

The Effectiveness of the Aswesuma Social Protection Policy in improving the Living Standards of Low – Income Families: A Study of Public Policy Implementation in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study examines effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in improving the living standards of low – Income families in Sri Lanka. Aswesuma was introduced as a major government social protection program to provide financial assistance to vulnerable and low – income households and to reduce poverty. The research problem is, Although the Aswesuma social protection policy was introduced to improve the living standards of low-income families in Sri Lanka, why does it not fully achieve its intended objectives? The main purpose of writing this research paper, critically analyze the effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in improving the living standards of low – income families in Sri Lanka. And also sub purposes are, to examine the impact of the Aswesuma policy on the living standards of low – income families, to identify the main challenges in implementing the Aswesuma policy, to assess the contribution of Aswesuma to reducing the economic difficulties of beneficiary families and to examine whether the Aswesuma program actually reaches poor and low- income families. The writing of this article uses quantitative method. The sample for the study consists of 100 people from the Moraketiya gramaniadhari division, Embilipitiya divisional secretariat. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The study examines key areas such as household income, food security, access to education and healthcare and the ability to meet basic needs. Through this study, Aswesuma program improves living conditions in low-income families, financial support is insufficient, reduce only short-term poverty, needs further improvements like this help to begin small business and some poor families are excluded in this program these findings were able to identified in examine the effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in improving the living standards of low-income families in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Aswesuma, Improve, Living standards, low-income families, Public Policy

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Introduction

Social protection is a key component of public policy that aims to reduce poverty, inequality and social vulnerability by providing support to individuals and households who are unable to meet their basic needs. It plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive development, ensuring social justice and improving the overall quality of life of disadvantaged populations. Poverty and economic inequality are significant interconnected issues and formidable challenges globally, particularly in development nations. In 2002, around 712 million individuals resided beneath the extreme poverty threshold, defined as earning less than \$2.15 daily (Daulay, 2025). In developing countries such as Sri Lanka, social protection programs are especially important due to persistent economic disparities, unemployment and the rising cost of living, which continue to affect the well-being of many families. In this context, effective implementation of social protection policies is important to ensure that public resources reach the people who need them most.

Sri Lanka has a long history of government welfare program aimed at supporting low – income and vulnerable populations. In response to these challenges, the government of Sri Lanka introduced the Aswesuma social protection policy as a targeted welfare program designed to replace previous subsidy systems and improve the efficiency of poverty alleviation efforts. The poverty is one of the major problems that government has been focus since in 1948 policy makers. In this situation government introduced many antipoverty alleviations program such as Janasaviya, Gamudawa, Gamaneguma, Divinaguma, Gamperaliya, Samurdhi. In order to scale up the new base line survey and policy framework to implement Aswesuma in July 2023 (Hajara, 2025). The main objective of Aswesuma is to identify and provide financial assistance to genuinely low- income and vulnerable households through a more structured and data – driven selection process. Divisional secretariats and other government institutions play an important role in implementing the program and delivering benefits to eligible households.

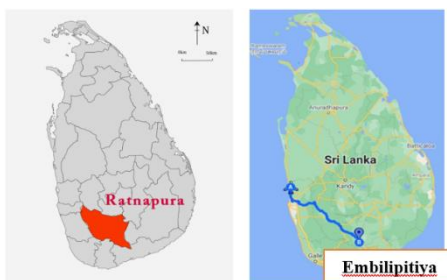
The success of the Aswesuma program largely depends on several key factors, including the accuracy of beneficiary identification, transparency in the selection process, effective administrative implementation and the adequacy of financial support provided. If these elements are not properly managed, there is a risk that deserving families may be excluded while others who are less vulnerable may benefit, thereby reducing the overall effectiveness of the program. The Aswesuma program was implemented in 2023, aiming to provide financial assistance to

vulnerable and low – income households in order to reduce poverty. Even though previous poverty alleviation program selected beneficiaries based on few criteria, such as education, health, economic level, assets, housing conditions and family demographics (Padmakanthi, 2025). The implementation of Aswesuma is important from a public policy perspective because the success of a policy depends not only on its objectives but also on how effectively it is implemented.

This study focuses on the effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in improving the living standards of low – income families in Sri Lanka. It examines whether the program effectively reaches the intended poor and low-income families and whether financial assistance contributes to improvements in their daily living conditions. This research is important for understanding the effectiveness of Aswesuma as a government social protection policy. Sri Lanka in its 2025 budget, unveiled the largest – ever allocation for Sri Lanka’s social welfare program, with a sum of Rs. 232.5 billion earmarked for Aswesuma (Rajawasam.2025). The study also identifies key challenges in implementing the policy objectives and actual outcomes. Furthermore, the study may contribute to discussion on poverty reduction, welfare policy, and effective public policy implementation in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the Effectiveness of the Aswesuma Social Protection Policy in improving the Living Standards of Low – Income Families: A Study of Public Policy Implementation in Sri Lanka. The theoretical framework has been featured with the public policy and public administration. The quantitative approach is appropriate because its study aims to collect measurable data from Aswesuma beneficiaries and identify patterns and relationship between the policy benefits and household living conditions. Total sample of 200 respondents in Moraketiya GN division, Embilipitiya divisional secretariat.



The first map shows the Ratnapura District, which is the district where the study was conducted, and the second map shows the Embilipitiya Divisional Secretariat Division where the study was conducted

Greater emphasis was given to low – income families because they are the main target group of the Aswesuma social protection policy. Include categories of this sample, Aswesuma beneficiary low-income families, low-income families not receiving Aswesuma, middle income families, higher income / affluent families, government officers, private sector employees and business owners. To obtain a broader understanding of poverty, social protection and poverty reduction the study will include respondents from different social and economic groups. These groups will represent different perspective and experience related to poverty, government assistance, employment, income and social welfare. Their experience is therefore particularly important for assessing whether the Aswesuma policy has achieved its intended objectives. The data will be collected using a questionnaire and the responses will be analyzed using quantitative statistical methods such as percentage values.

Review of the Literature

The Effectiveness of the Aswesuma Social Protection Policy in improving the Living Standards of Low – Income Families: A Study of Public Policy Implementation in Sri Lanka. This research, which address the question of Although the Aswesuma social protection policy was introduced to improve the living standards of low-income families in Sri Lanka, why does it not fully achieve its intended objectives? Identifies two primary theoretical areas that need to be addressed. Accordingly, the literature review can be conducted based on the theoretical fields of public policy and public administration

Title	Year	Writer	Research Findings
An empirical analysis of Aswesuma poverty alleviation program in rural area: A study based on the Ankumbura Division.	2025	Hajara M. S	This research explores key areas to identify the reducing poverty. Such as education support, entrepreneurship support and cash transfer amounts influence perception. Its highlighted education support is most important for reducing poverty. The research discussed, Households with school going children show a positive perception of

			the program because education was associated with better employment opportunities and its future investments. So, should be given priority through the Aswesuma program for increasing education support for the children of low- income families. In additional explain what are the selection criteria for distributing Aswesuma. These are health conditions, number of dependents and disability status. But this research not explain deeply beneficiary selection criteria and the transparency of the selection process.
Estimating Aswesuma Effectiveness	2025	Amarasinghe.P	This study discussed background of samurdhi and Aswesuma program, multidimensional approach to poverty, Aswesuma selection criteria and targeting, Aswesuma and Samurdhi household comparision and food insecurity. As well as presented data base with the source one by one related mention above factors well. But the measures necessary to prevent individuals who possess substantial assets from obtaining Aswesuma benefits by providing false or inaccurate information have received limited attention in this research. Such as imposing fines and requiring the repayment of benefits that were obtained improperly.
Multidimensional poverty and vulnerability in Sri Lanka, 2024-2025	2025	Stifel. D	In this research use the nationally representative BRIGHT integrated household survey data to explore

			multidimensional poverty and vulnerability in Sri Lanka. Discussed poverty through this study under three main categories. These are education, health and living standards. Under the education category, years of schooling percentage and school attendance male and female percentage very important measurement for measuring poverty. Under the health category, food stock, water resources, experienced disasters and ins fractures facilities very important measurement of poverty. Third category living standards, debt status, housing, assets, sanitation and employment or unemployment very important measurements of poverty. This research very important for reducing future poverty and making polices because through this study introduced lots of data province by province in Sri Lanka related measurements of poverty. But this paper not specialized or not explain Aswesuma social protection program.
Are low – Income households in Sri Lanka adequately food secure? An empirical analysis with special reference to the rural sector in Sri Lanka	2025	Padmakanthi N.P. D	The research paper highlighted low-income families and their life style well. Specially attention through this study what are the importance of food secure, rural areas in Sri Lanka. Identifying food insecurity coping strategies among low-income rural households is crucial, as inappropriate strategies can harm health, social dignity and long-term economic wellbeing. According to this paper, food insecurity serious challenge

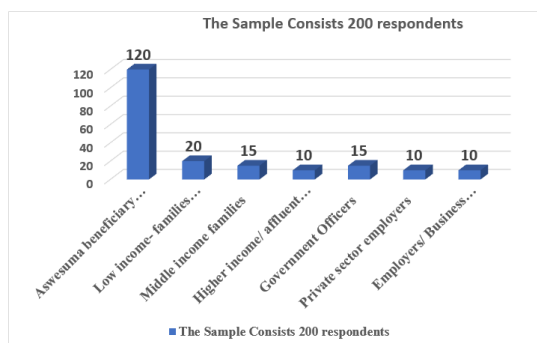
			globally, among low-income rural households in Sri Lanka. Most households rely on short term consumption strategies such as borrowing foods, eating less nutrients foods (protein) or reducing meal size. This paper well-structured nature of rural households' life style and Their having food pattern but this paper not enough for the understand how to prevent poverty through social protection program such as Aswesuma.
The role of public policy in addressing global poverty and inequality: case studies in developing countries.	2025	Daulay S. A	This paper examines the how to reduce poverty and inequality through the public policy. In this study mention key policies for preventing poverty and inequality. These are family hope program, village funds, equal infrastructure development, labor policies, fiscal reforms and subsidies, agrarian reforms and access to clean water, social security and pensions, education policies, family health strategy, rural economic development, community empowerment development and public distribution system. The study expands deeply mention above key features one by one using cases under the related country by country separately. But This paper mainly focuses Brazil, Indonesia and India case studies for writing this paper. It does not specially address the Sri Lanka situation.

Results and Discussion

This study examines the Effectiveness of the Aswesuma Social Protection Policy in improving the Living Standards of Low – Income Families: A Study of Public Policy Implementation in Sri Lanka. The study adopts a quantitative research approach using a survey method based on a structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The sample consists of 200 respondents, selected to represent different social and economic groups. The distribution of participants includes 120 – Aswesuma beneficiary respondents, 20- low -income families not receiving Aswesuma, 15- middle income families, 10- Higher income families, 15- Government officers, 10- private sector employees and 10- employers/ business owners.

Aswesuma beneficiary respondents/ Low-income families	120	60%
Low income- families not receiving Aswesuma	20	10%
Middle income families	15	7.5%
Higher income/ affluent families	10	5%
Government Officers	15	7.5%
Private sector employers	10	5%
Employers/ Business owners	10	5%
Total	200	100%

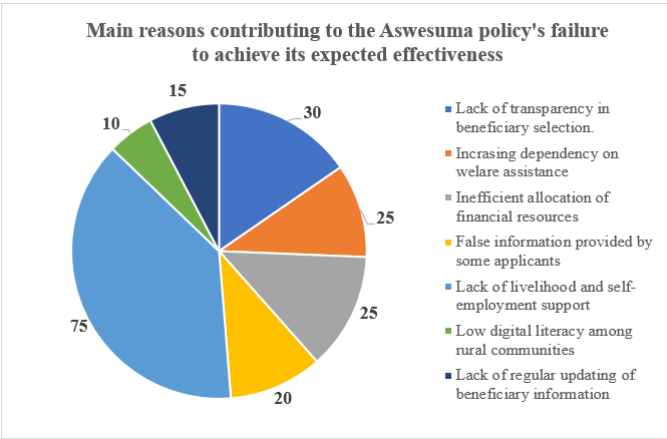
(Source: Field visit 2026)



Data collected through the questionnaire will be analyzed to identifying why Aswesuma social protection benefit program has failed to achieve its expected outcomes. Based on the findings of this study, it is expected to identify the main weaknesses and challenges of the Aswesuma social protection policy. The study will examine whether the program reaches the families who are genuinely in need, whether the beneficiary selection process is fair and transparent, and whether the financial assistance is sufficient to improve their living standards.

It will also identify gap in policy implementation and areas that require improvement. The findings are expected to provide useful information for policy makers when developing and improving government social protection programs. In particular, the study will highlight important areas that should be considered when developing more effective and sustainable public policy to reduce poverty and improve the living standards of low-income families in Sri Lanka. Based on the information obtained from the respondents, the analysis of the data revealed several factors that have affected the effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in achieving its objective of improving the living standards of low-income families. These findings indicate that the policy has faced several challenges that have limited its ability to achieve its intended outcomes effectively. Mainly six reasons contributing to the Aswesuma policy's failure to achieve its expected effectiveness according the survey.

- Lack of transparency in the beneficiary selection process.
- Increasing dependency on welfare assistance and spending the benefits mainly on daily consumption.
- The need to manage and allocate the available funds more effectively to reach a large number of needy families.
- Inclusion of ineligible individuals who provide false or inaccurate information to obtain benefits.
- Lack of adequate guidance and support to help beneficiaries start self – employment or sustainable livelihood activities.
- Limited awareness of modern technology and digital literacy among some rural communities.
- Lack of an effective system for regularly updating the information of Aswesuma beneficiary families.



(Source; Field survey 2026)

According to the survey results, 75 respondents identified, Lack of adequate guidance and support to help beneficiaries start self – employment or sustainable livelihood activities is mainly affected for contributing to the Aswesuma policy's failure to achieve its expected effectiveness. 30 respondents, Lack of transparency in the beneficiary selection process is mainly affected for this. 25 respondents identified the Increasing dependency on welfare assistance and spending the benefits mainly on daily consumption is mainly affected for this. As well as another 25 group of respondents identified, the need to manage and allocate the available funds more effectively to reach a large number of needy families is the most influential factor for this. Inclusion of ineligible individuals who provide false or inaccurate information to obtain benefits was identified as a most important factor for that, 20 respondents. Limited awareness of modern technology and digital literacy among some rural communities is more impactful reason than others identified by 15 respondents. In addition, Lack of an effective system for regularly updating the information of Aswesuma beneficiary families was identified by 10 respondents according to this

Firstly, the survey, Lack of transparency in the beneficiary selection process was a major factor for influencing to the Aswesuma policy's failure to achieve its expected effectiveness. This program selected beneficiaries based on a few criteria or income. This program selected beneficiaries based on multiple criteria (Jayaweera.R, 2025).

Main Criteria	Sub Criteria
Education	Education level of Family members Number of children with no schooling between 5-16 years
Health	Number of members suffering from chronic illness Number of disabled persons
Economic Level	Monthly per capital expenditure Monthly per capital income Electricity usage below 60 units per month
Assets	The house and the land are not owned by a family member No of family members owns any other land or buildings The family does not have a land of 0.5 acres, which can be cultivated The family does not have a paddy land of 01 acre. Not having even one asset related to transportation.eg; motorcycle cc125 Not having at least one asset related to economic activity.eg fishing boats Not having at least one asset related to livelihood.eg: cows, goats
Housing Condition	Living in row houses, shanties or others Lack of a home with permanent walls, a permanent floor, and a permanent roof to live in Total floor area less than 500 square feet Lack of asses to drinking water Lack of necessary sanitation facilities No electricity
Family Demography	The dependency ratio Single-parent families

(Source: Department of government printing, 2019)

Aswesuma beneficiaries were selected using 22 criteria covering six main criteria mentioned above of the chart. To enhance the program's effectiveness, revisit the selection criteria for beneficiaries. But we cannot see transparency system although published selection criteria. Including more nuanced indicators (health conditions, number of dependents or disability status). Could help better identify households that would benefit most from the program (Hajara. M. S).

According to the views of some respondents, it is not always clear how families are selected to receive Aswesuma benefits or how their eligibility is assessed. If the selection criteria and procedures are not clear, some genuinely poor families may be excluded, while families who are not eligible may receive benefits. Some low - income families reported that they were unable to understand why they were not selected despite facing serious economic difficulties. Such situation can create doubts about fairness and equal treatment among the public. If beneficiary selection is influenced by personal relationships, political connections or other external factors, genuinely poor families may be excluded from the program. This can reduce public confidence in the Aswesuma policy and weaken its ability to achieves its main objective of reducing poverty. Therefore, clear and understandable selection criteria, accurate verification of household information, regular monitoring and an effective complaint system are necessary. Greater transparency and accountability can help ensure the families who are genuinely in need.

Secondly, another important factor affecting the effectiveness of the Aswesuma program is the increasing dependency of some families on welfare assistance. For many low-income families, the financial support received through Aswesuma is mainly used for daily household expenses such as food, electricity, transport, medicine and other basic needs. Further challenges at the individual or household level include poor money management and reliance on other family members, both of which affect food security (Padmakanthi. N. P, 2025). So, they spent Aswesuma financial assistance to meet daily food requirements. Although this assistance helps families manage their immediate economic difficulties, it may not create long-term improvements in their living standards. Some beneficiaries may become dependent on the monthly financial support instead of using the assistance to develop sustainable income-generating activities. As a result, the program may provide short -term relief without sufficiently helping families move out of poverty.

Limited awareness of modern technology and digital literacy among some rural communities is an important issue affecting the effective implementation of the Aswesuma program. Many people in rural areas, particularly elderly people and those with limited education, may not have sufficient knowledge or experience in using smartphones, computers the internet and government websites. This create difficulties when important Aswesuma information, including beneficiary selection lists, is published online (Sewwandi.R.M.S.2025). People who do not regularly use digital technology may not know how to access the websites, search for their names, or understand the information provided. Rural people who depended on others to access online information may face delays or receive incomplete information. As a result, some eligible families may not be aware of whether they have been selected as beneficiaries or whether they need to take further action.

Another factor affecting the effectiveness of the Aswesuma program is the Inclusion of ineligible individuals. Some applicants provide false or inaccurate information to obtain benefits. Another area for improvement with Aswesuma is the measurement difficulties faced by officials on the ground about verifying households' information on the eligibility criteria. For example, there could be errors in collecting information as households may withhold truthful reporting of their poverty status to obtain benefits or could not recall accurate information. Such inaccuracies in gathering information on a household's poverty status could harm the coverage of individuals who require assistance and undermine the efforts to implement a more objective social protection program (Amarasinghe. P, 2025). Some applicants may provide false or inaccurate information about their economic situation and become a beneficiary. As a result, some deserving families may be excluded from the program while others who do not meet the eligibility requirements receive benefits. Government funds are limited, this situation can negatively affect poor families who depended on government assistance. Therefore, accurate verification of household information is essential.

Another important issue affecting the effectiveness of the Aswesuma program is the lack of adequate guidance and support for beneficiaries to develop self-employment or sustainable livelihood activities. The Aswesuma program does not transfer assets. The Aswesuma program does not include skills development. Thus, provision of productive assets and training facilities for livelihood development is a significant way of reducing poverty in this group, but that is missing in the Aswesuma program (Jayaweera. R, 2025). The financial assistance provided by Aswesuma mainly helps

families meet their immediate daily needs. However, providing financial support alone may not be enough to help families move out of poverty in the long term. Some beneficiaries may have skills and other opportunities to start small business or income generating activities, but they may not have sufficient knowledge, training, capital or guidance to develop them. Therefore, Aswesuma should be linked with vocational training, self -employment programs, small business support, financial literacy, access to markets and employment opportunities.

Therefore, well- designed social protection programs should include components such as the provision of productive assets to help initiate income generating activities, skills development and vocational training aimed at enhancing employability and entrepreneurial capacity, access to financial service and insurance, and monitoring to support beneficiaries in the graduation process (Jayaweera. R, 2025). Government institutions could identify the skills and resources of each beneficiary family and provide suitable livelihood support.

Another important issue affecting the effectiveness of the Aswesuma program is the lack of an effective system for regularly updating information about beneficiaries' families. Not yet introducing update system for the Aswesuma beneficiary selected families. Specially not method for reporting newly born, diseases situation and disability conditions (Sewwandi.R.M.S.2025). The economic situation of a family can changes over time. For example, a beneficiary may obtain employment, increase their income, acquire assets or improve their living conditions. If beneficiary information is not regularly updated, these changes may not be properly reflected in the selection process. Therefore, a regular and reliable system should be established to update the socioeconomic information of Aswesuma beneficiary families. This can create problem in identifying the families who are genuinely in need. Some families may continue situation has improved, while newly vulnerable families may not receive the support they require. Government institutions should conduct periodic reviews and verify information related to household income, employment, assets and family conditions. Improved coordination between relevant government institutions and the use of updated digital records could also support this process. Regular monitoring and updating would help ensure that Aswesuma benefits are directed to families who continue to meet the eligibility criteria and would improve the overall effectiveness and fairness of the program.

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of the Aswesuma social protection policy in improving the living standards of low-income families in Sri Lanka. The main purpose of the study was to identify whether the program reaches the families who are genuinely in need and whether the financial assistance provided is sufficient to improve their living conditions. The study also focused on the implementation of the policy, beneficiary selection, transparency and the main challenges that affect its effectiveness.

The findings indicate that Aswesuma provides important financial support to many low-income families and helps them meet some of their immediate basic needs. However, the program has not fully achieved its expected objectives of improving living standards and reducing poverty in a sustainable manner. Several factors were identified as affecting its effectiveness. These include weaknesses in the transparency of beneficiary selection, the inclusion of some ineligible individuals through inaccurate information, and the exclusion of some genuinely poor families. These issues can reduce public confidence and effect the fair distribution of limited government resources.

The study also found that some beneficiaries mainly use the financial assistance for daily consumption, particularly food and other essential household expenses. Although this support is important for addressing immediate economic difficulties it may increase dependency on welfare assistance if there are no opportunities, vocational training, self – employment support and other livelihood development programs. Such measures can help families gradually economically independent. Another important issue identified by the study is the limited digital literacy of some rural communities. When important information is provided mainly through online platforms, people who have limited access to technology may face difficulties in obtaining information and checking their eligibility. In addition, the lack of a regular system for updating beneficiary information can result in outdated information being used when determining eligibility.

Overall, the study concludes that Aswesuma is an important social protection program, but improvements are necessary to achieve its expected outcomes more effectively. Greater transparency in beneficiary selection, accurate verification of household information, regular updating of beneficiary data, improved access to

information and stronger monitoring mechanism are required. Furthermore, Aswesuma should be linked with sustainable livelihood and employment program rather than focusing only on cash assistance.

The findings of this study can contribute to the development of more effective and inclusive public policies for poverty reduction in Sri Lanka. Future social protection program should focus not only on providing short-term financial assistance but also on empowering low-income families to improve their income, employment opportunities and overall quality of life. Therefore, strengthening the implementation, transparency, accountability and sustainability of Aswesuma can help the government move towards a more effective approach to poverty reduction and social protection.

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- The author agrees to take responsibility for every facet of the work, making sure that any concerns about its integrity or veracity are thoroughly examined and addressed

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