, poverty alleviation, as well as social and spatial equality, and all of these have to be handled within the financial restrictions. Particularly in dual societies, it is difficult to prioritise all these concerns simultaneously, and it was argued in Chapter 2 that it is increasingly difficult to reconcile the renewed efforts to achieve global competitiveness and poverty alleviation with the concern for equality in times of global transformations. This is mainly because education for poverty alleviation and education for global competitiveness increasingly are seen as separate, while concerns for local relevance and the financial restrictions in many contexts make it difficult to distribute "global skills" equally in space.

After independence, subsequent governments in Sri Lanka aimed to reform the dual system left behind by the British (Chapter 4). Many schools were built and reforms were introduced to enrol more children in school as well as to safeguard opportunities for educational mobility for successful students in inferior segments of schools. This is the background to the Sri Lankan "success story" discussed several times already. However, a number of problems remained while several new ones cropped up with the course of time. A population literate in local languages and equipped with basic education of low quality might have been sufficient for the kind of industrialisation achieved after the opening up of the economy in 1977. Nevertheless, in order to avoid a "Low-skill, Bad Job" trap and link up more favourably to the global economy, there are re-intensified concerns about the need for "new" skills. Among the most important are the kind of "global skills" identified earlier, English and computer skills, as well as the need for more people with tertiary and high quality education. To this comes the old problem of local relevance, mainly in terms of relevance to the labour market, which is further complicated by the apparent inability of the open economy to equalise economic development in space. For a long time it has been claimed that the education system in Sri Lanka is not sufficiently related to the needs of the economy, mainly because of its very academic orientation, which results in wasted resources and high levels of graduate unemployment. Today, the private sector is supposed to be the engine of growth and, it is claimed, demands English-speaking employees.

My interpretation of the policy to reintroduce English as an optional language of instruction is that the government could wait no longer; the old policy simply did not generate sufficient numbers of English-skilled people. This is also what one of the main

architects behind these reforms, Ms Tara de Mel, suggests (Chapter 4). Equipping more people with English skills is an attempt to meet the new requirements of an open economy and part of the quest to *partly* imitate what has happened in India, as suggested by the former Minister of Education, Mr Kodithuwakku. If the strengthening of English were also an attempt to bridge ethnic groups through a common language, there would need to be efforts to see too that not only elite groups are bridged while other groups within all ethnic communities are excluded. My interpretation of the process of school rationalisation is that there is a need for more high-quality schools, at the same time as the urbanisation of education risks further undermining the quality of many National Schools. Hence, this policy shift stems from a combination of the perceived need for global competitiveness and the increased competition for educational resources (leading to an urbanisation of education) within severe financial restrictions. The growth of Private Tuition is, as already suggested, mainly a result of increased competition for educational resources in a situation where insufficient resources have been allocated to increase the quality of schools while there are few positions to compete for at university and in "good" segments of the labour market.

Yet, *all* schools in Sri Lanka will not be elite institutions and *all* schools will not introduce English-medium education. Unfortunately, my discussions with actors at the national level did not take me deep enough to understand whether this is also due to the lack of local relevance of having many university educated people skilled in English and computer skills in marginal areas. A weakness of this study as a whole is that I have not managed to capture and illuminate the struggle within the state and between the state and other actors over how educational opportunities are to be distributed in space. My interpretation is, however, still that the concern for local relevance *is* related to it because the kind of jobs that demand the "global skills" are very scarce in marginal areas; indeed, there may not be so many in the country as a whole. Nevertheless, as long as there are severe financial restrictions for expenditures on education, this is not likely to be a problem. The problem is not only that poor families in marginal areas have high aspirations with education, and few opportunities for fulfilling them. Parents base these high aspirations on what they perceive as requirements for their children to lead better lives than they are doing themselves; for getting out of what they see as inter-generational poverty traps. The perception of parents and students in marginal areas of what is a locally relevant education does not differ from what is accessible mainly in larger urban areas, and most probably not from what is aspired to by families in those areas (although this has not been studied here).

In summary, Sri Lanka is leaving an education system designed for poverty alleviation with possibilities for educational mobility from inferior segments of schools for more of a dual system designed for both poverty alleviation and global competitiveness, but with fewer possibilities for educational mobility for many groups in marginal areas. This is happening at a time when people feel that the need for education is increasing, and when many parents and students in marginal areas are

identifying "global skills" as necessary for being favourably included in society. Hence, there might be a linkage between the government's attempt to counter aggregate exclusion from global flows of investments and the exclusion of poor families in marginal areas from capabilities deemed to be necessary for leading lives they value. And this linkage would be fully compatible with education for poverty alleviation, as it has been defined here, because there are few signs of a decrease in enrolments in basic education or even of decreasing quality in schools in marginal areas.

Of what value are these findings from marginal parts of Sri Lanka for understanding the situation in other parts of the South? This is not an easy question and it has to be addressed with a great degree of humbleness and through a critical reflection about the particularities of the case areas.

As noted in Chapter 1, Sri Lanka was chosen for this thesis as something of a "special case" in the sense that the country has been successful in getting children enrolled in basic education and the ideal of an egalitarian education system has always been strong. On the one hand, this circumstance is likely to have major implications for what kind of education people aspire to because most of the parents interviewed have gone through quite a few years of education themselves. It was noted in Chapter 2 that there is an in-built dynamic whereby education generates its own demand, which, in turn, would mean that competition for educational resources is likely to be stiffer in Sri Lanka than in many other areas in the South. Further, this would imply that the importance of relative and relational dimensions of educational opportunities, which has been so thoroughly stressed throughout this thesis, is more so in Sri Lanka than in countries where many children do not attend school at all. To this should be added that the percentage enrolled in universities is exceptionally low in Sri Lanka, even in a comparison with many other poor countries. On the other hand, choosing Sri Lanka as a case might well provide important insights regarding what is happening in other areas, in a time when there is a renewed focus on education for poverty alleviation relating to campaigns for EFA and MDGs. Hence, the points made above about the increasing importance of relative and relational dimensions might be valid for many countries with rapid enrolment expansions. In addition to this, high educational aspirations are also related to the diversification of rural livelihoods and increased socio-spatial permeability, which hardly are processes confined to Sri Lanka. It should be remembered that I have conducted interviews and collected essays in marginal parts of the marginal Hambantota District, and still, these people generally seem to understand the importance of education even in relation to developments taking place globally.

Another thing making the Sri Lankan case special is the fact that there has been a civil war in the country for more than 20 years, something that naturally has great implications for the situation regarding educational opportunities. On the one hand, an end to the war would, presumably, generate a substantial peace dividend, and thus additional resources that could be used for educational purposes. There should be no doubt that this would substantially improve the situation. On the other hand, I do not

see stratification primarily to be linked to a lack of resources alone, but rather to the way governments perceive the opportunity structure in the global economy, to dual economic structures, and to increased competition among families for educational resources. Hence, even if the education sector would receive more resources, the process of stratification would probably continue anyway, and might therefore be found in other countries in which governments are trying to reconcile goals of global competitiveness and poverty alleviation with those of local relevance.

9.5. Reflections on the research process and some final remarks

Writing a Ph.D. thesis is a very long process and at the end there are always things that one feels could have been done better or, at the least, conducted differently. One weakness with this thesis I feel to be particularly grave at this point of time regards, as already suggested, the fact that it has not been able to fully capture the political struggles *behind* the current distribution of educational opportunities. The model of a "new" dilemma of educational planning does provide important insights, but for a deeper understanding there would have been a need for both a thorough conceptualisation of the state and more time interviewing actors at national and global levels. Yet, this is something that will have to be left for future research and my main contribution is to have illuminated empirically how educational opportunities are affected in times of global transformations, in a particular geographical setting, rather than having thoroughly "explained" why this happens the way it does.

Furthermore, there is no section termed "policy implications" in this thesis, but I still want to make a few minor remarks regarding the future of education in Sri Lanka. A common critique in the country is that there is "...insufficient attention to the role of education in promoting social harmony in a multi-cultural society" (GOSL 2002: 74). Surely, there is a lot to be done to ensure that children get an education that is conducive to increasing harmony between ethnic groups. This would in much be related to what kind of history students are taught in school, how they learn to relate to other ethnic groups, and, finally, whether children of different groups attend the same schools and meet each other on a daily basis. Yet, to increase social harmony, it is also necessary to see what kind of educational opportunities different families can access in relation to their aspirations with education, as well as in relation to what they see that other children can get and what they feel they are entitled to. It is difficult to achieve harmony between different groups through education by looking at the educational circumstances of some groups in isolation from the circumstances of other groups in society, and this also applies to different groups within the same ethnic community. This is both because the poor are not isolated from information about what other children get in other places and because the opportunities education *can* offer to some groups are interdependent on the educational opportunities that other groups get.

In relation to this, a great deal of what is done by the government might be rational in terms of national economic interests, but it simultaneously serves to exclude

groups in marginal areas by restricting their possibilities to access superior segments of schools. This is part of the "new" dilemma of educational planning and it is likely to remain a dilemma, at least as long as the country continues with its functionalistic open economy policy and as long as resources and economic activities are not more equally distributed in space. Presumably, this is not even primarily an educational issue. However, there are reforms that cannot be seen to be necessary for increasing national competitiveness, such as reintroducing English as an optional medium of instruction *instead* of spending these resources on strengthening it as a subject for all.

Moreover, the idea of having a small school in just about every village in the country has strong political clout making it difficult to go through with the closing down of small schools with few students and very low pupil-teacher ratios. The widely spread network of schools is likely to have been one of the key contributors to education for poverty alleviation, and to get such a great majority of children enrolled in school. Yet, it does not seem to be compatible with a more equal system. If a major problem in most schools is that they do not have enough teachers to cover all subjects, this problem will be difficult to solve unless the school structure is rationalised by closing down schools in order to pool resources. This would then have to be combined with policies to increase the physical mobility of rural families, particularly those with younger children and daughters. Alternatively, there must be substantially more resources devoted to education in the budget and a much less strict adherence to pupil-teacher ratios when distributing resources between schools, so that even rural schools can provide an education in subjects that parents identify as most important.

Finally, it will not be possible for every person in the country to get a job in the public sector, or to enter universities. A change in attitudes to vocational alternatives is thus necessary, as has been proposed so many times already. Yet, the negative attitudes to private sector work, self-employment, farming, and fishing are built on the idea that these jobs will never take the children out of their present social positions. Consequently, it will be difficult to change attitudes without changing the structure of the labour market. As long as large parts of the private sector mainly offer "poverty-wages" and insecure working conditions, and as long as opportunities for farming, fishing and self-employment are highly restricted, people are likely to continue to aspire to university education and/or public sector jobs and thus to be frustrated by the fact that they are excluded from these opportunities. This challenge is, however, not confined to the private sector in Sri Lanka, or even to the Sri Lankan government. Rather, it also relates to the whole question of how processes of globalisation must be transformed to better serve the interests of poor people in marginal areas of the South.

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PRIMARY SOURCES

Interviews in Families

Meegahajandura Village, Meegahajandura GN-division

SMH01 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer, wife is keeping goats, two children (both in school), 18/10 - 2002, 10.15-12.15

SMH02 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer and her husband who is also a Farmer, four children and a grandchild (the grandchild, whose mother is in the Middle East, is in school), 23/10 - 2002, 11.30-13.30

SMH03 - Rich Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife and her husband who is a Farmer retired from a government department, two children (one in school), 24/10 - 2002, 9.30-10.45

SMH04 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Farmer, five children (all in school), 1/11 - 2002, 9.30-11.00

SMH05 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband has passed away, nine children (none is going to school), 4/11 - 2002, 10.20-11.50

SMH06 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, home from the Middle East, husband is Farmer and mason, two children (one in school), 4/11 - 2002, 12.15-13.15

SMH07 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer, back from the Middle East, wife is Housewife, they have no children of their own but the man's sister, who is living with them, has two children, 4/12 - 2002, 11.00-12.30

SMH08 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband Driver in Colombo, five children (all in school), 5/12 - 2002, 10.30-12.00

SMH09 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, two children (one in school), 2003, 10.30-11.45

SMH10 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Farmer, eight children (none in school) but living with two grandchildren of one of their daughters, who is in Middle East, 3/3 - 2003, 11.15-12.00

Usgalle Village, Andarawewa GN-Division

SAH01 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is Farmer and Casual worker, five children (all in school), 11/12 - 2002, 11.30-13.00

SAH02 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is Farmer, seven children (three in school), 13/1 - 2003, 9.30-11.15

SAH03 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, three children (all in school), 13/1 - 2003, 13.30-14.30

SAH04 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer and her husband who is also Farmer, four children (two in school)

SAH05 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also a Farmer, five children (three in school), 15/1 - 2003, 11.15-12.15

SAH06 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer and his wife, who is also a farmer, three children (two in school), 20/1 - 2003, 16.30-18.15

SAH07 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, four children (all in school), 22/1 - 2003, 16.30-17.30

SAH08 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, three children (all in school), 23/1 - 2003, 9.00-10.00

SAH09 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, five children (all in school), 8/2 - 2003, 15.00-16.00

SAH10 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer and his wife, who is also Farmer, two children (both in school), 24/2 - 2003, 17.30-19.00

Sooriyawewa Town

SSH01 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer, wife is also Farmer, three children (all in school), 8/11 - 2002, 9.30-11.00

SSH02 - Rich Sinhala-Buddhist Businessman, earlier government servant, his wife is Housewife, two children (one in school), 26/11 - 2002, 11.00-11.45
SSH03 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer, wife is also a Farmer, seven children (four in school), 27/11 - 2002, 10.00-11.30
SSH04 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Housewife, husband is Farmer, two children (both in school), 8/1 - 2003, 9.45-11.10
SSH05 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Farmer, two children (one in school), 9/1 - 2003, 11.15-12.30
SSH06 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Farmer, five children (four in school), 27/1 - 2003, 15.00-16.30
SSH07 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Female Businesswoman, husband is businessman, five children (two in school), 9/2 - 2003, 14.30-15.15
SSH08 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Driver, two children (one in school), 9/2 - 2003, 15.30-16.30
SSH09 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife, husband is Farmer, three children (one in school), 12/2 - 2003, 9.00-10.20
SSH10 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer, husband is also Farmer, three children (one in school), 12/2 - 2003, 10.40-11.20

Hambantota Town

HH01 - Poor Muslim Man, Fisherman, wife is Housemaid in Middle East, three children (two in school), 30/11 - 2002, 9.45-10.45
HH02 - Poor Muslim Housewife, husband is Fisherman, 5 children (four in school), 30/11 - 2002, 11.00-12.00
HH03 - Poor Muslim Fisherman and his wife, who is Housewife, five children (three in school), 1/12 - 2002, 9.20-10.50
HH04 - Very Poor Muslim Woman, Housewife, husband Unemployed, four children (none in school), 1/12 - 2002, 11.00-11.30
HH05 - Very Poor Tamil-Hindu Housemaid, and her son-in law, who is fisherman. The Husband is a casual worker. There are three children (none in school), 1/12 - 2002, 12.00-12.45
HH06 - Poor Muslim Housewife, husband is Fisherman, three children (one in school), 2/12 - 2002, 9.15-10.15
HH07 - Very Poor Tamil-Hindu man, Retired, wife is working as "Cleaner", four grandchildren (none in school), 3/12 - 2002, 11.15-12.00
HH08 - Middle-level Sinhala-Buddhist Businessman and his wife, who is Housewife, three children (all in school), 7/1 - 2003, 15.30-17.00
HH09 - Middle-level Muslim Man, who has worked as Secretary in Middle East and is waiting to go back, and his wife, who is Housewife. There are two children (both in school), 8/1 - 2003, 15.45-16.45
HH10 - Middle-level Muslim Businessman, wife is Housewife, four children (one in school), 9/1 - 2003, 15.45-16.45
HH11 - Middle-level Muslim shop-worker and his wife who is Housewife, two children (one in school), 10/1 - 2003, 9.15-10.30
HH12 - Poor Tamil-Christian man, on "early-retirement", and his wife, who is Housewife, home from the Middle East. There are two children (both in school), 11/1 - 2003, 12.00-13.00
HH13 - Very Poor Tamil-Hindu Male Farmer and his wife, who is Housewife. There are four children (three in school), 11/1 - 2003, 13.30-14.30
HH14 - Very Poor Tamil-Christian Female Casual Worker. Her husband is also Casual Worker, both in the Urban Council, four children (none going to school), 26/1-2003, 10.15-11.00
HH15 - Very Poor Tamil-Hindu Male Casual Worker, mother is in Middle-East, three children (none in school), 25/1 - 2003, 16.15-17.00

Families in other areas

SOH1 - Very Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Male Farmer in Habaraththawela, and his wife who is also a Farmer, two children (one in school), 2002, 10.00-11.30

SOH02 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Housewife in Ihala Kumbukwewa, husband is Farmer, four children (two in school), 21/10 - 2002, 10.00-11.30
SOH03 - Very Poor Sinhala Buddhist Housewife in Meegahajandura GN, husband is Casual Worker, five children (no one is going to school), 13/11 - 2002, 9.45-11.15
SOH04 - Poor Sinhala-Buddhist Female Farmer and her Husband, also a Farmer, in Welliwewa, three children (two in school), 6/12 - 2002, 9.30-11.00

Interviews School Personnel (Teachers and Principals)

SMe1 - Principal (M) Meegahajandura, 17/10-2002, 10.30-11.30
SMe1b - Principal (M) Meegahajandura, 14/11 . 2002, 10.00-10.45
SMe2 - Science Teacher (F), Meegahajandura, 6/11-2002, 10.00-10.45
SMe3 - English Teacher (F) Meegahajandura, 6/11 - 2002, 12.00-13.00
SMe4 - Sinhala Teacher (M) Meegahajandura, 7/11-2002, 11.30-12.00
SMe5 - Deputy Principal (M), Meegahajandura, 26/5-2004, 9.00-9.40
SW1 - Deputy Principal and Primary Teacher (M), Welliwewa, 16/10-2002, 10.45-11.30
SW2 - Principal and Teacher (M), Welliwewa, 10/5-2004, 10.30-11.15
SIK1 - Primary Teacher (F), Ihala Kumbukwewa, 17/10-2002, 11.45-12.15
SIK2 - Primary Teacher and Principal (F), Ihala Kumbukwewa, 15/5-2004, 11.45-12.30
SSN1 - Principal (M), Sooriyawewa NS, 28/1-2003, 9.15-9.45
SSN2 - Sinhala Teachers (M*2), Sooriyawewa NS, 28/1-2003, 10.15-11.00
SSN3 - English Teacher (F), Sooriyawewa NS, 26/11-2002, 14.00-15.00
SSN4 - Sinhala Teacher (M), Sooriyawewa NS, 29/5-2004, 10.45-11.30
SSN5 - Deputy Principal (M), Sooriyawewa NS, 10/6-2004, 1.15-1.45
SMA1 - Deputy Principal (and Sinhala/Buddhist teacher) and Primary Teacher (M*2), Mahagalwewa, 7/2-2003, 9.00-9.45
SMA2 - Principal (M), Mahagalwewa, 18/5-2004, 9.00-10.10
SHat1 - English Teacher (M), Hathporuwa, 19/2-2003
SHat2 - Principal (M), Hathporuwa, 25/5-2004, 9.00-9.45
SVM1 - Acting Principal (M), Viharagala, 20/2-2003, 10.15-10.45
SVM2 - Principal (F), Viharagala, 24/5-2004, 10.30-11.15
SVK1 - Principal (M), Viharagala, 7/6-2004, 9.15-10.00
SWi1 - Teacher (F), Wirijagama, 20/2-2003
SWi3 - Principal (M), Wirijagama, 27/5-2004, 10.00-10.45
SZ1 - Principal (M), Zahira NS, 4/3-2003, 13.15-13.45
SZ2 - Principal (M), Zahira NS, 8/6-2004, 16.45-17.45
SWe1 - Principal (M), Wewegama, 21/2-2003, 9.45-10.00
SWe2 - English Teacher (M), Wewegama, 21/2-2003, 11.15-11.30
SWe3 - Principal (M), Wewegama, 30/5-2004, 17.00-17.45
SWed1 - Principal (F) and Primary Teacher (M), Wedigamwewa, 27/5-2004, 12.15-13.00
SHam1 - Principal (F), Hambantota KV, 28/2-2003, 10.10-10.45
SHam2 - Deputy Principal (M), Hambantota KV, 4/3-2003, 14.15-14.30
SHam3 - English-Medium Teacher (F), Hambantota KV, 8/6-2004, 9.30-9.50
SA1 - Social Studies Teacher (M), Andarawewa, 25/2-2003, 9.30-10.15
SA2 - Principal (M), Andarawewa, 6/3-2003, 9.15-10.30
SA3 - Principal (M), Andarawewa, 7/6-2004, 11.20-12.15
SA4 - English Teacher (F), Andarawewa, 13/1-2003 12.15-12.45
SN1 - Principal (M), Namadagaswewa, 11/2-2003, 9.00-10.30
SN2 - Principal (M), Namadagaswewa, 19/5-2004, 8.30-10.00
SN3 - Principal (M), Namadagaswewa, 30/5-2004
SN4 - Sinhala Teacher (F), Namadagaswewa, 31/5-2004, 10.50-11.20
SN5 - English Teacher (M), Namadagaswewa, 10/6-2004, 15.00-15.15
SR1 - Principal (M), Ranmuduwewa, 28/5-2004, 9.45-11.00
SBe1 - Principal (M), Bedigamtota, 25/2-2003
SBe2 - Principal (M), Bedigamtota, 24/5-2004, 12.45-13.30
SStM1 - Combined Maths Teacher (F), St Mary's NS, 6/2-2003, 11.05-11.30

SStM2 - Principal (M), St Mary's NS, 18/2-2003, 14.15-14.45
SStM3 - Principal (M), St Mary's NS, 9/6-2004, 11.10-11.50
SStM4 - English Teacher (M), St NS, 3/2-2003
SHab1 - Deputy Principal and Science Teacher (M), Habarathawela, 21/2-2003, 12.00-12.20
SHab2 - Acting Principal (M), Habarathawela, 25/5-2004, 11.45-12.20

Other Key Informants:

KI01 - Former Principal and Director of Education in Hambantota (Male) 4/11 - 2002
KI02 - Visit to English Support Unit, Hambantota Education Zonal Office 5/11 - 2002
KI03 - Grama Nilhadari (GN) (M) in Meegahajandura, 11/11 - 2002, 12.30-13.30
KI04 - GN in Meegahajandura (M), 3/3 - 2003
KI05 - Buddhist Monk (M), Sooriyawewa town, 26/11 - 2002, 13.00-13.45
KI06 - Buddhist Monk (M), Meegahajandura, 5/12 - 2002, 9.30-10.15
KI07 - Zonal Education Director (M), Hambantota Education Zone, 11/12 - 2002, 9.30-10.20
KI08 - Buddhist Monk and former principal of Sri Ljunawima Pirivena (M), 14/1 - 2003, 16.00-17.00
KI09 - GN in Andarawewa (M), 23/1 - 2003, 12.00-12.30
KI10 - Buddhist Monk and principal of Sooriyawewa Aliolu Ara Sri Vijitha Lokha Pirivena (M), 23/1 - 2003, 17.00-17.45
KI11 - 2 Male Private Tuition Master, Marga Institute, Tangalle, 26/2 - 2003 - 13.15-13.35
KI12 - Male Development Officer, Planning Department, Sooriyawewa Divisional Centre, 5/3 - 2003, 10.30-11.00
KI13 - Female Private Tuition Master, Hambantota town, 2/12 - 2002, 10.45-11.15
KI14 - Male Private Tuition Master, Hambantota town, 2/12 - 2002, 16.15-16.35
KI15 - Male Private Tuition Master, Hambantota Town, 3/12 - 2002, 9.15-10.45
KI16 - Male Private Tuition Master, Hambantota Town, 10/1 - 2003, 11.30-12.00
KI17 - Male English Teacher, Mantinde Primary Pirivena, Matara, 5/2 - 2003, 9.00-10.30
KI18 - Buddhist Monk and Principal, Pushparama Pirivena, Matara, 5/2 - 2003, 13.30-14.00
KI19 - Buddhist Monk and Principal, Sudarshana Pirivena, Matara, 5/2 - 2003, 14.45-15.15
KI20 - Male Principal, Pahala Andarawewa, Hambantota Division, 7/1 - 2003
KI21 - Male Science Teacher, Beliatta Division, 9/1 - 2003
KI22 - Male A-level Student, Sooriyawewa NS, 9/1 - 2003, 10.15-11.00
KI23 - Visit to Beliatta Industrial Park, Asia Resource (the only company in the Park at that time) 21/10 - 2002
KI24 - 2 Female O-level students, Meegahajandura, 4/12 - 2002, 9.30-10.30
KI25 - Male Private Tuition Master and owner of Vikal Private Tuition Institute, Sooriyawewa Town, 29/5 - 2004, 12.00-12.30
KI26 - Garment Factory Manager (M), CAN Exports (PVT) Ltd, Sooriyawewa Town, 7/6 - 2004, 15.00-15.45
KI27 - Director General (M), Hambantota District Chamber of Commerce, Chairman Hambantota Youth Business Trust, 8/6 - 2004, 14.00-15.00
KI28 - Deputy Secretary, Provincial Chief Ministry, Southern Province, Mr A.U. Welaratna, 17/5 - 2004, 15.00-16.00
KI29 - Planning Director (M), Walasmulla Education Zonal Office, 26/5 - 2004, 12.30-13.15
KI30 - Divisional Director (M), Walasmulla Education Zonal Office, 26/5 - 2004, 12.30-13.15
KI31 - Assistant Zonal Director (M), Walasmulla Education Zonal Office, 26/5 - 2004, 12.30-13.15
KI32 - Zonal Director (M), Tangalle Education Zonal Office, 26/5 - 2004, 15.00-15.30
KI33 - Male Principal, Aluthwewa NS, 11/6 - 2004, 8.40-8.50
KI34 - Male Principal, Weeraketiya NS, 11/6 - 2004, 10.00-10.15
KI35 - Female Deputy Principal, Katuwana NS, 11/6 - 2004, 11.45-12.00
KI36 - Female Deputy Principal, Walasmulla NS, 12.45-13.00
KI37 - Zonal Director (M), Hambantota Education Zonal Office, 13/6 - 2004, 10.00-11.15
KI38 - Former Minister of Human Resources, Development, Education and Cultural Affairs (UNP-Government 2001-2004) Mr Karunasena Kodithuwakku, 14/6 - 2004, 10.15-11.20

KI39 - Director of Planning (M), Ministry of Education, 18/6 - 2004, 14.15-15.15
KI40 - Deputy Director (M), Planning Division, Ministry of Education, 21/6 - 2004, 14.00-14.45
KI41 - Project Director (M), Secondary Education Modernisation Program (Funded by ADB), Ministry of Education, 23/6 - 2004, 10.15-11.15
KI42 - Senior Economist (M), World Bank, 25/6 - 2004, 14.00-14.45
KI43 - Dr Parakrama, English Department, University of Peradeniya, 28/6 - 2004, 14.30-15.15
KI44 - Deputy Director (F), National Schools Branch, Ministry of Education, 1/7 - 2004, 14.00-14.45
KI45 - Deputy Director of Planning (F), Provincial Department of Education, Southern Province, 5/7 - 2004, 10.15-11.00
KI46 - Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Ms. Tara de Mel, 16/7 - 2004, 10.20-10.50
KI47 - Professor Lakshman Jayatilleke, Chairman, National Education Commission, 2001
KI48 - Professor Lakshman Jayatilleke, Former Chairman of the National Education Commission, Dean, Faculty of Engineering, University of Ruhuna, 20/3 - 2002, 8.15-9.20
KI49 - Member of Parliament (M), JVP, Mr Bimal Rathnayaka, 27/3 - 2002, 19.00-20.30
KI50 - Ven. Gathemaney Vijithu, Alu Olu Ara Pirivena, Sooriyawewa Division, 12/5 - 2004
KI51 - Mr Mannamperi, World University Service of Canada, Matara Regional Office
KI52 - Buddhist Monk, Sooriyawewa town, 22/1 - 2003
KI53 - GN, Andarawewa 10/5 - 2004, 14.30-14.50

SUMMARY

Education for all in times of global transformations. Aspirations and opportunities of poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka

This study is concerned with the educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas of Sri Lanka. It takes as its point of departure the fields of tension between the kind of education these families perceive themselves to need in order to lead lives they value, and the kind of educational opportunities that are accessible to them.

The study is motivated by a renewed interest in education among policy-makers, which seems to lead to quantitative expansions of enrolments in basic education in many parts of the South, as well as by a "new" dilemma of educational planning in times of global transformations. The former is likely to stimulate increased competition for educational resources. With regard to global transformations, four tendencies are identified to be of importance to the understanding of educational opportunities. The *increasingly knowledge-based* global economy and the *financial dilemmas* in relation to the increasingly mobile flows of investments should guide more research towards how the educational opportunities of different groups, in different geographical settings, are being affected. The *diversification of rural livelihoods* and the *increased socio-spatial permeability* should guide more research about educational opportunities to include people's aspirations with education, in relation to diversified and transformed opportunity structures.

The main aim of the thesis is to better understand how educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas are affected in times of global transformations. A subsidiary aim is to better understand how the accessibility of educational opportunities is related to processes of social inclusion and exclusion. In order to fulfil these aims, I address two sets of empirical research questions. The first set of research questions has to do with attitudes towards education among poor families in marginal areas: what role do these families perceive education to have in leading lives they value and how are their educational aspirations affected in times of global transformations? The second set of research questions is concerned with the accessibility of educational opportunities of poor families in marginal areas: what kind of educational opportunities are accessible to these families, and how are these opportunities affected in times of global transformations?

To make better sense of the empirical material, an analytical framework is formulated mainly with the aid of the literature about education and development in the South. Within this framework, three analytical models are proposed. The first model

concerns the dilemma of educational planning, which is being transformed in times of global transformations. The major point is that it is increasingly difficult to reconcile goals for global competitiveness and poverty alleviation with concerns for social and spatial equality in educational opportunities, as well as with the concerns for local relevance, within severe financial restrictions. The second analytical model deals with factors of importance for the accessibility of educational opportunities. The major point is that there are two dimensions that need to be taken note of, namely the spatial distribution of the education network and family resources crucial for being entitled to different segments of this network. Within the education network, the availability of schools, teachers and school facilities are stressed. Four kinds of family resources are identified to be of importance in affecting who will be entitled to what kind of educational opportunities and where: economic, social, and cultural capital, as well as physical mobility. The third analytical model outlines four possible scenarios for educational opportunities in times of global transformations, namely polarisation, equalisation, stratification and increased prospects for educational mobility.

The contribution of the study is mainly empirical and the focus for the empirical research is on marginal areas in southern Sri Lanka. The case of Sri Lanka is interesting since the country has been successful in enrolling an absolute majority of the children in basic education. The ideal of an egalitarian education system has furthermore long been hegemonic in the internal debate. However, Sri Lanka is also an interesting case in the sense that the four tendencies relating to global transformations are evident. Most of the fieldwork has been conducted in the spatially and socio-economically marginal district of Hambantota in the south-east. In the dry parts of Hambantota District, I have chosen four areas for in-depth studies - one urban, one semi-urban and two rural areas. Within these areas, families were classified as being very poor, poor, middle-level and rich, with the aid of an earlier all-island participatory research appraisal.

Several methodologies are used to address the research questions. Apart from going through a wide range of secondary material and related research to provide a comparative background, the main research method is semi-structured interviews with families, especially parents. In addition to this, I have also invited students to write essays, interviewed local key informants (primarily school personnel), and collected statistics regarding the whereabouts of schools, teachers, and students, as well as regarding the attendance rates of both teachers and students. Finally, I have also conducted semi-structured interviews with key informants at the national level.

One main conclusion of the thesis is that there is a stratification, rather than polarisation of educational opportunities. The Sri Lankan education system was never equal in the sense that different segments of schools provided education of similar quality, but there were since the time of independence substantial prospects for educational mobility from inferior to superior segments of schools. Three mechanisms are identified in the network behind this process of stratification, all of them strengthening the need for particular sets of unequally distributed family resources in

the quest to move from inferior to superior segments of schools. First, there is a growth of Private Tuition, and a de-facto privatisation of parts of the education system, which lead to more clear-cut division between those who have abundant economic capital and those who have a lack of it. Physical mobility is another important resources for accessing Private Tuition, particularly the good institutes, and even the Private Tuition sector is differentiated to suit the differentiated effective demand. Second, there is a reintroduction of English as an optional medium of instruction, seemingly strengthening the importance of particular forms of cultural capital (mainly English language competency) and other resources necessary for being able to access the few schools that are able to introduce English-medium. Third, a number of factors have led to an urbanisation of education in Sri Lanka, that is, a shift of the student population in the network from rural to urban schools, leading to an overcrowding of many of the latter. Attempts to improve quality of these urban schools through a rationalisation of the school system increase the value of particular forms of social capital for entrance to schools perceived to be good, as principals in these schools increasingly are selecting and rejecting students. In short, one implication of school rationalisation is that more students are forced to remain in the school closest to home, regardless how bad its quality. Several but not all of these stratifying mechanisms are related to a quest of the government to increase the contribution of education to global economic competitiveness, while it also relates to the increased competition for educational resources among different families.

The stratification of educational opportunities has implications for processes of social inclusion and exclusion; both on its own terms and in relation to the perceived increasing need for education to lead valuable lives. Aspirations with education among the families are very high; most of them aspire to at least A-level education in order to secure a public sector job. The high aspirations with education among parents are interpreted to be due mainly to qualification escalation and the perceived need for education in a rapidly changing society. Even in these marginal areas there is a high demand for "global skills" like English and computer skills, which relates to education largely being seen as a means for social and geographical mobility; children are sent to school so that they should not have to remain. Consequently, the custodial function that many school personnel express to be what rural schools mainly can offer the students is not perceived sufficient by parents and students. This strengthens their feelings of being excluded from substantive capabilities for leading lives they value, and have reason to value in the societies in which they live. Hence, there seems to be important connections between the government's attempt to counter aggregate exclusion from global flows of investments, and the exclusion of poor families in marginal areas from capabilities deemed to be necessary for leading lives they value.

APPENDIX 1

Classification of very poor, poor, middle-level and rich families in Sri Lanka

(From Shanmugaratnam 1999)

The well-to-do or the rich are seen as owners of larger holdings of land with assured water supply and agricultural machinery, market-oriented producers of surpluses, employers of casual labourers, and receivers of income from public sector employment and of remittances from relatives living abroad. The rich rent-in land, have savings, generally borrow from banks and may themselves be money lenders and/or pawn brokers and engage in trading. They cultivate higher value crops and may have partly switched from paddy to non-paddy crops depending on price incentives, technical skills and locational factors such as agro-ecological conditions and access to markets. In most instances, they tend to be less interested or even uninterested in local institutions like Farmers' Organisations and savings and credit societies. They would rather spend their time fostering their own social networks, which extend beyond the village, and political contacts, as these are of vital importance to sustain and promote their interests and power. However, they are often patrons of local religious and cultural bodies as such positions enhance their prestige in the community. In fishing villages, the rich own motorised boats/trawlers and employ crewmen. Like their counterparts in farmer villages, they are also engaged in other businesses and political networking.

The rich own big and well-furnished houses, jewellery, vehicles, TV sets and electrical appliances. They are not addicted to alcohol. Their children go to better schools, often proceed beyond secondary education and generally have access to private tuition in subjects like science, mathematics and English. The rich use private health services.

The middle group as seen by the villagers is different from the rich mainly in terms of the size of land holdings, the value of other assets and incomes and the role its members play in local associations. It may include households which have moved downwards from the rich group but the typical upwardly moving middle level household displays visible dynamism in pursuing economic activities and participating in local associations such as Farmers' Organisations, savings and credit societies, Rural Development Societies (RDSs), Death Donation Societies (DDS), and other Community Based Organisations (CBOs). A middle group household owns more than 2 acres of farmland, may rent-in additional land and is a market oriented surplus producer. Family members and casual labourers work on the farm. The household owns equipment like sprayers and paddy winnowers and threshers. It intensively cultivates the homestead and may switch from paddy to higher value crops wherever feasible. The middle group households have members employed in the public sector and/or abroad. They have savings and are more regular users of local credit schemes. They may borrow from institutions and informally re-lend at higher rates to the poor. They also form *seettu* (rotational saving) groups to pool money at regular intervals so that members could take turns to receive the lump sum. The middle group also includes some PAP (Janasaviya) beneficiaries who were able to utilise the assistance received to

promote their upward mobility. In many villages, several middle families (mostly at the lower end of the stratum) still receive poverty reduction benefits that serve them to maintain their status.

Middle groups are active in networking within and outside the village. They do have links with the rich in the village and tend to emulate them in various ways such as developing links with politicians in power. They hold leading positions in local associations that are vital to their economic interests and social mobility. They are normally not addicted to alcohol. The middle level household owns a decent brick/concrete house that is reasonably furnished, often with TV sets and some electrical appliances, and in many instances a motor bicycle. The children go to better schools and may have access to private tuition. Parents have high aspirations about children's future, and the children themselves have high aspirations too.

The poor are seen by the communities as families with little or no land, highly dependent on casual waged employment, poorly educated, having many children and fewer income earners who are invariably unskilled, and receiving poverty alleviation entitlements (Janasaviya before and Samurdhi at present). They are generally not participating in or excluded from local associations except DDSs. They are indebted to neighbours, local money lenders, pawn brokers and shopkeepers. They usually borrow small amounts of SLR 100-500 to meet consumption needs and often to repay another debt. They also join *seettu* groups that may generate a lump sum of not more than SLR 250. The *seettu* saving may be converted into a good or used as cash for settling debts or for consumption by the recipient member of the group.

The poor usually live in wattle and daub houses without toilet facilities and electricity and use common wells or other common sources of drinking water. They face food insecurity to varying degrees at different times depending on their employment situation. They cope with food shortages by consuming fewer meals, receiving food from relatives and neighbours, hunting and gathering in whereby forests where they exist. The children attend the local school and may not complete their secondary education. The children's education is often interrupted or completely discontinued due to the family's need to send them to work. Children and other members of the family are prone to frequent illnesses. They use state health services. The men in poor households tend to be high consumers of alcohol - often the illegally brewed *kasippu*, which habit demands a considerable share of the hard-earned meagre income. Addiction to alcohol seems to promote family quarrels and violence against wives and children.

The very poor are seen as the poorest of the poor and they seem to constitute 3-15 % of the families in ten of the nineteen villages; in one, 44 % of the families have been classified as very poor. The difference, therefore, is the degree of deprivation. They are generally assetless, very poorly literate, unskilled and dependent on casual waged-labour. The families are large with many children. In addition to the uncertainties affecting poor casual labourers, the very poor are affected to a greater degree by illnesses and physical disabilities and by the absence of an adequate number of able bodied persons. Some of the families are headed by females, and the others by old and disabled persons. The very poor live in semi-permanent and often dilapidated houses without toilet facilities. They are affected by high food insecurity which aggravates their health conditions. During a PRA session, the very poor were described as 'people who struggle for a square meal'. They use common sources of drinking water. They are recipients of Samurdhi benefits and poor relief (pauper allowance). The men are often

addicted to alcohol and violence in the family is common. The children's attendance at school is irregular and they drop out early around year 6-7. The very poor use state health facilities.

APPENDIX 2

Interview-Guide - Interviews with parents 2002-3

Target group: parents with children of school-going age (primary/secondary education)

Background Information

Name of respondent(s)
Age and place of Birth
Family-size - extended family
Religion (Caste)
Educational background of Parents
Literacy
Languages spoken
Present occupation/sources of income
Additional sources of income
Approximate income
How does the household rank in village: rich/middle/poor?
Land-ownership
What is cultivated?

Attitudes/Aspirations/Expectations

Is education important? Why or why not?
Main reasons for sending?
Differences between boys and girls?
How far do you want your son/daughter to study?
Is education getting more important? Why or why not?
What are the most important subjects in school?
Do urban and rural children need the same education?
Should there be more practical skills taught in school? Farming/Vocational skills?

Is education important for getting a job?
Job-aspirations for the children?
Any jobs you do not want them to get?
How much education is needed to reach job-aspirations?
Do young people get jobs through education?
Is education important even if you cannot get a job afterwards?
What kind of jobs will be important in this area ten years from now?
What kind of jobs will diminish in importance?
Private-government?
In the country as a whole?
Is it important to know English? Why, or why not?

Which second language is most important?

Are people with education treated differently than others in the village?

What happens to people who do not get education?

Accessibility

Which school(s) are the children enrolled in? What grades are they in?

How do you find the school? What is good and what is bad? How are the teachers? Has this changed?

How is the school compared to other schools? Where are schools better? Why?

If other schools are better, why not send the children to these?

What families in the village can get a good education for their children? Why?

What families in the village cannot get a good education for their children? Why?

Costs of education, costs of Private Tuition, transport fees, opportunity costs, etc.

Changes over time?

Electricity (study/homework opportunities), etc.

Nutrition, diseases in the family, the need for children to remain in the household, is lunch/breakfast prepared. Changes over time?

Distances to school? To Private Tuition?

The influence of external shocks (droughts/floods).

Political patronage and the importance of social networks (e.g. for entering particular schools), lack of necessary documents, etc.

Time-constraints - how does the educational project compete with other valued projects in terms of time? Siblings?

Homework - who can help?

Child reluctance (e.g. beating/humiliation/alienation)

Will education fulfil aspirations? Why, or why not?

Household strategies

Where do you turn to if you have complaints on the school?

Is the parent-teacher organisation working well? What do you do there?

Alternatives/complements to the public school system? (Private, religious/Pirivena)

Is the household using Private Tuition?

Why? How often? Who is (not) going? Why?

Possible to pass examinations without Private Tuition?

What is good/bad with Private Tuition?

Can all children go? If not, what happens to those who cannot go?

Costs of education - which are they? Which costs are the biggest?

Can costs be handled? How are they handled? Borrowing?

Costs competing with other priorities?

Move to another area

Send child to relatives. Can daughters study outside the village?

The role of kins/neighbours/friends

What can be done to change the situation?
Which are the important actors? NGOs?
Is it important which government is in power?

Interview guide - follow-up interviews with parents 2004
(General themes covered in all families)

Physical appearance vs quality of education
High aspirations with education vs possibilities to go to university
The importance of children living in the village/area in the future
Self-employment – vocational training

Show and discuss attendance records (pupils).
Why do girls go to school more often?
Show and discuss attendance record (teachers).
Reason for low pupil attendance?
Same Private Tuition teachers as in school?

The role of the Parent-teacher organisation

Who do *not* go to Private Tuition?
Borrowing money to cover costs?
Have to prioritize between the children?
Choose A-level Arts because it is cheaper?

Private-government buses? Changes over time?
The importance of transport costs
The importance of distance
Gendered restrictions to mobility

Would you like the school to have English-medium education?
Changes for Education with the new government - PA/JVP