

1. The Health of the Plantation Community

The Health Situation of the Plantation Population.

Numerous studies done over the past 20 years have documented that there is considerable ill-health in the communities living in the "labour lines" of the plantations in our country. To quote a few

- the prevalence of soil-transmitted helminths in estates in Selangor and Trengganu were in the region of 60 - 90% in studies done in the early 1990's. (See Appendix Ia)
- There is significant stunting of physical growth of children in the estates. (Appendix Ib)
- Maternal anemia is significantly higher in women from estate backgrounds. (Appendix Ic)

This ill-health impacts negatively on the physical as well as the academic development of the estate population (Appendix Id & e) and is likely to impair the capacity of this community to partake of and contribute to this nation's lofty visions for 2020.

The Main Causes of this Poor Health Status

There are 3 main causes

- the low wages that estate workers receive
- the poor quality of the amenities that they are provided
- a culture of apathy.

1) Low wages

- Despite being a major foreign exchange earner in good times and in bad, the plantation sector has never rewarded its workers with reasonable wages. Real wages for tappers and palm oil harvesters have stagnated for the past 25 years despite the fact that this country has become relatively prosperous over that same period. This is captured eloquently in Mr K Arumugam's chart that is reproduced as Appendix IIa.

- RMA-Perunding Bersatu, a consultant analyst firm that was commissioned by the Penang State Government to do a study on economic development in the Northern States, also concurs with K Arumugam's position (See Appendix IIb), and goes on to document that workers in other sectors in Malaysia have done much better than the workers in the plantation sector.

- Up till today, estate workers are daily paid. They are penalised for poor yielding fields, bad weather, rain, and any fall in the commodity prices in the world market. The average income of an estate worker is about RM 350 per month.

2) Poor amenities

- A survey carried out by the Department of Health in 1995 revealed that out of the 33 estates in District of Larut-Matang-Selama in Perak, 21 estates had water collection and treatment facilities of their own. In 16 of these estates, the water that they provided to their workers had high level of coliform organisms!

- Surveys by CAP, Dr Selvakumaran and by the MMA itself have documented time and again that the provision of proper toilets to the labour lines is woefully inadequate. (Appendix IIc).

- MMA's own 2 studies on the provision of health services to the estate population documents that the percentage of estates served by Estate Hospitals had deteriorated from 17.1% to 6% between 1988 and 1994 in the 65 odd estates surveyed by the MMA. These two studies also document that the emphasis placed on training these HA's declined as evidenced in the decrease in training seminars from 13 in 1987 - 88 to only 6 in 1993-94.

3) The apathetic face of Indian working class poverty

It should not be denied that cultural factors exacerbate the health and other social problems of the plantation community. These negative cultural factors have been fostered by

- a system of caste discrimination that has been robbing these people of their sense of selfworth for the past 300 years.

- 70 years of plantation life where there was physical isolation, tight authoritarian control, the promotion of toddy consumption as a form of worker control, and rapid and efficient elimination of the few workers who attempted to rebel against these conditions.

- Paternalistic political and union organisations which have found it expedient to not to address these issues of apathy and lack of self-worth in any effective manner.

These negative cultural values could be addressed and ameliorated by a broad-based programme that mobilises and empowers the estate poor to do something for themselves and their community. Haranguing them from the podium (as some groups are prone to do) isn't very different from what their traditional political and union "representatives" have done, and isn't likely to do more than to divert public attention away from the structural causes of their depressed state ie the low wages and substandard amenities that are mentioned above.

The MMA position

The position that the MMA has taken to the issue of estate health is contained in the Proceedings of the Seminar on Estate health and Vision 2020. (which is also the source of all the tables and charts reproduced as appendices to this write-up). The same position has been written up as a Memorandum to the Prime Minister and this is being circulated within Council, but not handed in to the PM as yet.

The main features of the MMA position in these 2 documents are

- the government should recognize that the estate sector is a depressed rural sector.

- Further the government should recognize that its policy of urging the plantation companies to provide better amenities to the estate sector has failed miserably. The companies have not and will not make the necessary allocations for the provision of reasonable amenities to their resident workers.

- Therefore the MMA has urged the government to put the plantations on par with the traditional rural kampungs, and take over the direct provision of proper water, electricity, sanitary services as well as medical care to the estate populations instead of leaving it to the plantation companies.

This measure would not only go a long way towards solving the health problems of the plantation community, but would also help to strengthen the plantation sector itself by ensuring more workers opt to stay on in a sector that has been and continues to be a very important contributors to the nation's economy.

TABLE III-1: Prevalence of Soil-Transmitted Helminths among the Plantation Population in Malaysia (1934-1994)

Ref.	Study Area	No. Pop. Exam.	% Infected by one or more worm	% infected by Ascaris	% by Trichuris	% by Hookworm	% by Strongyloides
Russell, (1934) ⁶	Malacca Penang (Estate)	27,000	-	62.7	70.5	69.8	
Sinniah et al., ⁷ (1978)	Selangor (Estate)	150	82.7	52.7	56.0	28.0	1.3
Zahedi et al., ¹² (1980)	Johor, Melaka, N. Sembilan (Estate)	819	30.2	14.0	15.0	20.6	0.7
Kan (1982) ³	Selangor	25,246	39.6	18.8	35.0	7.1	-
Ramalingam & ⁵ Sinniah (1983)	Selangor (Estate)	342	70.2	14.3	44.7	55.0	-
Sinniah (1984) ⁸	Selangor, Melaka (Estate)	731	66.4	30.9	47.6	20.9	-
Sinniah et al. ⁹ (1990)	Terengganu (Estate)	134	92.5	83.6	88.8	6.0	-
Sinniah et al. ¹⁰ (1992)	Selangor (Estate)	319	62.7	28.2	46.7	9.7	-
Sinniah, (1994) ¹¹	Selangor (Estate)	571	63.2	21.0	59.8	8.0	-

TABLE III-2 : Intensity of Intestinal Helminth Infections in Children from different types of Habitation

Type of Habitation	Intensity of infection expressed in No. of egg/gm of stool (EPG) Mean and (Range)		
	Ascaris	Trichuris	Hookworm
Urban Advantaged	11,488 (74 - 18,500)	1,832 (37-4,625)	426 (19-1,702)
Urban Disadvantaged (Squatter)	25,566 (441 - 55,019)	7,123 (130-11,739)	1,166 (148-3034)
Rural Disadvantaged (Plantation)	23,902 (518 - 158,369)	7,245 (185-13,740)	2,212 (93-12,800)

EPG = Eggs per gram of faeces

Trichuris & Hookworm

Light infection

Moderate infection

Heavy infection

Ascaris

Light infection

Moderate infection

Heavy infection

1 - 4,000 EPG

4,001 - 10,000 EPG

> 10,001 EPG

1 - 30,000 EPG

30,000 - 60,000 EPG

> 60,000 EPG

Source: Sinniah et al 1984, JMSH

Vol 4, p 1 - 5

TABLE III-8 : Growth of 6 year old Children in Estates in Malaysia

	<u>Mean ht (cm)</u>	<u>Mean wt (kg)</u>
Urban Advantaged	116.8 cm	37.6
Squatter	113.0 cm	28.0
Kampung	112.8 cm	28.6
Estate	110.3 cm	28.8

Source : P.J. Singh (1992), J.M.S. of Hlth, 10(1):33

TABLE III-9 : Growth of 5 year Children in Estates in Malaysia

	<u>Mean ht (cm)</u>	<u>Mean wt (kg)</u>
Urban advantaged	112.2	18.8
Squatter	109.4	17.2
Kampung	108.8	17.4
Estate	106.3	15.4

Source : P.J. Singh (1992), J.M. Soc. Hlth 10(1):33.]

**Appendix III - 8 : Anemia among Pregnant Women in Sg Tinggi Estate
(SOCFIN Company, Batang Berjuntai)**

Total number of pregnant mothers in 1995	25
Total number with anemia*	13
Percentage of pregnant mothers with anemia	52%
Incidence of Anemia among pregnant mothers in Hulu Selangor Health District	3%

* Anemia = Hemoglobin < 10.0 g%

Source : Laporan Situasi Kesihatan Ldg Sg Tinggi
Pejabat Kesihatan Daerah, Hulu Selangor

APPENDIX THREE

Appendix III - 1 : 1992 UPSR Bahasa Malaysia (Penulisan) Results in Selected Schools.

School Type	No. of Schools	No. of Students	"A" & "B"	"D" & "E"
Ipoh Premier Schools	6	1162	893 (77%)	113 (10%)
Ipoh Tamil Schools	8	371	25 (7%)	301 (81%)
Sg. Siput Schools (SRK)	5	302	129 (43%)	96 (32%)
Sg. Siput Schools (SRJK Tamil)	5	103	0	99 (96%)

- Premier = ACS, St. Micheals, MGS, Main Convent, Tarcisian.
- Source : Dept. of Education Perak.

Appendix III - 2 : 1992 UPSR Mathematics Results in Selected Schools.

School type	No. of schools	No. of students	"A" & "B"	"D" & "E"
Ipoh Premier Schools	6	1162	684 (59%)	192 (17%)
Ipoh Tamil schools	8	416	72 (17%)	234 (56%)
Sg. Siput schools (SRK)	4	468	240 (51%)	76 (16%)
Sg. Siput schools (SRJK Tamil)	5	110	5 (4%)	67 (61%)

Source : Dept of Education Perak.

Appendix III - 3 : HIV positivity by Race in Perak (up till 01/09/93)

Race	Total no. of HIV +ve cases	Percentages
Malays	205	48.2 %
Chinese	110	25.9 %
Indians	96	22.6 %
Others	14	3.3 %

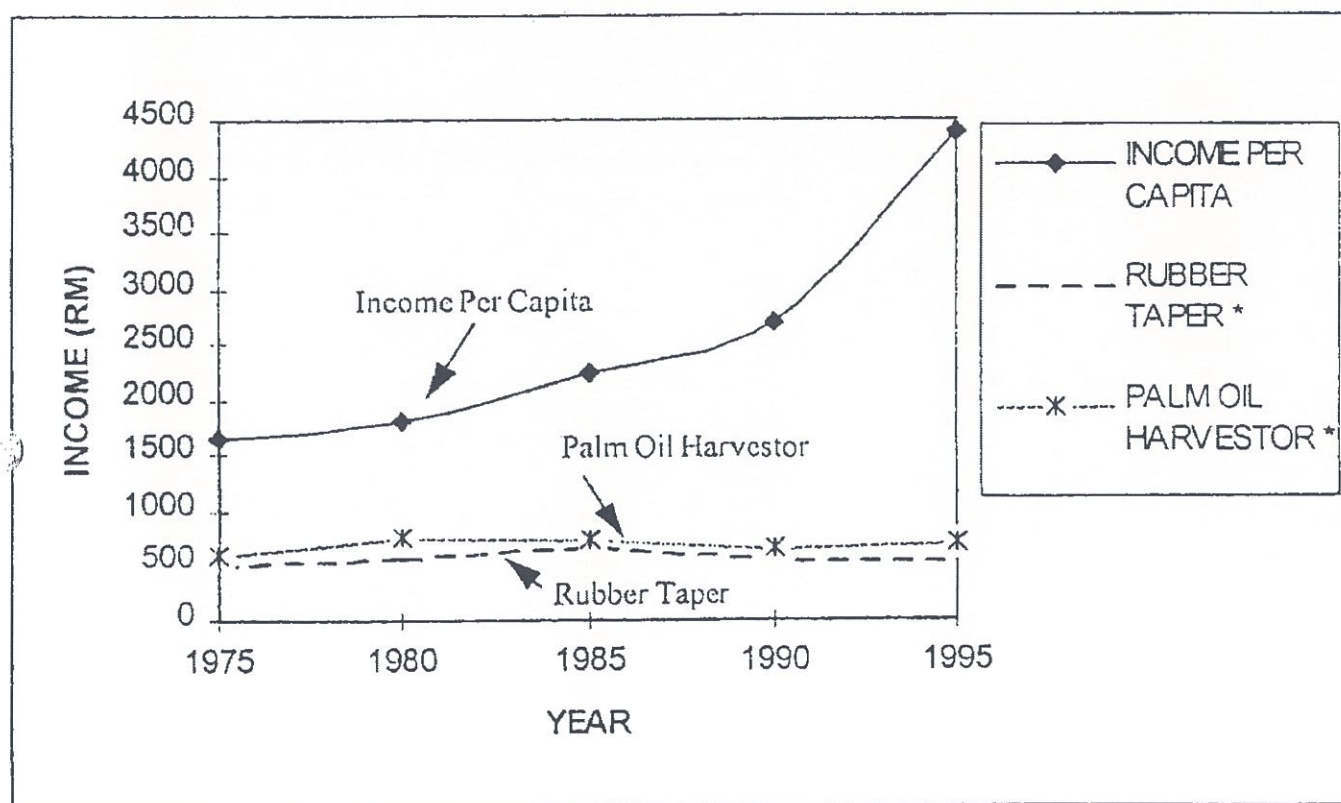
- Indians make up 14% of population of Perak.

Source : Dept. of Health report.

**TABLE X1 - 7: National Per Capita Income Compared
with Per capita income of Plantation
Workers 1975 - 1995
(in constant 1967 dollars)**

YEAR	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
INCOME PER CAPITA	1643	1813	2247	2704	4391
RUBBER TAPER *	524	576	672	536	540
PALMOIL HARVESTOR *	580	764	720	656	708

(* Adjusted on the basis of 6 members in a family with two members working)



**Appendix III - 7 : Average Monthly Wages of Workers in Selected Sectors
Peninsular Malaysia, 1981 and 1990.**

Year	Rubber Estates		Manufacturing Companies		Construction Companies	
	Nominal	Real*1	Nominal	Real	Nominal	Real
1981	RM 272	RM 248	RM 440	RM 371	RM455	RM 415
1990	RM353	RM 253	RM 657	RM 471	RM 734	RM 527
% Increase from 1981 to 1990		2%		27%		27%

* Real = 1980 dollars

Source: Manpower Resource Study for the Northern States. Final Report,
Volume I; Table 6.1 (RMA-Perunding Bersatu)

TABLE III-7 : Basic Amenities, Water and Toilet facilities in Estates

Toilets	MAPA	Non MAPA	All
Flush	44%	20%	32%
Pour flush	17%	40%	19%
Bucket/Pit	22%	10%	26%
Bushes/Open air	17%	33%	23%
<u>Water Supply</u>			
Piped (Government)			29%
<u>Other Sources</u>			
No filtration			37.1%
No chlorination			23.1%
No pipes to house (stand pipe)			46.4%
Total waters			70.6%

Source: R Selvakumaran - study of 31 estates (PhD thesis).