

# Household Interviews Overview

## Seevalipura & Sirisara Uyana

### Wanathamulla, Sri Lanka

November 2021 - May 2022



## Summary of Key Findings

### LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Majority of those interviewed are households that rely on a daily income of one or more members of the household. This includes those who run their own shops, cart vendors, three wheel drivers, labourers etc. Four households have a monthly salary that cover their living expenses. Almost all households interviewed have taken one or more loans over the years, some do so every month for various reasons - housing related (to improve or renovate), to make ends meet, for their livelihood or emergencies. Many are part of seettu groups as well and a few households are Samurdhi beneficiaries.

### GRID ACCESS

Everyone interviewed in Seevalipura (except one household) and the high-rises are connected to the electricity grid. In Seevalipura households have access to water - majority through a formal metered connection. There is continuous supply through the day, although some noted that the water pressure was better in the morning. There are also a few public wells and taps in Seevalipura that people still access, especially those who still are not connected to the main water grid. Most households said that they drink water straight from the tap, and have no problems with the quality of the water, while some do boil and then drink.

In Seevalipura the houses are connected to a sewage line - either the official one or one that households have dug and created themselves over time. The sewage lines are all connected to the canal that's runs across the community. Depending on where they are located in Seevalipura, some households experience flooding following heavy rain and some don't.

In the high-rises every household complained about the broken lifts in the building (some for over six years) and how only one or two were usable and maintenance was not good.

When there is a water cut in the high-rises they are informed beforehand, but households complained that it is still difficult as there is no public well or tap close by they can access. They also cannot store a lot of water in the flat due to space issues and households with children especially find it hard during water cuts.

Households in high-rises also commented on the built environment, and the impact of the change in their security and community. The building design was not considered particular safe or private and people were still finding it hard to adjust to this new way of life, including the small size of the flats. Even those who had issues with flooding, mosquito borne diseases or no security of tenure or grid access previously said that they still prefer their old life to the new one in the high-rise.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Food purchasing is determined by key factors such as income and affordability, convenience, and perception of quality. Spending, and frequency of purchasing is linked to income. Households that have a regular monthly income buy most dry goods and spices once or twice a month, and fresh food such as vegetables, fruit and fish/meat whenever necessary. Households that are reliant on daily wage will purchase good – dry and fresh – daily and mostly only the quantities needed. Daily wage households will also buy dry goods when possible and only purchase them again when they have run if they can afford to. Those whose livelihood or businesses deal in vegetables and fruits would set some aside for the family's consumption or also consume whatever that was not sold.

Almost all interviewed households noted the steady increase in the prices of goods since COVID-19, and a notable increase in the months leading up to the second half of 2022, where food inflation reached 90% by September 2022. However, households with a monthly income or a higher income stated that they have not given up purchasing fresh food even though there was a price increase, but instead had cut back on the quantities that they usually buy. Households on a daily wage stated that they could no longer afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetable in the way that they used to previously, and only occasionally bought fish or chicken. Every household interviewed said that they prefer not to buy food or groceries on credit, and the few who said that they did, had done so in emergencies and from shops that knew them and knew their ability to pay back what was purchased on credit.

Those on a monthly income or higher income purchase from larger stores or supermarkets as they buy larger quantities, whereas daily wage household purchase from shops or vendors close to their homes or somewhere that is on their way home from work. Those who buy from larger stores or supermarkets also noted that they like the convenience of being able to buy everything from one place. Those who buy vegetables, fruit and fish daily will mostly buy from a known cart sellers that passes their homes every day, or they will purchase from a known shop close by. Some also choose shops and vendors based on whether they get a discount. In the high-rises most households buy from the market and shops immediately around their buildings and stated that they only buy from shops inside the high-rise in an emergency as they find the shops inside to sell goods at a slightly higher price.

When it comes to fresh fruit and vegetables and fish, households buy from shops and vendors they perceive have the best quality options, or where they know the vendor and know that they sell good that are fresh. As most households interviewed do not use their fridges to store fresh goods or cooked food and prefer to consume them within the day, the quality of the fresh food matters a lot to them. At the time the interviews were conducted, most families (except those who not well off at all) were still able to maintain some diversity in their food plate. When looking at what they ate previously, it is apparent that nutrition was important to them, and their diets were a mix of vegetables, fruits,

proteins, pulses and carbohydrates. Many said they would like to grow their own food but were unable to do so given space limitations.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

In every household interviewed, it was women who did all the cooking for the household. Across all households, around 1.5 - 3 hours a day was spent on cooking. All households ate three meals, but cooked only two and some cooked only once and had it for two meals. Those who woke up early and cooked breakfast made enough to last for lunch as well, or those who had a light breakfast would cook a larger lunch that would stretch to dinner as well. Households with a lower income also mentioned that some days they did not have three meals as they could not afford it and had cut back on the number of meals, while households with more means said that while they have not cut back on the number of meals, they had cut back on the number of curries or quantity of food given the cost of living. Fresh fruit and vegetables, along with fish and other proteins were the first to be sacrificed. Every household said that they ate all three meals properly prior to COVID-19, and the changes in their diet had taken place slowly since.

Food that is cooked was cooked for all members of the house. However in some households where there would be a diabetic, chronic illness or a child with particular food preferences, we see different food being cooked in order to accommodate their particular dietary requirements.

At the time of the interviews, every household commented on the prevailing gas cylinder issue - safety, affordability and availability. Many had made the switch to kerosene, or were stacking with multiple cooking fuel options - gas, kerosene, firewood, electric (rice cookers). Those who were using electrical appliances for cooking also noted that their electricity bill had increased, and interviews were conducted a few months before two significant electricity tariff hikes which subsequently saw household bills more than doubling for the same number of units consumed. In addition to the additional cost of stacking, women who used rice cookers also noted that their cooking time had significantly increased - some said up to 5 hours when previously it was 1.5 hours - as they could only cook one dish at a time. Interestingly, even while trying to save on cooking energy, most households still preferred not to store any uneaten food in the fridge. Some households had cut down on the number of meals they cooked a day in order save on cooking energy as well. Households interviewed in the high-rises noted that cooking with firewood was not an option for them due to the built environment even though that would have been a more convenient option for them.

None of the households that have school going children have access to a school meal programme, and also said that the school monitors the food brought by the children to school. Parents have been told not to send processed food, short eats, biscuits etc and only to send nutritious cooked food such as rice and curry or pulses.

## (1) Chandrika (Interviewed 07/12/21)

## PROFILE

Seevalipura is not Chandrika's hometown. Her hometown is in the Southern Province and she moved to Seevalipura when she got married, 24 years ago. She lives in her husband's home. They don't have deeds to the property, but they have a permit from the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA). Her vote is also registered to her home.

Currently four people live in her house – Chandrika (43), her husband (48), and her two sons (ages 16 and 11). Chandrika registered for social welfare (Samurdhi) during COVID-19 lockdown but didn't get it. She continued to state that those who get Samurdhi are those that have money, and the people who really need it don't get it. In her area, households with school-going kids don't get it, but houses with grown up "marrying – age" children get Samurdhi. They had been instructed to deposit money monthly in the book, because they ask for proof of that. Even though they are running their own business, if they ask for a loan to improve their business, they don't get it. She thinks the samurdhi scheme needs to be restructured. During COVID they only received LKR 5,000 from the Government once. They got a few dry rations that the head of their Community Development Council had received from donors, but apart from that they received nothing else.

When asked if it's difficult to pay back loans, Chandrika said that more than the loans for the shop, it's the loan they have taken for the three wheel that is difficult to pay. They have to pay LKR 13,000 monthly towards the loan repayment for it. In Chandrika's house, food is the biggest expense with about 50% of the monthly income going on food. Especially with the price of food going up and given that there are four people in the household, she finds that her biggest expenditure is on food. They also have a daily payment of 500 that they need to make to buy the merchandise, and the monthly payment for the vehicle loan as well. Chandrika has noted a decrease in their income since COVID. Given that before COVID they had more merchandise they were able to make more money, however after COVID as their merchandise has reduced they noticed a fall in their income. She plans to get more merchandise, however she needs more money in her hand before they are able to buy more. Chandrika's husband has diabetes, which he takes medicine for, when he feels unwell. He doesn't take the medicine regularly, only around twice a week.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Chandrika runs a home based business, for a living. Her husband drives a three wheeler and takes hires. They get their income on a daily basis. Chandrika noted that she takes loans from private individuals from a little outside Seevalipura and she spends that money on buying goods for the business. She has to pay for the goods daily based on what she buys. Chandrika and her husband usually take loans like this every two months. Their monthly household income is between LKR 71,000 - 80,000 Chandrika noted that there are times that their income can increase, which is dependent on what extra items (not

otherwise sold at the shop) they bring and sell.

Chandrika used to have grocery items such as rice etc. However, during COVID there weren't any places to buy merchandise from, and salesmen wouldn't come either, so it was difficult to buy items such as that. Udayagiri stores were open for a little while, however they were not always open so it was difficult to buy. Additionally, Chandrika noted that they had to think of their profit margins as well, if they were to buy and sell. Chandrika went on to state that they spent all the money they had in hand, during the first lockdown. As vehicles weren't able to run, her husband wasn't able to do hires from his three wheel. Additionally, they were unable to go and buy vegetables every day due to restrictions. She also highlighted that it's difficult when the money in hand is spent, because it makes it difficult for them to buy merchandise for their shop.

These days, given that the price of items are expensive, Chandrika knows the quantity of items she can bring that will be bought by customers. She often finds that she is able to sell out of that quantity by 1 or 2 pm in the afternoon. If there is an excess quantity, she is unable to sell it and given the perishable nature of vegetables, she will make a loss.

Chandrika doesn't also buy expensive items given that when she buys things that are priced high, most people will buy on credit. If she doesn't get the money in time, it is difficult to prepare money for the next day's purchase of merchandise. She finds that the cheaper items move faster. Additionally, even if those items are bought on credit, it is a small amount compared to more expensive items, so she is able to manage her cash flow. The increase in prices of grocery items has made it more difficult for Chandrika. So, if she buys a kilo and if there is an excess amount, she is unable to keep money prepared for the next day's purchase of merchandise. They keep a minimal profit margin on their produce so they are able to sell their goods within the day.

Chandrika and her husband buy items for the shop from the wholesale market. He will come back at around 6.00 am and after that he will usually run hires mostly in Colombo.

Whilst there are quite a few shops in Seevalipura, everything Chandrika brings to the shop, sells. She doesn't find that competition affects her business. She says it's because those that are used to shopping at her store, will continue to do so, and those who are used to going to the other store, will also continue to do so. It's mostly people that she knows that come to her shop. Sometimes she sells goods on credit. She admits it is difficult to sell, without selling on credit. Some will buy in the morning on credit, and pay at night because they pay from their daily earnings. She only sells on credit to people she knows, all of who are from Seevalipura.

Chandrika closes her shop at different times. If items are remaining she will keep it open until around 8-9pm as people come back from work and buy as well. However, if she sells everything before that she will close.

## GRID ACCESS

Chandrika has a metered electricity connection, and it was there before she arrived to Seevalipura, when her husband's parents were alive. She noted that many, if not all in her neighbourhood have a metered electricity connection. She also has a meter for water. She noted that the electricity supply is continuous and they don't often have an issue with power cuts. She noted that they had been told they would be cutting power in the coming week due to maintenance work. Chandrika said that would be good, because their bills will also be less if their electricity is cut off for a bit. If there is electricity, they have the lights and fans on, but if there isn't they will manage and stay. The mosquitoes are only a problem in the night. She also noted that she doesn't bring anything to the shop that has to be refrigerated so even if the power goes the food doesn't spoil.

Chandrika identifies that the fridge consumes a lot of electricity and as a result the electricity bill is high. However, as they need it to store fish and meat, it's difficult to live without it as well. Additionally, as it's an old fridge, it consumes more electricity.

In addition to the piped water that is available in their home, there are also two or three public wells in their immediate neighbourhood around their house. If there isn't any water in the pipes, they use the public well. It's also clean. Chandrika sometimes drinks water straight from the tap, but sometimes she boils as well.

Their toilet is connected to a pipe that takes the waste to a canal, and has been the case since before Chandrika moved to Seevalipura. She also noted that most of the houses have their waste go to the canal, and very few with a separate drainage pit. Chandrika even seemed to think that the houses in the inner parts of Seevalipura as well were connected to pipes that flowed to the canal.

When it rains continuously for about 2 or 3 days and the canal overflows, Chandrika experiences flooding in her home.

## FOOD PURCHASING

For her family's consumption, they purchase dry goods from Nayana stores because some things are cheaper there than other shops. With regard to vegetables, they use a portion of what is bought for the shop. If she wants a certain vegetable, she will make sure to buy it in bulk (2-3 kilos) and keep a little aside for her family's consumption. She buys fish from a cart seller, and there is a place near her house as well that sells. She finds the fish from the cart seller to be of a good quality, as it is bought fresh to be sold within the day. The cart seller is someone known to her, and she buys the fish early in the day, by about 8 am. The meat, however, doesn't come in a cart so she goes to a meat shop near the high rise buildings. Chandrika walks to the meat shop, usually during the day, but she sometimes goes at night as well to buy stuff to cook for the morning.

She buys grocery items for the house weekly, but sometimes she will buy daily as well, such as fish and meat. Once it is purchased, they keep it in the fridge until it is ready to be prepared.

Her spices are bought from a spice mill in Dematagoda. However, if they run out of certain spices, they will buy packets. Chandrika usually does the purchasing of the food items for the house, apart from the vegetables, that are bought by her husband.

Chandrika doesn't buy goods on credit, but has noted an increase in the prices of things compared to pre-COVID times. Although the prices have increased, often by 2-3 rupees each week for different items, Chandrika noted that they could not refrain from buying, especially when the children ask for certain items such as biscuits. The only alternative she sees is increasing the income by undertaking extra work, as they have to match the income to an increase in the price of goods.

Chandrika makes the buying decisions in the house, in terms of what vegetables to be bought. She tries to make food that is nutritious for her husband, and her children also eat that without fussing. Sometimes if the younger son doesn't like the food, she will make something separately and give. She also prepares food separately for the children to take to school. Her elder son doesn't eat fish at all, so she usually has to make something else.

Chandrika is unable to grow vegetables at home and she lacks the space.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Sometimes Chandrika cooks all three meals, and sometimes she brings dinner from outside. Some days when she cooks in the morning, they eat it for lunch too. On those days they bring dinner from outside such as string hoppers or pittu. Alternatively, if they buy breakfast from a shop outside, they will cook for lunch and dinner. She only cooks two meals and it takes her only about an hour and a half, and she cooks by herself. She usually makes food for four people (the four people in the house).

Chandrika noted that no one has advised her about nutrition and healthy eating habits. She went on to say that it is up to themselves to learn by themselves. Her children haven't been taught in school either.

Chandrika used to cook using the gas cooker, but now that gas is problematic (due to reliability as well the price increase) she has switched to a kerosene oil cooker that she had at home. Chandrika went on to state that during the day given that she is mostly alone at home, so she feels scared to use the gas cooker in case something happens. Chandrika says they will go back to gas after a while. However, everything is so expensive now, what money they have in hand, they have to be able to cover their expenses. Chandrika has been using gas cylinders for cooking for around 3-4 years now. Chandrika went on to elaborate that while some people say that using a kerosene stove changes the taste of the food, it doesn't. People complain because if you keep the food on the stove for a long time, the odour gets to it. Also, after turning on the cooker, you have to wait for a little while to start cooking, otherwise, it does change the taste a little. While the price of kerosene has gone up, Chandrika says that there is peace of mind compared to gas. She elaborated saying that if one house catches on fire, given that they live in a row of houses, the fire will spread to the neighbouring houses. Additionally, they don't have a



door at the back of the house, where the kitchen is, it's only a wall.

Chandrika's fridge is always on. She doesn't cook and store food in the fridge, as she cooks enough to finish within the day. She also doesn't switch it on and off, because it consumes more electricity when they do so.

For breakfast usually she will make a fish curry to eat with bread. Some days they will eat rice. For lunch, they usually have to have fish or meat to go with their meals as they have got used to that. They buy different types of fish to cook, whatever is available in the shop. In terms of prepared food, they buy fried rice from the shops. They refrain from eating roti because the husband has diabetes. However, if it is bought he will eat it, so they try to refrain from buying. They buy from shops on the other side of their settlement, near Sahaspura. On average, approximately 3-4 times a week they will get food from outside.

Although Chandrika's husband goes out on hires, he will always eat lunch from home, and he will always come back to have Chandrika's tea.

When asked for her opinion on the most nutritious meal, she said rice for breakfast or chickpeas. For lunch, it would have to be rice as there would be complaints from the members of her household saying the food is not filling enough. Hence, she cooks rice almost everyday, as they only like to eat rice, out of habit. With rice, Chandrika will prepare 2 types of vegetables, a fish, meat or eggs. They eat rice every day with two types of vegetables. They also buy fruit such as bananas, papaya and mangoes – however this is not bought everyday.

Both Chandrika's children go to a school in her neighbourhood, so they are able to walk to school. They usually take food from home for their meals. Some days she buys some buns from the shop for them, at other times she also cooks rice and gives them. However, as they don't like to eat rice and curry all the time, she will buy other things, such as buns. She noted that the school monitors the food that is brought for meal times until about Grade 5 (the age of ten), but the older they get the less the monitoring of meals happens. The school recommends what type of food to bring, which is nutritious such as chickpeas, mung beans, sweet potatoes, and they check to see what the children have brought. Chandrika says for her elder son it's alright as they don't check his food that much, but for her younger son she needs to prepare the food separately.

## COMMUNITY

When asked about what improvements she would like to see in their community, she said she would like a community centre. There is no place inside the community for children to study in peace or to do a class. If at all, they have to travel a bit far. There is a playground down the road, however it's a bit far, and if the children want to go, she usually goes and stays with them, otherwise she doesn't think they will be safe. Chandrika also noted that whilst she would like a common community facility, there are people who will claim ownership of these common things or will not like a common facility. Some people don't

like these things as they just prefer to mind their own business and wait. Each house is only 2 perches. But people with way bigger lands don't have this much desire and greed. People here fight a lot for these lands. Chandrika noted that even Pushpa (head of their CDC) wanted to build a community centre where there's a bit of space, But the people in the community didn't like that. People living near the place claim ownership, however those belong to the town council. Back in the day, houses didn't have toilets, only public toilets in several places. Those have now been claimed by people who lived close to the facility as well. For example, the last public toilet was demolished saying they were going to keep a statue of Lord Buddha, however they haven't fixed anything there. Chandrika highlighted that it could have been used for something that benefited everyone. Given that children of Seevalipura will continue to live here, Chandrika thinks that the community should develop the infrastructure for future generations.

For people on the opposite side of the canal, their houses usually flood because the drainage system does not work properly. Chandrika noted that even their house is prone to flooding. Given that the waste from the Prison flows into the canal, there is a bad odour. This happens daily – at least once or twice a day. Whilst they have informed so many people about this issue they are facing, no one has been able to rectify it. They don't have flies coming to the canal, however the odour is very bad.

## (2) Rukmani (Interviewed 17/12/21)

## PROFILE

Rukmani was born in the Central Province, but she has lived in Colombo all her life (since she was born). She is 55 years old. She has partitioned her house – her daughter lives separately with her child in one area (her daughter's husband lives separately). Rukmani, her husband and their son's child (age 7) live in the other portion of the house. She is registered to vote from this house. Her grandson goes to school.

Rukmani noted that no one in her home has a permanent job. Her daughter works as a tea lady. She was without work for some time, but was called for a cleaning job, where she also makes tea. She used to work abroad for a little, during which time Rukmani looked after the granddaughter. She sent goods (furniture/electronics) during that time. Rukmani noted that now she can't afford to buy these things with her income. Rukmani's first husband disappeared – he was on drugs and went missing. Her second husband sells vegetables and spends it for the family. Her daughter also gives some money when she gets her salary. However, she usually cooks and eats separately. But since COVID she is not home most of the time, so Rukmani feeds her grandchild. Rukmani also gives food for her son, as he doesn't have a wife. Rukmani bears the expenses for both of the houses, the child's schooling, she provides all three meals to her son etc.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her husband goes at 2.30 am to the Pettah wholesale market and to the Peliyagoda Market. He brings the merchandise from there. He travels using someone else's three wheeler, where he pays LKR 800 for the hire. He then brings the goods back and sells them in the cart (they have a vegetable cart). He loads the cart with the goods and travels for about 25 km. He often finishes and returns home by 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Some days, there's an excess of vegetables. Rukmani noted that especially these days, there is not much business as vegetables have become so expensive and people cannot afford to buy.

Unlike the shops in her neighbourhood that bring vegetables in bulk (wholesale), Rukmani's husband brings about 3-4 kilos of all kinds of vegetables and sells those. He usually sells to Bungalows in Colombo. At night, the cart is parked outside their house. Her husband usually earns about LKR 1500- 2000 daily if the business is good. He works all days of the week, except on poya days (holidays) as the markets are closed.

If her son goes to work, he will contribute about LKR 500 for a day. Whilst he doesn't do drugs, he likes to drink beer – and Rukmani doesn't object to it, for fear he might get addicted to other things. He will usually come home, drink a beer and mind his own business. Rukmani noted that he must be feeling sad, as his wife left him and their son. They also have another child together, an elder

daughter, who she took with her when she left. Rukmani now looks after the grandson that was left behind. Her son doesn't have a proper job, he goes when he is called for work.

Rukmani's daughter makes tea in a place in Colombo, and earns a monthly salary of LKR 25,000. She spends that money for herself and her child. Her child is currently in Grade 11, so she has to spend for her child's needs. Sometimes, when Rukmani is cooking something, her daughter would say, "Amma (mother) take this 500 and cook for us also'. She buys and brings goods for the month when she gets paid. Rukmani, on the other hand, buys food daily from the shop, as she would need a big salary to buy for the entire month. She takes the vegetables from her husband, and buys the remaining items such as rice, fish, coconut etc from the shop near the bo tree in their neighbourhood. She chooses her shop based on the price of the items – she goes to where it is said to be the cheapest. As items such as fish etc, vary in prices at different shops. Items such as rice, she buys from reputed places.

The biggest expenditure Rukmani faces is on purchasing food. The rice costs her about LKR 250 a kilo.

They have no other way of earning an income. Her daughter has registered for Samurdhi. Although the daughter lives separately it still goes as the same address – however, two people cannot be registered for Samurdhi from the same household. Her daughter in law was also registered for it. The son has an address, but then her daughter in law left after the Samurdhi forms were filled. After that Rukmani tried to get it under her name, but was told she couldn't for this house number.

Rukmani takes loans from a , where they have to form a team of 2-3 to be able to take a loan. They have previously taken a loan of LKR. 50,000 to repair their cart, and they pay it back from what they earn. They have to pay back about LKR 1000 a week on the loan.

Rukmani's husband usually earns about LKR 50,000 a month. However, sometimes when he gets sick he doesn't go to work for about 3 or 4 days. Recently, he received the COVID-19 vaccine and fell sick afterwards, and was at home for 3 days. When he is unable to work, they don't get the income from the business, and have to take from the LKR 20,000 that is kept separately to buy vegetables. Rukmani's husband buys a variety of vegetables, not just one type. Carrots, beans, potatoes, cabbage... about 10 or 15 vegetables. He used to buy 4 or 5 kilos each, however, these days, he only 2 or 3 kilos are bought because vegetables have become more expensive.

## GRID ACCESS

Rukmani received an electricity connection in 2004-2005. At that time, it was just Rukmani and her children, who weren't married then. She was doing a cleaning job, and she was able to slowly save the money that was required to get electricity. She built a portion of her house, as it said that a cement structure was needed to get electricity. She didn't get a water connection at the time. She pays LKR 50 per month for the water pipe. The neighbour in the house in front of Rukmani's house had applied for water. Because she

needed water for the toilets, she got the water board to give the supply to that pipe. Many of those who don't have the water supply in the area use that pipe. They get their fill of water and do the laundry. The whole row of houses neighbouring Rukmani's house don't have water (2-3 houses). They all use the pipe adjacent to the public toilet, which gets a bill of around LKR 700-800. They each contribute LKR 50 monthly to pay the bill. Her daughter handles the payments – she has the book, collects the money and pays the bill.

Rukmani and her family applied for a water line, however they have been told that their houses will be demolished soon, and they would need to pay a fee of LKR 25,000 to get a water connection. Given that they might lose their house soon, they didn't want to spend on a water connection. They usually take buckets of water from the water pipe for cooking.

They collect LKR 50 each and if there is an excess they keep the rest to buy the toilet brush, cleaning products etc. Sometimes when the gully overflows, someone from the municipality comes to empty the gully 3 or 4 times. The excess money that was collected will be given to them. This is the only pipe in the area, Rukmani claims, where the bill is paid collectively. Sometimes people from the road will also use the tap and not pay for it, but there is nothing they can do about this. They don't usually face any disruptions in water supply, and if they do, it's usually due to planned maintenance that is being undertaken. They are also able to drink the water from the tap there. There are two taps – one for bathing, and one for drinking water.

The bill comes to Rukmani's address, but it is in the name of the front house neighbour. They used to do the bill payments, however, there was a funeral, their mother-in-law died and they went to live in her house after the funeral. Now it's Rukmani's daughter who does the collection. However, the bill is still in his name.

Rukmani noted that after heavy rains, the drains usually overflow and her area is subject to flooding. As a result, they have kept most of their things elevated as it often floods. When the interview was conducted, it had flooded twice for the year.

Rukmani noted that her electricity bill comes to about LKR 4,000 a month, given that her daughter and son both use electricity and it is the same connection used by all. Her daughter contributes to the electricity bill, approximately LKR 1500 - 2000 a month. There is only one fridge in the house (used by Rukmani), but it consumes electricity. They didn't pay their bill during COVID and now they have arrears to pay. The month before last, Rukmani pawned a piece of gold jewellery and paid LKR 15,000. She noted if she doesn't pay, the connection will be suspended. This was the first time for the year she had to pawn something to pay a bill.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Rukmani usually shops from a nearby shop– she usually buys her dry goods from there. She claims it has everything, even dried fish. She gets her vegetables from her husband. Rukmani said that sometimes in the morning if there are no vegetables her husband will give some before going to sell – around one or two to make a mallung, perhaps. However, if there are excess vegetables in the evening, they will take some and keep.

Rukmani's family mostly eat fish. They usually buy this from a fish stall near the railway.. They can't afford to eat Thalapath fish anymore as its price has increased. She noted that it costs LKR 800. Even chicken is LKR 820 for 500g. Sometimes (not often) she will cook chicken for the children because she feels bad. She can't afford to buy a whole kilo so she will buy about 750g.

When she considers what she buys often, Rukmani said that she buys 1.25Kg of rice – as they have rice for lunch, and her husband, son and herself will have the remaining rice for dinner. The others don't eat rice. They make Kottu Me [instant noodles] or something similar, and eat. Their grandson is given String Hoppers or Pittu [flour-based food items] for dinner as he doesn't eat rice for dinner after eating it for lunch. Rukmani requires about 500g of lentils for 2 meals and 500g of fish. On the day of the interview, Rukmani had bought 500g of Linna [a type of fish] for LKR 240. She paid LKR 105 for a coconut and LKR 240 for half a bottle of coconut oil. When she has a bit of extra cash in hand she says she buys chilli powder and other spices (100g each) and keeps them stocked. They are not bought frequently. Turmeric, curry powder and other spices she will buy beforehand and keep a bit extra at home. If she knows it's running out, she will buy more and keep. Packets of salt too, she buys 3 and keeps them when she has money. You can buy 3 for LKR 100, and she buys this from whichever place is the cheapest.

Rukmani noted that there are times where she will have to buy goods on credit – for example, if she is short of money when she goes to the shop, she will give what she has and will pay the rest the next day. She likes to try and limit her purchases to how much money she has in hand, as she doesn't want to get into debt. She usually buys fish, rice, coconut, spices, grains and dry fish. Things like curry powder she keeps stocked, the vegetables are from her husband.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Rukmani usually has about 2 curries a day – usually two vegetables and a fish. Sometimes she will cook chilli-fish curry, pumpkin and a mallung. As she and her husband have diabetes, cholesterol, pressure etc, they have been told by the hospital to eat mallung, so they mostly eat leafy greens and bitter gourd etc.

In the mornings sometimes she will make some Kiribath [Coconut Milk Rice] and eat. Some days, she will make an Onion Sambol and bring bread from the shop. These days, there's no gas available in the market. Rukmani noted that they are also scared to buy gas. Because they are scared to buy gas, owing to recent reports of exploding gas cylinders due to composition changes, Rukmani cooks the rice and also the curries in the

rice cooker. Rukmani said that she was expecting the electricity bill to be very high as a result. She further elaborated that even if they have the money, they are scared to buy because it can explode. She also looked for a kerosene oil cooker, but could not find one for a cheap price. Rukmani's husband had told her that they should get a clay stove soon – they have space at the back of the house where they can arrange it to cook. They used to have a wooden stove, but because the inside of the house and clothes turn black for the fumes, they got rid of the wooden stove and started using a kerosene oil cooker, around 2010/2011. Rukmani's daughter brought a gas cooker from abroad in 2012, so they got gas and started cooking with it. However, now, they have put away the gas.

Rukmani cooks once a day. What she cooks for lunch, it will be eaten again for dinner. She and her husband prefer rice over bread, as does her son. However, they will bring something like pittu from outside, for their grandson. Cooking used to only take her two hours to prepare food. However, since they have moved away from gas, Rukmani noted that it is now taking her more time to cook as she is cooking all her dishes in the rice cooker. Once she cooks rice in the rice cooker, she will have to transfer the rice to a saucepan, wash the rice cooker and then use it again to cook a vegetable curry or two. She said they couldn't eat properly in the last few days because they didn't have gas.

They will usually eat bread in the morning. They don't usually buy food from outside. For example, the day before the interview was conducted, for lunch they had bread and dhal curry. There was leftover dhal for dinner, so they made some rice and had it with some onion sambol.

Rukmani's husband leaves for work at 6.30am, and he will usually get some hopppers for breakfast from the shop. He will have about 4-5 hopppers, come home, drink tea, light the lamp for the morning and loads the vegetables in his cart and then leaves. Sometimes he will bring hopppers for Rukmani too. There is a kanji shop that he will pass in the morning, where he will drink some kanji at around 8 or 9 in the morning. He will usually eat lunch after coming home, even if its 4 or 5 in the evening.

For her grandson, when she had gas she would make some rice with an egg, some carrots and leeks and prepare a meal separately for him to take in the morning. Rukmani said they don't allow the children to bring biscuits – as the teachers will scold them if they bring biscuits or bread etc. Rukmani noted that her grandson says, "Aachchi [grandma] please don't pack bread or buns for me. The teacher will hit. We have been told not to bring those". One day she packed biscuits and bananas without knowing about this, and he had been scolded because the other children brought rice. From that day onwards, she has been sending rice, cowpea or chickpea from the shop.

For herself and her husband, Rukmani will stir fry dried fish and cook dhal, manioc, and prepare a Mallung and eat. Some days, she will cook beans, fish in coconut milk, stir-fried water spinach and eat. On other days she will cook chilli fish curry, pumpkin and prepare a Mallung. Some days she will cook bitter gourd, fish in coconut milk, and prepare a

Mallung, with a little bit of carrot for the little one - because he won't eat bitter gourd or fish. He will boil an egg and eat, but doesn't like to eat fish or meat. He would eat a fried egg, but doesn't eat the yolk – he will only eat if the egg is beaten and fried. If her grandson hasn't had rice for lunch, she will give him rice for dinner. But if he has eaten rice for lunch – he will eat other things.

Rukmani has high sugar, so she takes medicine from the general hospital for that, for which the sugar level normalises. They checked her reports and referred her to the local dispensary. The community centre has one, to which she was transferred. Her husband also buys from outside. He didn't previously have a high sugar level. However he took part in a blood donating programme in the university. When they had checked his pressure prior to donating blood, they had said it was high. So he couldn't donate blood. Rukmani noted that he always donated blood to a blood donation campaign – however this was the first time that his blood pressure was high. Rukmani noted that it could have been because he climbed the stairs and got tired. So, he was told to sit aside and to come back in 10 or 15 minutes. When they checked again, it [the pressure] had not come down. The doctor had checked and told him that he has high blood pressure and to go and get cholesterol and other things checked. There's a place here that performs blood tests near the community centre. LKR 150 for sugar and LKR 750 for cholesterol, so he went and got it tested there. He had pressure and sugar. The pressure was high, and the cholesterol went up too. He took all those reports and went to the dispensary. The doctor checked them and referred him to the clinic, and he gets all the medicine from there now. Now his sugar level has gone down because he doesn't eat a lot. Hence, Rukmani is now careful with their food and drinks. The pressure tablet and the cholesterol tablet is compulsory for him to take at night. Rukmani takes cholesterol tablets at night. The sugar tablet and pressure tablet are a must for her in the morning.

Because Rukmani doesn't have a gas cylinder anymore, if the cooked food is leftover, she throws it away as there is no way to reheat it after taking it from the fridge. The fridge is usually kept on, and the child's food is usually kept there – such as mango or guava as he likes to eat those. Her grandson likes to eat a lot of fruit, so the fruit that is bought is usually kept in the fridge. If there are vegetables remaining, those will also be stored in the fridge for an emergency, because on the days her husband is unable to go trading they won't have any vegetables otherwise. Items such as tomatoes they keep, as they are very expensive now. If Rukmani buys fish or chicken, she won't store it in the fridge – but will cook it as soon as it's bought.

Rukmani noted that they don't eat much flour based food because of their high sugar content. Once in a while they will make roti for dinner.

Rukmani feeds some street cats. For them, she will buy ribbon fish from a three-wheeler vendor who sells ribbon fish for LKR 100. 4 – 5 street cats come to her home during mealtimes, and one of them they keep at home. For them, Rukmani will put some rice in a saucepan, wash it well, and wash the ribbon fish, add some turmeric, curry powder, salt and boil the rice. Then she will mix it well and give them to eat by 1.30 or 2. She noted



she feels bad to eat when the animals watch her hungry, so she makes for them as well.

Rukmani noted that they were given advice from the general hospital about nutrition – when they go on their monthly clinic to the general hospital a nurse will talk to them about diet, what to eat, how to eat and will advise about quantities. However, this too hasn't been happening properly for a year or two (since covid). They check reports from a distance. She got a fever after getting the vaccine, and when she went to the dispensary to get medicine, she had to stay at a distance – even the details were read out from far away.

In Rukmani's opinion, manioc is a nutritious food. She avoids sweet potatoes because of the sugar. She eats manioc, and boils chickpeas and eats.

During COVID they got a LKR 2000 from the government. They were asked to send an SMS to a particular number, and told to come to a certain place and given a bag of food. It contained two packets of chickpea, soya meat, lentils, rice, sugar, noodles etc. Rukmani said that when they get aid like that, they will make those items, the chickpea etc, and eat. But they don't buy chickpeas. When they get it as aid, they don't throw it away. They make it and eat for breakfast. They keep it to soak during the night and boil in the morning and eat, after tempering it.

When asked to think of a nutritious meal without worrying about the price/cost of it, Rukmani said, she would have a vegetable fried rice, chicken, some potatoes for the children, fried papadam. She noted that there were times that they eat like that as well. Sometimes she will make some dunthel rice with some meat and eat at least once a week. Sometimes she will make a coconut sambol, fry some fish - Ribbon Fish, fry some chillies and eat. With dhal curry as well. On poya they avoid fish but will have items like yellow rice, vegetables, and soya meat and eat – a vegetarian meal.

## COMMUNITY

In the past, Rukmani noted that she got help from the community. Her parent's begged on the road and earned money to raise their children. She was not sent to school. When she got married, she married a drug addict. It was the head of the CDC who introduced her to some programmes that were conducted at nearby school such as soup making events, health events, sewing courses. Thripasha Kanji was served to the children. Specialist doctors from the Children's Hospital visited to do programmes for the children - at the school. Everything was done through UNESCO those days.

When Rukmani applied for electricity, no one was there to help them. They applied with the relevant documentation and had to pay LKR 10,000 or 15,000.

The land she is currently residing in belongs to the NHDA. Rukmani said that the area has changed a lot. Back in the day, there were mostly shacks. Rukmani considers her house to still be a shack as they don't have money to build a house. Although her daughter works, she doesn't get a big salary. What she sent from abroad was spent on school and food for

her child. She borrowed money to go abroad and had to repay that. She bought some gold jewellery, saved LKR 400,000 or 500,000 in the bank book, and that was all. Rukmani said you can't do a lot by going abroad. She sent money to buy a TV in instalments. She sent money for a sofa set and a sink. She has said to buy it from Sri Lanka, so they bought it from here itself, from Singer. Rukmani also continued to say they are poor by birth. It is only now that they are able to sleep on a bed with a fan on, previously they couldn't. They didn't have clothes, there was a time they slept on cardboard and sacks, and didn't have electricity and a pipe. There was a well right in front of them. Now, they are able to have certain things because her daughter went abroad. Additionally, it was only after Rukmani met her second husband, that they can live like this, as her previous husband used to be on drugs. She never wore earrings, and barely had clothes to wear.

### (3) Seetha (Interviewed 17/12/21)

#### PROFILE

Seetha has been living in Seevalipura for 28 years. Four people live in the household – herself, four children, her husband and her mother. Her eldest son is 24, the second child (daughter) is 18, her third child (daughter) is 12 and her youngest is 7. The youngest two children go to school nearby.

No one has any non communicable diseases in Seetha's house. Seetha's mother, and her daughter do most of the housework. Seetha is unable to as she has a problem with her hand. Even her clothes are washed by her mother, or daughter. She noted that many women in Seevalipura take on jobs and noted that even 99% of the shops in Seevalipura are run by women.

#### LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

In her family, her husband and son work. Her son receives a monthly salary from working as a machine operator, but her husband gets his salary daily as he is a labourer. Previously he was doing business in a cart, however during COVID it was removed. There is no other income generated for the household. Sometimes Seetha's mother will contribute monthly when she gets her pension. For the month, her husband will earn about LKR 1200 – 1300 a day, her son will give her LKR 20,000 and her mother will contribute LKR. 10,000. Roughly the monthly income of Seetha's household is about LKR 54,000. Seetha noted that approximately half of it goes for schooling. Seetha doesn't take loans. However, she takes money from the people in the community who give out loans on interest. She doesn't like to take from organisations. The main items of expenditure in their house is food, schooling, the son's transport by bus to work. She does not get samurdhi.

#### GRID ACCESS

Seetha does not have an electricity connection and uses other people's connections to charge phones.

They used to have access to water, but this has been disconnected due to non-payment of arrears. She noted that this was the first time it happened, perhaps because of the accumulation that happened during COVID. During that time, her son was also diagnosed with dengue, and her mother and husband were also unwell. Currently, they get water for drinking purposes from their neighbours in front of the house, and go to the well for bathing etc. Their neighbours have a piped water connection – and have told Seetha to use their water to drink. Seetha also uses the public well. She said of about 1000 people, 800 will use it to either bathe or wash clothes. It is often used by people who have piped water connections, because they don't want it adding to their bill.

They don't have toilet facilities at home – they use the publicly available ones. The public toilet was there when Seetha first moved to Seevalipura.

Seetha noted that her house floods when there are heavy rains and the canal overflows. In 2021, while their house didn't flood, the water had come very close to their house.

When asked what improvements Seetha would like to see in terms of infrastructure, she said that the water and toilet facilities are what people need the most. Seetha said that nobody has enough income to build their house properly, and that is why they are faced with limited infrastructure. Seetha has an NHDA card to prove her ownership of the house.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Seetha buys her groceries from Seevalipura – the dry goods she buys from different shops within Seevalipura. They don't eat many vegetables because Seetha finds them to be expensive, and they don't have enough money for that. However, they eat lentils a lot. She buys her vegetables from cart sellers coming to Seevalipura, or some vegetable shops within. Seetha also buys fish from cart sellers that come to Seevalipura, and meat from a house in Seevalipura that sells meat.

Seetha's eldest daughter usually does the grocery shopping for the house on a daily basis. Seetha said they don't buy on credit. Since COVID she noted that the prices of grocery items have increased but she buys the same groceries. If they are unable to buy groceries, they stay at home hungry. Seetha continued to say that there have been uncountable times recently where they haven't had money to buy groceries – approximately 80% of the time. She also noted that they don't grow vegetables because she doesn't have the space for it. Seetha said that the quality of the vegetables she buys are good, as they are brought daily to Seevalipura, fresh. Seetha also buys her spices from Seevalipura. She doesn't have a particular shop that she goes to.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Seetha doesn't have any special dietary requirements in her household. When asked about how many meals she eats a day, Seetha said, sometimes she eats 3 meals, sometimes 2, sometimes 1 – there are some days that they don't even eat. Most of the time, they only eat one meal. Some days, no breakfast and lunch but they have dinner. Some days, no dinner and lunch but they have breakfast. They don't like when their son eats from out, but he gets lunch from the workplace. They usually cook one meal a day – which is lunch. If there is leftover food they have it for dinner, if there is leftover gravy they will bring bread to eat with it. Seetha will usually cook lentils, one type of vegetable and either fish or dry fish.

If Seetha buys food from outside, it's usually either string hoppers or bread. They usually have rice at lunch time, and will buy bread to eat with leftover gravy. Seetha noted that she has to give her children biscuits every day when they are drinking tea. One of her children is very fussy, and has to have a biscuit – but the others are not as fussy.

It's mostly Seetha's mother who does the cooking for the household. Seetha has noticed that as her children grow older, the amount of food they consume has also increased. It

takes Seetha's mother an hour to prepare/cook the food for the household.

Seetha uses gas for cooking and has been using gas for the past two years. Prior to using gas she used to use firewood but found it difficult to cook for so many people with that. The firewood you can buy for LKR 10 from the shop. Seetha noted that she is now anxious to use gas as well due to the prevailing situation. She also noted that she was without gas for about a month, during which time, they ate from the shop. It takes her about an hour to cook. Once the food has been cooked, they keep the food covered on the stove, and they will reheat the leftovers and take them. If there is anything leftover after dinner, they will throw that away.

Seetha noted that no one has advised her on nutrition. Her opinion on a nutritious meal is rice. She also said they eat dry fish such as sprats, and if they have enough money they will have fish. If she didn't have constraints around money, her ideal meal would consist of fish, rice and vegetables.

Previously, some mothers would send a meal for the day for the whole class, things like cowpea. Everyday the responsibility fell onto one mother. The menu is given by the teacher and they have to prepare the food according to that, on the day stipulated by the teacher. The school knows about Seetha's financial situation so they don't keep track of her children's nutrition. She usually sends them food from the shop such as Maggi, noodles, rice or kiribath.

## COMMUNITY

Seetha said that she doesn't have a relationship with the community development council. She wishes she could leverage that to get electricity so her children don't have to work in the morning before school, and can work in the evening. Seetha identified that she hasn't seen much change in Seevalipura over the last two years.

#### (4) Nelun (Interviewed 11/02/22)

##### PROFILE

Nelun and her husband moved to Seevalipura after they got married 32 years ago. They used to live beside the railway track when UNESCO divided up the land they gave everyone 2 perches each. At that time, if there were too many people in a family, they were given 2 perches for free. This is where Nelun built her house and is now living. They were offered a deed but they didn't take it. They received letters notifying them to collect the deed, which asked them to pay LKR 150,000 for it. They didn't have money at the time, so they didn't get it. They couldn't enrol their son in a better school because they didn't have a deed. They had to put him in a school nearby. Nelun hasn't got a card from the NHDA. They have an approved plan and letters, but that is all. Her vote is also registered to the house.

Nelun has a husband and two children. One child got married and has two children – who also live with her, while her other son got married and left. The total number of people in the house is 6. Nelun and her husband are 62 years old, her elder son is 32, and his wife is 30 – their children are five years and three months. Her other son is married and lives in Gampaha – he is 25 years old. Her grandson goes to a nearby government school, and is in Grade 1. They tried to put him in more popular government schools but they were unable to because they had an issue with the house deed.

Nelun and her husband both have diabetes – and they both take medicine for it. They are also careful with what they eat, as a result.

##### LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Only Nelun's husband has a proper job. Her elder son earns irregularly through a home-based livelihood. Nelun's husband does contract work. He gets paid for the amount of work he does – if gets a contract they are able to live off the money he makes. It works well when he works continuously, however, they find it difficult when he is out of work, such as during the initial COVID period. For two years during COVID he didn't go to work, as people were scared to give work. Nelun says that during this time they suffered a lot. They haven't taken out any loans, and they don't owe anyone. Nelun noted that their expenditure for the month is about LKR 50,000 – 60,000 and their income is about the same, around LKR 60,000 on average. Their income fluctuates based on how much work her husband gets, the more work he gets, the higher their salary will be.

Her main expenditure for the month is on food. Now that her children have grown up, her spending patterns have change – she used to spend money on children's schooling. Now she spends mostly on food. Her youngest grandson is still small, so as he gets older they will need to spend more on school and tuition. They currently don't get social protection.

## GRID ACCESS

When Nelun first moved to Seevalipura, they didn't have electricity. However, once they paid for the connection, the board gave them an electricity connection straight away. They were also able to get a water connection. They were also charged a land rent – assessment tax.

They currently have a pit for their toilet. When it gets full, they get the sewage truck to come and drain it. They don't use the public wells, rather they use their own taps. Nelun drinks directly from the tap, but for her grandchildren she will boil and give. She says there are no issues with the water.

Nelun said that her house doesn't flood because it's on slightly elevated ground, so the flood water never reaches her home. Nelun also noted that they don't have power cuts. However, they sometimes face water cuts. She also elaborated that she doesn't face a problem with the water pressure, although once in a way she notices that there is sometimes less water.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Nelun buys her dry goods from Seevalipura, or goes to the junction and buys in bulk when she has money. She buys vegetables from the vegetable shop next door to her house. They also buy meat, fish and eggs from shops in Seevalipura. There is nothing in particular that determines which shops she shops at. She will usually buy her groceries monthly, but will buy her groceries daily when she doesn't have enough money. Vegetables she will anyway buy daily, as she doesn't buy and keep. What is bought will be consumed within the day. She noted that during COVID they bought food and kept for two or three weeks and the food spoiled. She buys her spices in packets – those packeted by companies. Her spending is linked to the income she gets.

Nelun noticed that in the last two years, the price of food has gone up and as a result they are buying less. They continue to buy what they used to, but in lesser quantities. She noted that the price of goods have gone up because of the current problems being faced in the country – she continued to say that she is anyway a staunch supporter of the current president "Gotabaya Sir".

Nelun chooses what grocery items to buy. Everyone in the family will eat the same food, however, they will make a portion that is less spicy for her grandson. Whilst she would like to grow her food at home, she is unable to due to lack of space.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Nelun cooks, and so does her daughter in law. In the morning they will make something small, and will cook properly for lunch, where they will make enough to have for dinner as well. For breakfast they will usually eat string hoppers and rice, although they mainly eat rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They used to use gas for cooking, but now they have put it aside and are using kerosene, because they are scared to use gas given the risk of

explosions and the presence of young children in their home. She also noted that they had a certain type of cooker that can explode. She continued to say that stoves with glass are prone to blowing up. Hence, they also wanted to buy a different cooker. Nelun highlighted that it takes much longer to cook with kerosene than with gas – it takes her about 4 to 5 hours. Additionally, there is soot. Sometimes if breakfast is taking a long to prepare, she will eat some biscuits and drink some milk. Comparatively, when they used to use gas, she was able to make the same meal in 1.5 hours.

Nelun has a fridge but she doesn't put vegetables in it. If there are leftover items such as a bit of coconut, and maybe some lime – she will keep in the fridge as it will spoil if kept outside. She will keep fish and meat in the fridge. She will not put cooked food in the fridge – they will get rid of it. Nelun noted that they don't buy food from the shops outside. If at all, they will buy some biscuits for her grandson. If she eats string hoppers for breakfast, she will make a coconut sambol or a dhal curry. For lunch, they will have a fish, two vegetables and a mallung. They require about 500g of vegetables to cook for a day. Sometimes they will skip the mallung as it takes time to prepare.

Nelun will sometimes buy fruits – usually, bananas. She usually buys from Borella junction as the quality is good, and it's not often that you get fruit in Seevalipura. However, when it's available in Seevalipura, she will buy it from here. For vegetables, she buys beans, carrots etc – she rotates which vegetables she buys. When asked for her opinion on a nutritious meal she said beans (they are good and green), pumpkin (yellow vegetables) and also eggplant varieties. Nelun drinks tea twice a day but refrains from putting sugar due to her high sugar. She also eats biscuits but items such as cream crackers. She has recently found out that cream crackers aren't good for her, and so she is reducing her quantity. When asked if anyone has advised her about nutrition she said no, but she knows what's good for sugar and what isn't. She uses Anlene for the tea, whereas the others will use Raththi.

When going to school her grandson takes noodles, macaroni and bread at times. She noted that the school monitors nutrition, and the teachers will make remarks. As he is still small and in grade 1, she said they don't actively say they are going to have days when they check the nutrition of the food. She also sends water with her grandson to school.

During COVID, Nelun noted that they didn't eat less, but they chose to buy different things. However, they did eat less vegetables as things became very pricey. She noted that vegetables are still expensive, and the prices during COVID are comparatively better than the prices we have now.

Nelun has been using her fridge for the past 15-20 years. She bought her kerosene oil cooker from Lady J. She noted it was expensive and cost her LKR 5,200 – there used to be a time where it was 500. They bought it when the gas cooker started exploding.



## (5) Rangika (Interviewed 24/11/21)

## PROFILE

There are four members in Rangika's family. Herself, her husband and two sons. She is 48 years old, her two children are 16 and 12.

Seevalipura is not Rangika's hometown, this is where her husband used to reside – she moved to Seevalipura in 2004 when she married him. His hometown is on the Southern Coast of the country.. Her husband is 49 and he has lived in Seevalipura all his life. His parents also lived in Seevalipura. When Rangika's husband's family moved to seeevalipura the house they are currently living in was not there, rather, it was a clay house with a thatched roof. However, by the time Rangika moved in 2004, the house was already built. After she moved in, they did some renovations to the property, such as plastering the kitchen, building the washrooms and building a second storey. Rangika's house has two stories, the ground floor has the living room, kitchen, washroom and a bedroom. The upstairs part of her house has a bedroom and a living room.

The house is occupied by her family – her husband and two sons. Previously, her husband's parents used to live here, in the downstairs portion of the house, but they have since passed away. The house they are living in is provided by the NHDA, and they have a household card to prove their ownership. Both Rangika and her husband have their votes registered to this house. Rangika noted that she registered to vote from her current house so as to be able to enrol her children in a neighbouring school. However, now, she is using the registration of her vote to the house to claim ownership of the house in the event they are asked to relocate. There is also a legal dispute over their house. Her sister-in-law (Husband's sister) has registered Rangika's address as hers on the voting register, claiming that she lives downstairs, however she lives approximately 20 KM away. She registered the vote to their house to be able to enrol her children in school, however, she is now using it to claim ownership. This was taken to court, however, court told them not to fight and reconcile. Now, because (part) ownership was given, they don't come to the house anymore. Given that the house is two stories, two houses can be allocated to them if they are asked to resettle. However, given that its one staircase, washroom and electricity bill, rather than two separate entities, it is unclear whether Rangika's sister-in-law will challenge that and get ownership of the property so that they can be eligible for compensation/resettlement property.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Rangika doesn't work anymore, although she used to work in the Government Service for 5 years. After her husband started working abroad, she resigned to take care of her children. His work has not previously taken him away from Sri Lanka for too long, but this is the first time that he would have gone for six months. This is only the second time he would have gone. Sometimes, when he calls there isn't much signal for him to have a conversation with Rangika, however when he gets cellular signal he will call her for a quick conversation.

Rangika's husband's salary is paid monthly, and he sends the salary to his wife on a monthly basis. She doesn't have another way of getting an income and only relies on her husband's salary. Rangika has taken an advance (loan) from the women's bank and she pays it weekly. Her weekly payments amount to approximately LKR 500. Rangika has also taken a loan of LKR 350,000, which she took to build the upstairs portion of her house. She took this from the Women's Bank that gives out loans, where she is also a member. From this bank you can get loans up to LKR 1.5 million if you are buying a new house however, you have to show proof. If you are getting the loan to build, they will check your assets and the assets of your family. They will visit and consider the amount requested and approve it. Monthly, they pay LKR 500 out of LKR 1000. They have previously paid extra and given this, they are able to get loans fast. 1.50 per month is the amount for a 100. Rangika took the LKR 350,000 loan in 2020, and also took a loan for LKR 300,000 in 2019. She is currently still paying for both loans.

Rangika's family income for a month is LKR 250,000. This is obtained by her husband from his work. Rangika noted that the salary for the family does not increase at different times of the year. They are always able to pay their bills and loans on time. Rangika does the main shopping for the household. She spends 25% of the family's income on bills and Women's Bank loans, 25% on food, 25% on bills including children's tuition fees as well. The other 50% she saves at a variety of banks including the women's bank.

Before COVID, Rangika's husband went for a job for 3 months and did a course too. However, he had to stop because he had to travel which was difficult during COVID. He was asked to come to work and stay and not to go to work if he was going to return home. So, he decided to stay at home and continue with his course, rather than going to work. Over a period of 4 months, they had to manage with the money they had previously saved. Rangika noted that this month (when the interview was conducted) will also be the same, where she might have to dig into her savings. Rangika noted that they couldn't spend how they usually used to. Whatever they earned/received was spent on loan repayments, food and bills.

During COVID, Rangika was working in the Government Service and was getting paid, but her husband didn't have a job. Because there was no school, they weren't too affected. They were able to pay their bills and manage the rest of their expenditure.

In their household, they don't have any individuals with medical problems, apart from her husband who has cholesterol which came up in the medical report he had to undertake.

#### GRID ACCESS

When Rangika first moved into the house, the electricity was already available. They currently have a metered connection too. The power rarely gets disrupted in her area, and she thinks it is because the maternity clinic is close by. However, she recently experienced a power cut at midnight that was only restored the next day – but that was because lighting had struck something. She also doesn't face a diminished supply.

Rangika also has a metered water line, where the pressure is good early in the morning. However, as all the houses in the neighbourhood wake up at around 6, the water pressure reduces thereafter. She doesn't drink water directly from the tap, but rather puts it in a filter. She has noticed that rust collects even in the filter, and it needs to be cleaned daily. She has tied a cloth onto the tap as well to reduce the rust. However, rust collects in the cloth as well. She used to boil water and give it to her son, but she noticed rust collecting at the bottom of the cup, and that's why she decided to get the filter. However, if she doesn't wash the filter daily, the rust collects to the point that water won't filter through. She uses water for cooking from the filter as well. If at all, for cooking purposes, the only water she will take from the tap is for washing the rice prior to cooking. She doesn't use any public taps – before she moved, her husband's sister used to use it but not anymore.

They had a bathroom that was built before she moved to Seevalipura. They have a sewage pit of their own. Rangika noted that they are the only house with a sewage pit, and it would be good if every house has one. She also identified that when the drains overflow, there are water surges in the bathrooms in the neighbourhood.

Their house doesn't flood when it rains. However, she highlighted that households have to be responsible for hygiene. Rangika and her son both got dengue due to drains being full and polluted. When she and her son contracted it, they had to both be admitted to hospital – which meant her son couldn't go to school, and her husband couldn't go to work as he had to come and visit them in hospital. She said it wasn't in her purview to tell her neighbours how to keep their house, each person must be responsible for their house. Rangika also said that no one will listen if she says, but if someone from outside gives advice, they might be more receptive. She said no one has come to raise awareness in the neighbourhood about cleanliness, hygiene and associated diseases. In the past they have come and advised about the dengue virus, but they haven't come in a long time. They only spray smoke (de-fogging) but that's it. Even the house in front, Rangika notes, is very unhygienic, and as a result their child is constantly getting in, and being admitted to hospital.

She washes her clothes in the washing machine once every two days. But because the husband isn't here, there isn't a lot to wash. When the schools were shut as well, due to COVID, there wasn't much washing to do. She used to wash by hand and put them in the dryer. However, now that there are school uniforms, she washes every other day. In terms of appliances they have machines, a fridge and iron. The fridge is constantly switched on.

## FOOD PURCHASING AND CONSUMPTION

Rangika buys the household goods each month. She goes to Cargills (Dematagoda) and buys food for the month. If there are any shortcomings, she will go to the neighbourhood shop and buy from there. Her purchasing habits are aligned to her husband's salary. There is a vegetable shop close by that she goes to buy vegetables from. She buys and cooks vegetables daily – without buying and storing in the fridge for a long time. She doesn't buy any of her vegetables from the cart. She also buys fish and meat from a shop close to her house, near Nayana stores. She buys the fish from there when required, as she eats

less meat. Her main purchases of fish are mackerel, barracuda, sailfish, yellowfin tuna, but she mainly buys sailfish. She makes her spices herself – she brings the ingredients, lets it dry and blends them. She goes to Pettah to buy dry fish – however if her supply for the month dries out, she buys from a shop in her neighbourhood. This is also usually timed with her husband's salary. She goes to Pettah because the goods are cheaper there, and it's possible to buy a lot of goods at once, as in Seevalipura they only give in small quantities.

Sometimes she buys food on credit. For example, although her husband works abroad, his salary is not always consistent. So, until his salary comes in, they would buy food on credit. Not all the shops sell on credit, but they give to her because they know her family. Prior to leaving, he borrowed some money from some of the shops as well. So the shops know they don't have any money right now, but will pay when the husband's salary comes at the end of the month.

Before COVID, they used to go to the food city in Dematagoda, however during COVID they were unable to go. At times, her husband went alone and bought, compared to before when the whole family used to go and buy groceries. They used to also travel to visit her mother or to go to the park. However, they stopped all that and stayed at home when lockdown started. Her husband lost his salary so their financial situation was affected. Only Rangika got a salary from the air force. Whilst they usually buy clothes for the children to wear to their classes, Rangika said she stopped her expenditure on items such as this, during COVID. She managed her finances very carefully, and cut her expenditure by almost 50% of what it used to be.

During COVID/lockdown they bought their food from a place called CoOp City, which is near their house. It's owned by a person known to them, so they went there to buy items such as rice. At that time, the shop next door that was newly opened wasn't there, so they went there to buy. They didn't get things delivered from Cargills. The vegetables were also bought from CoOp city, and they didn't buy fish during that time – rather, they managed with what they had.

Rangika chooses where she shops based on the ability to buy all her goods from one place. But she does that when the stuff she bought from Food city, runs out. She has been shopping at Dematagoda food city for the past 6-7 years. Prior to that, she used to shop at Nayana stores and another big shop over there.

Rangika grows food at home. She has planted gotukola, thebu leaves, curry leaves. She removed the passion tree because it didn't bear fruit after flowering. She has also grown kiri aguna. She finds it easy to quickly pluck leaves when she needs to prepare a mallung(green salad). She also has a lima bean vine. She noted that whilst she likes to grow, she is restricted by space. Additionally, people fight and complain about fallen leaves and such. She also noticed mice running along the passion vine, hence, she decided to cut it down.

Rangika has never used a phone app to order food, but her husband has done so to order goods such as shoes.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

They eat all three meals from home, and their meals consist mainly of rice. At night, they some times eat things that are a little different. For her younger son, she makes food specially for him. If she is making something else for dinner, she will make for everyone, but in the morning she makes food separately for her younger son. Rangika cooks in the morning for lunch as well. At night she will cook something again if there's not enough leftover food. They hardly ever have food from out.

Her husband likes food such as lotus root, kohila leaves, kohila, lima beans, egg plant(as he is from the village), so if he sees those vegetables anywhere, he will buy it for her to make. They also buy sweet potatoes, manioc, baby jackfruit, cooking mangos, ambarella and mushrooms. Only if they are unable to buy the items previously mentioned would they buy carrots, beetroot and beans. She also plucks the leaves from her kiri aguna, lima bean and gotukala plants to make a mallung.

For breakfast they would usually have a mallung, a dhal curry (elder sons requests this everyday), two vegetables, fried eggs or fish if they have. Mostly, she will fry or boil eggs and give as a source of protein. Rangika usually wakes up at 4 am to make breakfast, but on holidays it is closer to 10 or 11 by the time the family eats breakfast. Lunch they usually eat at about 2, where they eat the same things they cooked in the morning. They keep the cooked food in the pots and pans and reheat it at lunch time. For dinner, if there is only leftover rice they will make a coconut sambal, fry papadams, have dry fish or egg. If there are only leftover vegetables or dhal curry, she will make string hoppers. If there are no leftovers she will make pittu, string hoppers or hoppers. When her husband isn't at home she would make something stir fried to go with the string hoppers and dhal curry, but when the husband is at home, coconut sambol is a must. When her husband isn't there, they will eat pittu with coconut milk, sugar and bananas. But when her husband is home, they need to have it with lunu miris without fail.

Both Rangika's son's go to schools nearby. However, the school does not provide free food, so Rangika has to send food from home for her children's meals. She makes the food at home, and does not buy this from the shop. Rangika noted that they only monitor the nutrition of the children if it's a special day, such as nutrition week or a nutrition day where they inform the children that they will be checking the nutrition of the food that is brought to school as part of their meals. Sometimes Rangika sends things that her children don't like, such as mallung (green salad), as its nutritious for them. Rangika also noted that if the child is eating something like a bun at meal time in school, the teacher will make a note of that and later advise the parents to send food of higher nutrition. On the note, Rangika also mentioned that whilst her children also like food such as buns, she doesn't send them. When asked what type of food Rangika sends her children for school, she said for the younger son she sends rice, string hoppers and pittu – whatever she can make at home. Her elder son only eats rice. During the holidays, because the children are home

she will make extra food at night. Or if they visit her mother's house or somewhere and come, she will make more because it's the holiday's and she doesn't need to eat early. She notices a change in the amount of food she cooks during the holidays.

During COVID, they ate less fish. They got their dry fish from Pettah, but when they ran out of that they ate eggs. They also cut down on extra food at night, but apart from that, they mainly ate rice. However, they don't consider it to be a significant change.

They use gas for cooking, and she can use a gas cylinder for about 2 months. Her brother leaves near IDH, so she gets it from there, as there are often queues in her area to buy gas. However, if she asks her brother, he will often bring it for her. Five years ago she used to cook on the wood stove, but then there was a firewood shortage so she had to switch to gas. She still uses the wood stove occasionally however there's no firewood. The kiln is there, but they removed the stove because there is no way to use it without firewood.

She buys vegetables daily as she believes the quality of the vegetables gets worse daily, even if she keeps it in the fridge. She uses the fridge to keep butter, coconut, and mallung. When her husband is here they need a whole bundle of mallung because he likes it a lot. If there is any remaining they will keep it in the fridge and mix it with a new bundle and eat. When she brings dried fish she also keeps that in the fridge. Even grains such as chickpea she keeps in the fridge. However, leftover curry's she doesn't keep in the fridge. The food that is cooked daily is finished within the day.

The current gas crisis hasn't had a big impact on her yet. She takes about 1.5 hours to cook on her own. She doesn't even keep pre cut vegetables in the fridge. She wakes up at 4am and does everything so by the time her son wakes up at 5.30am, she is done cooking. In the evening it takes her about an hour to cook. When her husband was at home during the COVID time he helped her cook a lot. He would do things such as scrape the coconut, pick the mukunuwena, leafy greens etc. Whilst her sons don't help her to cook, if she asks them to sweep the house, or bring take the clothes in, the elder son will do it.

No one has come and advised Rangika and her neighbourhood about nutrition. When she cooks, she always makes sure there is balanced nutrition. For example, if she makes a dhal curry, she will also make two vegetables and a mallung, and either meat, fish or egg. They used to eat red rice, but now it's a bit less. She takes nutrition into consideration when preparing food. When asked what the most nutritious meal could be, she said grains or rice for breakfast. Bread and buns won't do. For the night, perhaps a light soup – but that won't work for the kids. For the children, kurakkan flour based food such as roti is okay.

Rangika noted that if she didn't have to worry about money, she would bring cheese for the sons. They drink fresh milk (highland packet) currently. Rangika doesn't eat meat, so if she cooks a chicken biriyani for her family, she will rice for herself separately. She makes special food for her family, but if she will cook for herself she will just eat normal food. For example, she brings the family marmite, but she doesn't drink it, she drinks Sustagen.

## COMMUNITY

She didn't seem to have any knowledge of the community development council. Rangika did identify that the community unity had diminished a little over the past few years – they are always looking to start a fight. However if there is a funeral, the people will come together fast. Rangika said she knows the houses around her area, and will talk if she passes them on the road, but doesn't associate much with them apart for that. In the past the women in the community used to work with the community rather than going for jobs, however, now women go for jobs. More women go to work now, compared to five years ago. They are mainly engaged in activities such as office cleaning and babysitting. Rangika noted that this could be because expenses have gone up or because their husbands are drug addicts. There have been instances of husband's dying from drug overdose too.

When asked if she likes staying here, Rangika said she doesn't. She has a house approximately 25KM away where no one is currently living where she would like to go and live, but as her children go to school nearby, which is walking distance from their home. If they move it will include a longer commute. Once the children are done with their schooling, she plans to move out of Colombo. And if she is unable to go, she would at least send her children. The commute to school currently is under an hours walk.

After her sons go to school, she comes back cleans, arranges the household. She might sleep. She goes to pick them up. After they return from school, she spends time with them. The children don't usually play outside, apart from her younger son riding the bicycle. There are a few children in the neighbourhood who go to Nalanda. Her elder son goes for tuition, and Rangika usually accompanies him when he goes, as the area they live in is full of drugs and she is worried that somebody might approach him. When he finishes school, he usually walks back with other children – Rangika follows from a distance. The problem of drugs wasn't that prevalent when she first moved here, however now it's quite bad. In her words, now it's to the level that "you can't step out of your house". There are a portion of people who use it and there are a portion of people who sell it - There are problems in school too; children take it to school and get caught. That's why her husband told her to quit her job saying that the money isn't worth it if the children go astray. She noted that she doesn't allow the elder one to even go to the shop alone. The younger one can go in an emergency, but not the elder one. The other side of Nayana stores is a bit better, a bit safer. There are no other problems, apart from drugs – she noted that you don't have to be scared even if you walk alone at night. Sometimes gold jewellery has gotten stolen, or a purse has been stolen, but they won't come inside the house to steal.

## (6) Asoka (Interviewed 14/01/22)

## PROFILE

Asoka was born in Seevalipura and has lived here since birth. She lives with her daughter(25) and husband(60). Her husband works on his property in outside of Colombo and lives there for the majority of time and spends 4 or 5 days at home. Her daughter's marriage was recently registered and she plans on joining her husband abroad in the near future. Her husband has diabetes and takes medicine for it.

Her grandfather arrived in Wanathamulla around the 1920s, at which point there were only 28 houses. In her childhood, Asoka lived in a hut with clay walls and a coconut branch roof. They had a lot of space and eventually the land was divided up. Asoka noted that in her childhood people would take electricity by attaching a wire to the cables on the road. For water, they had a personal well and a public tap supplied drinking water. She noted that the canal was developed in 1975, and now a massive amount of water flows through it and people dump garbage in it.

While they had a lot of land, in 1982 the Housing Development Authority divided the land into 2 perch plots. This was a big disadvantage to those who had settled earlier and had large plots of land. She said that everyone had houses with wells and land for animals to graze. There was tension when officers from the Housing Development Authority came to divide up the land in 82. She has a card issued by the Housing Development Authority and her vote is registered to the house.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Asoka works at an NGO and receives a monthly salary. She doesn't take loans regularly but took a loan for LKR 500,000 to enrol her daughter at a university. She is still paying off the loan which is directly subtracted from her salary. The monthly income is around LKR 55000. The loan payment roughly accounts for LKR 15,000 per month. Her daughter bakes cakes and gives tuition classes to pay for her travel expenses. She has also pawned some gold jewellery and pays for that monthly as well. The main expenditure of the household is paying off the loans, followed by food.

## GRID ACCESS

They received electricity in 1977, a few months after building the house. A young man who had worked in the electricity board in a neighbouring house helped them get a connection and a meter. They were one of 7 houses in the area to have electricity at that time. They were billed LKR 50 for fixing the connection.

During COVID-19 lockdowns she couldn't pay her electricity bill for 5 months, leading to an arrears of LKR 30,000. They had an old fridge at the time which was used mostly to store the cakes that her daughter baked. This led to monthly bills of over LKR 4000. They bought a new fridge on an instalment basis.



A water connection and meter was received in 2003. They have two taps, one for drinking and one for bathing though Asoka acknowledges they come from the same waterline. They drink the water straight from the tap. She uses public wells only when there is a general water cut. She noted that their water bill isn't expensive as they save water. She notes that in houses where there are a lot of children people get a bill of LKR 2000 and that water is often suspended due to nonpayment.

Asoka has been actively involved in helping community houses receive electricity and a postal service. A latrine pit was established somewhere in 2000.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Asoka buys from a range of shops but most of her groceries are sourced from the Food City in Dematagoda. Meat is purchased from Rajagiriya Food City or from the chicken shop in the area. They buy about 500g which is enough for one day even when her husband is there. They don't eat many vegetables because it's expensive. When Asoka's husband returns to Colombo, he brings vegetables from the estate. They also purchase vegetables occasionally from carts. Both Asoka and her daughter buy groceries together and they don't go regularly because of time constraints.

Asoka's daughter is trying to lose weight and exercises and adjusts her diet accordingly. She got gastritis because of dieting.

Because healthy food eg. non-fat milk is expensive she uses her fiancé's credit card to purchase these things. Asoka stated that she doesn't spend on her daughter's lifestyle. Her daughter also buys food from out but Asoka doesn't. Her daughter also consumes food like apples and yoghurt. They rarely buy on credit because they don't want to be in debt. If there is something urgently needed she buys on credit from the neighbourhood shop. They allow people to pay monthly but she pays within a few days. She mostly buys things like milk powder.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Asoka used to cook but now her daughter does most of the cooking. Asoka says it takes her about an hour to cook. When they ran out of gas, Asoka's daughter bought a kerosene oil cooker for LKR 5000. Asoka noted that during Covid, everyone in the neighbourhood got together and cooked and all the money she had was spent on food. Around 10-12 houses contributed and fed neighbours who couldn't afford it but it was expensive and this led to her being unable to pay her electricity bill.

She says she doesn't grow anything because there is no space, and that even spinach can't be grown because of stray dogs.

They eat dinner from out, usually something like noodles, pittu, string hoppers. For lunch they eat rice and fish but Asoka doesn't eat vegetables or dhal out of preference. Her daughter eats carrots and dhal. A kilo of lentils lasts about a month. Asoka has two hoppers or laveriyas with her tea in the morning. Asoka buys mangoes and pineapples but

she says that the quality of fruits in the area isn't good and it is better to not eat at all. They don't store leftovers in the fridge because there is rarely food leftover. Vegetables, fruits and cakes are stored in the fridge.

She says that the money spent on gas is now spent on the kerosene oil cooker which requires 3 bottles a week. A litre is a LKR 100. Recently when there was a shortage of kerosene they had no means of cooking and had to eat out everyday. Asoka noted that they switched to gas only after her mother passed away. Prior to that, her mother used a wood stove and traditional methods of cooking such as coconut scraper, grinding stone, mortar. Now she says those methods have been abandoned. Asoka said that a balanced meal is a nutritious meal, and that health is the foundation of mental and physical health but she admitted that she account for nutrition but preference and taste when she selected food. She stated that she didn't eat vegetables even though she knew they were high in nutrition. Similarly, she stated that price wasn't always a deterrent because she bought an expensive variety of fish because she likes to eat it. She acknowledged that everyone eats according to preference, particularly in urban areas. She said that her husband, who is from a village, likes eating leafy greens. She also noted that milk was not nutritious even though she enjoyed it.

## (7) Kanthi (Interviewed 22/01/22)

## PROFILE

Kanthi moved to Seevalipura when she got married about 20 years ago. She has an NHDA card to show ownership to her property. Her vote is also registered to her home in Seevalipura. Four people live in her house: herself(41), husband (48) and two children aged 18 and 11. Her children go to two different government schools in the area.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Kanthi works at a community institution. After her husband got ill and was unable to continue to work, Kanthi started a dry fish business as well. Kanthi's salary is around LKR 15,000 a month. She uses her income from the dry fish business to somehow cover her daily expenses. They have tried to find other ways to get an income but haven't been able to find a way. Kanthi said she is unable to take out loans because she has no way of repaying them, and they don't want people coming to their doorstep asking for money. She manages with what she has.

They don't get any social security payments from the government, sometimes they may get a bag of goods but apart from that they have not received anything from the government. Their monthly household income is between LKR 20,000- to 40,000. There are times where their income is higher – this is usually when the price of goods go up that they see an increase in their income.

For Kanthi's business she usually goes to Pettah and buys dry fish from there. Thereafter she makes packets of 100 grams and she sells them to shops in her neighbourhood. The price she sells it for depends on the market rate of the dry fish. She usually buys about 10 kilos of all types of dry fish. Thereafter she will packet it and she usually puts them into about 4 shops. She will usually put ten packets to each shop of all kinds. She will get money for this once every three days and says these days she is lucky as business has been good. Kanthi also noted that she has seen a rise in her income since covid, as she took on this dry fish business.

## GRID ACCESS

They have electricity in the house. They got it when they bought the house twenty years ago. They don't face electricity disruptions unless it is a government mandated disruption. They have a water line but the pressure is poor, especially in the morning. Kanthi also noted that by around 6.00 pm the pressure reduces again. If they open a tap in one area of their house, water doesn't flow from the other tap. She noted that sometimes she can't even go to the toilet because the water flow is very weak. However on days when it rains heavily the water pressure is good. They informed the water board and the person who writes the bill, and were informed that it is due to the fact that their house is on a higher elevation. She further elaborated that they are adding new lines and say that perhaps they will get good pressure then.

It doesn't usually flood near Kanthi's house – if at all, if there is heavy rain for weeks, some

water will come from the back of the house. Otherwise it's quite unlikely.

With regards to their sanitation facilities, they have a piped connection that flows to the canal. They occasionally use the public well, but not often.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Their food expense is the main expense at home, approximately 75% of her income. She noted that they spend more on eating than what they earn. Despite how frugal they try to be, it isn't possible. Coconut oil is expensive now, coconut is expensive, rice is expensive. Given that those main ingredients are so expensive, she noted that it's difficult to even think of buying vegetables, fish, dry fish.

Kanthi's husband has diabetes, along with a kidney problem. He takes medicine for both illnesses. She has to take his illnesses into consideration when cooking. Now her husband doesn't eat rice at home as a result of his illnesses.

She buys her dry goods from shops in Seevalipura – she doesn't have a specific shop that she goes to. They buy their dry goods daily as they don't have the money to buy monthly. They have only ever had the money for daily expenses, as they get a daily income. They buy their vegetables from the shop near the bo tree in Seevalipura. They don't often buy from vegetable carts as they believe them to be of a lesser quality. However, the stuff from the vegetable shop near the bo tree can be kept for some time. They buy their meat and fish from the shops near the bo tree, however they barely buy these items now. Their spices are bought from a lady who sells spices in her home in Seevalipura. Kanthi buys the food for the house.

They don't usually buy goods on credit, if at all, it would be for small amounts such as LKR 100 or 200.

Kanthi has noted an increase in the price of goods over the last two years – as a result they are buying everything in lesser quantities. When vegetable prices go up, she noted that they don't eat vegetables, they just cook and eat what's there. When the prices go up, they only buy what is cheaper.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Kanthi's family eat all three meals. In the morning they will usually get food from outside. If she cooks early in the morning they will eat that for breakfast and lunch, and if there are leftovers she will have that for dinner too. If not, they will buy food from outside and eat. She will usually cook a dry fish or fish, with a vegetable and something stir-fried.

They mostly eat beans, leeks cabbage, radish and long beans. It takes her about 2-3 hours to cook. If she cooks in the morning she will give the children rice to take to school.

She doesn't buy many fruits, mainly bananas. She will buy pineapples or papaya if she sees them, but that is not often. They don't eat many biscuits or sweet biscuits often.

Her husband used to eat rice everyday, but because of his medication he has no appetite for it. Now. He always only eats dosa, seeni sambol bread etc. He doesn't eat anything else but those, he detests it.

When her children go to school, she sometimes prepares their meals. When she is unable to do so, she gives money to her children and asks them to buy something on the way. Sometimes their school monitors nutrition – there are even times when doctors visit and check. Her children's teachers have noted that the food her children bring are more sufficient than less as they are 'chubby'. The teachers say they have too much nutrition and that is why they are chubby. However Kanthi says that whilst they may have eaten like that previously, now they barely eat meat, and barely eat fish as well. They mostly eat dry fish as they can't afford to eat fish every day. They will have dry fish with a vegetable and eat.

She has a fridge but doesn't store cooked food in it. Even the vegetables she buys, she will plan on utilising it by the next day. As the vegetable shop is close by, they don't keep it in the fridge and eat. They buy daily and consume. They don't like to keep fish in the fridge – any fish that is bought (rarely) is consumed within the day. Their electricity bill is about LKR 2000 or 2500. It comes to about LKR 2500 most of the time, and she doesn't believe that the fridge consists of a significant portion of the bill.

No one helps with the cooking, but if they have to suddenly go to the hospital, the children will help out. They used to use gas for cooking but when the price of the gas went up they had to stop as they couldn't afford it. They now use the kerosene lamp. Kanthi was able to buy one for LKR 4,000 but she noted that the price has gone up to 15,000 since. She buys the kerosene from the shops in Seevalipura. The kerosene oil bottle costs LKR 100, which she can use for about 2 days.

When asked for her opinion on the most nutritious diet, Kanthi noted that previously, they used to cook 2 or 3 things. When her husband was well, they used to cook fish and also have it fried, and have 2 vegetables and something stir-fried. They would also eat fruits, yoghurt, cheese etc and would buy something every week, something that the children like to eat. Now they can't do that as they don't have an income. The only fruit they can buy is bananas.

Kanthi doesn't grow anything as she doesn't have space. She used to grow tomato and chilli plants but she said the cows in the neighbourhood used to come and eat them, so she gave up.

Kanthi noted that she hasn't seen a taste difference in the food by using a kerosene oil cooker, however it takes her longer than using gas.

## COMMUNITY

She gets a lot of support from the women's organisation. They give bag's of goods, and it's only from them that she will occasionally take out a small loan. Monthly, they send her a bag of goods at their expense.

According to Kanthi, Seevalipura has changed a lot in the sense, people's behaviour has changed. Compared to before, now there are way fewer people who are loud and noisy, those who roam outside. Now, most people just want to eat and drink and stay indoors by themselves. People's lives have changed, as they have a lot of financial problems. People can't help others also because of financial problems. They too have to survive. People don't roam outside anymore and stay indoors whether they have eaten or not. They don't even tell others.

The CDC didn't play a role in helping them to get access to infrastructure as this was already in place when they moved to Seevalipura.

## (8) Latha (Interviewed 08/02/22)

## PROFILE

Latha moved to Seevalipura after she got married. She owns the current house she lives in, however she doesn't have deeds to prove ownership. The officials had offered her the deed, but at a cost of about LKR 60,000. As she couldn't afford to give the money at once, she told them that she would need some time to put the money together. However, during this time, the price of the deed increased to LKR 70,000. When questioned as to why the price had gone up, she was told that the rates had gone up. She refused to pay for that as she didn't have the money. She has papers stating the valuation of the property from 1984, which she received when Mahinda Rajapakse was in power as Prime Minister (approximately in 2005), and Wimal Weerawansa was the Minister for Housing. They wouldn't give her a current valuation report, and instead gave one from 1984. These were valuation reports done for the low income settlements that were done in the 1980s. As the valuation is very low in those reports, they will use that to determine compensation if and when they demolish the houses, noted Latha. She had asked for a current valuation report, to assure her that her house won't be demolished, and to assure her that this can be bank collateral. They said that they couldn't do that.

Latha has some documents from the NHDA, however it is not the same card as other residents in Seevalipura as she bought the house from someone else in the 1990's. Latha (51) lives in her house with her mother (73), her husband (53) and her daughter (27). They all have their vote registered to this house. Her elder daughter got married and left home and no longer lives with them.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her husband owns a garage in a town 9km away - he usually travels to work by bicycle. He gets paid as and when he repairs a vehicle. Her daughter works for a private company and gets paid monthly. Only her husband contributes to the household expenses, however the daughter will contribute whenever there is an emergency. They have no other way of getting an income. Their household income is about LKR 40,000 a month depending on the work her husband gets, however she noted that the last two years were very difficult due to COVID. During that time, Latha got her husband to live in his garage as he couldn't travel due to lockdown/movement restrictions. He was able to do the work he had undertaken before COVID began, so he was able to manage with some income. At that time, Latha was in Seevalipura with her daughter, as her mother was stuck in another town. Colombo went into lockdown soon after her daughter had finished her university, and had not begun working yet. Latha also noted that it was incredibly difficult for her daughter to find a job at this time, and it took her about a year to find employment.

Latha has taken loans to build the upstairs part of the house. When they bought the property, it was a small hut, however, they dismantled it and re-built the house completely. They bought it before they got married, and started building it part by part. During COVID she found it difficult to repay her loans, but the Women's Bank offered

certain concessions during this time, to enable easy payment. Latha noted that the compound interest wasn't accumulated during that time. Latha prefers to take loans from the Women's Bank as they offer a rate based on your requirements - in contrast to finance companies during COVID gave moratoriums but they added the compound interest for that period. Latha noted that historically the Women's Bank was an initiative for the poor; it started with Rs. 5 deposit, and medicines were delivered to their homes for free, and they have even offered bags of groceries to be sent through the provincial council to them.

Latha's main expenses for the household are food and loan repayments. Her family does not receive any social security benefits. During COVID, she recalls they received Rs. 5000 twice or thrice, however, in the last lockdown they didn't get. Latha's mother has been on the waiting list for Senior Citizen allowance for years, but they have yet to receive it.

#### GRID ACCESS

It was only after Latha built her house that she received an electricity connection. During that time, the whole of Seevalipura didn't have electricity. It was only during President Premadasa's time that they got electricity. They have a metered electricity connection. Their water connection was also installed once they built the house. Although Seevalipura had public toilets during that time, she was not used to using a public toilet, so that was the first thing her husband built for her in their home. They got the water connection to aid that. Her toilet is connected by a pipe to the canal. Latha noted that she drinks water straight from the tap without boiling, as it's from the water board. She used to use the public wells in Seevalipura but only uses it now when there is a water cut. They don't usually get power cuts - Latha believes this to be because the prison, children's hospital and other essential services are in close proximity to their house.

Latha noted that Recently, there was an issue with the drain outside her house. They are the only house that hasn't turned the drainage water into the drain. Latha's drain is connected to the big one. When they were renovating the drain, the town council announced that the water cannot be turned to the drain. A major conflict arose because of it. They had asked to dig the drain inside the house itself. Latha noted that they should first think about how they can dig a drainage pit inside this 2 perch land. Once when the authorities were digging a drain, they left it open for about 2 months and her boundary wall broke. They didn't repair it for her so she had to do it at her own expense. The gate, the wall, and the mesh collapsed, as a result.

Latha also noted that the canal has also been polluted - back in the day, the government station sent its waste to this canal. But even now, the prison dumps its waste into this. She noted that they have plenty of space to dig drainage pits however, they "sneakily" send their waste into their canal. Latha noted that for houses closer to the canal the stench is very strong.

Latha noted that it usually doesn't flood when it rains. During heavy rain, there's a big gate near the parliament that gets closed. Then it gets flooded here. More so for the



people on the other side of the canal. Not so much for her.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Latha usually does the grocery shopping in her house - she buys her dry goods from the Food City at Borella Cotta road, along with Keells there and Sathosa. There is not one particular place she shops at. If she goes to Pettah she will buy from there. Her vegetables are purchased from the main road near her neighbourhood, opposite the children's hospital. She buys her fish from the fish market in Battaramulla, but if she is unable to go, she will buy from someone in the vicinity. She travels to Battaramulla as she finds it safer than going to Peliyagoda fish market. She also finds it cleaner, and more organised than in Peliyagoda. She noted that Peliyagoda is very crowded. The dirty water gets splashed onto their bodies. However it's not like that in Battaramulla. If they want a fish to be cut up, we are given a token, and they announce the token number when it's done. Then they can go and collect it. She noted that prices are around the same as in Peliyagoda, but Battaramulla gives her the option to get the fish cleaned the way she likes it. They don't usually buy vegetables from cart vendors, only if they don't have an essential at home. Otherwise, she tends to go to the shop at the top of the lane and buy.

Latha will usually buy rice and spices a month at a time. Vegetables she will buy in bulk and when it finishes, she will buy more. She usually buys food when her husband gets paid. She doesn't usually buy food on credit. During COVID, they didn't buy any food. They managed by cooking whatever they had at home. They didn't buy fish and meat during that time - but this was partially due to the fact that the X-Press Pearl sank during that time. They mainly ate dry fish and eggs. Her husband's garage also cultivated vegetables in that land, so she was able to get vegetables through any lorries that were sent towards Colombo.

Latha has cholesterol so she controls what she eats - she doesn't buy and eat buns from outside. Sometimes, however, she will order food from outside when they feel like it - sometimes it's pizza, and sometimes it's food they order from the shop.

They don't grow their own vegetables, although they would love to - as they lack the space.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Latha usually cooks for her household, it takes her about 1.5 hours to cook. She usually cooks in the morning - the daughter takes rice to work, and she gives rice to her husband as well. If there is not enough food by evening, she will cook again. They usually eat rice for dinner too. In the morning they will eat sweet potatoes, manioc, chickpeas, and occasionally bread. For lunch, they will eat rice with a leafy green, fish and one type of vegetable.

Latha uses her fridge to store leftover cooked food, and she will usually have it another day when they are unable to cook. They cook with gas, but given the gas issues in the

country they have been testing it using soap before they take it into the house to check for gas leaks. She jokingly said, “we worshipped the gas before taking it into the house, after that we worshipped the stove before cooking the rice - you never know”. She has been cooking with gas since she moved to Seevalipura. She goes on to note that she only bought it for LKR 1500 in the past - back then, there wasn’t even much of a supply.

When Latha cooks, she takes care not to make pumpkin as her daughter doesn’t like pumpkin – she eats bitter gourd and rice. But she won't eat pumpkin. Her mother, who also occasionally stays with her, doesn't require special food.

Latha noted that no one has informed them about correct/proper nutrition.

Since COVID, Latha says her eating patterns have changed. They buy less chickpea and cowpea now as those have gone up in price. It used to be LKR 200 to 300. Now it's 500 to 600. It's truly difficult for people to buy. They have also reduced the quantities of vegetables they buy. She notes that because it is only the 3 of them in the household, they somehow manage. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been possible. It's truly not possible in households with little kids. Latha also noted that they used to drink tea at tea time, but now after the price increase they don't. She doesn't usually have biscuits with their tea, as she is not a fan of sweets, but she will buy and keep for her daughter who will eat if she feels like it. Latha buys a lot of bananas and papaya, and mangoes and jambu during their respective seasons. However, she will eat a banana every day.

In Latha's opinion a nutritious meal would consist of a Mallung or a leafy greens which is a must for them, a fruit - something yellow, at least banana, is a must. Then fish, meat, or eggs, sources of protein are essential, or even dry fish.

## COMMUNITY

She notes that Seevalipura has changed a lot since the time she arrived - back in the day there were mostly small huts. Now those have been developed. However, she goes on to say that society seems to have deteriorated somewhat, given that more young people seem to be addicted to drugs. In the past it was mainly older people that used to take drugs. The drugs came in around the 80s with the open economy. Then for the people who didn't know about it, got exposed seeing the older generation using it. Those people don't have a way to escape it. For example, when the father uses drugs, the son would see him doing it and do the same. They need to find a way to escape from it. So, now the young generation is very much addicted, and as a result Seevalipura has deteriorated a lot.

Latha's daughter suggests that they should sell their property and leave Seevalipura. Latha noted that if she can sell it, she would. If they demolish her property she will ask for the money according to the valuation, and agree to go live somewhere else. She plans to relocate within the Colombo district itself, as they can't go far because otherwise the father and the daughter both won't be able to do their jobs. Currently her daughter travels to work by bus and comes back in transport provided by the company at 7.00PM.

## (9) Shaloni (Interviewed 12/02/22)

## PROFILE

Shaloni's vote is registered to the house. Shaloni (46) lives in her house with her mother (78), and daughter (8) and son (4). Her husband is away in abroad working, but he comes periodically for holidays. He has been away for three years, as he couldn't come because of COVID. Her mother is a heart patient.

Seevalipura is not Shaloni's hometown, she has been living here for 50 years. Her mother's relatives were living closeby to Seevalipura, so they moved to Seevalipura. Whilst they were living here, her father got some money and used that to buy a house in Seevalipura. The area where she now lives used to be a field of alocasia. They filled the land and elevated it. Back in the day, her house got flooded even with a little rain - the house was made with planks and with coconut branches for the roof. When the coconut branches decayed, the water used to stream in through the roof. There was no road here but an alocasia field. She noted that you had to keep stones to go on it as if it was a swamp. When it got flooded for even a small rain, they stayed up all night on four chairs that they used to have. They didn't have a cement floor. It was just sand - the sand from the road.

When they first moved to Seevalipura, Shaloni said that their plot of land had drains and other people's waste coming into their land. However they built their house with planks and sand, and managed to get an electricity connection in the 1980s. There were no roads back then, they had to keep bricks on the road to walk - there were only drains. Now, the drains spread a lot of diseases. People put their garbage there. They pay LKR 100 to clean the drains but they don't do a good job of it.

They built their house in the late 90's, however they are still making improvements to their house. Recently they built a toilet on one side of the house, as the other side has been grabbed by the neighbours. Her mother says that they know they will not get a large sum of money even if they sell as people don't like to buy from this community. They advertised in the newspaper, however whoever came to see the house didn't buy it as there were women seated on their doorsteps along the road so people weren't keen [alluding to the wider drug problem in the area].

Shaloni notes that her family suffered a lot back in the day. Both her parents were engaged in informal work. When he didn't have a job, he used to work in the timber mill. She further notes that at times, all three siblings could not live together as her parents could not afford to look after 3 children. Her elder brother would stay with her aunt, and her sister with another aunt. There were 3 children studying. The elder brother couldn't study for long, he only went up to grade 5. He then went to work in a garage. To this day he does garage work. Her elder sister studied till grade 11, but she couldn't sit for A/Ls because of financial constraints, so she went abroad. She was the first one to go abroad. It was only after that, that the family laid the foundation for their house. Shaloni noted that she studied till about grade 10, she passed O/Ls but couldn't study further. She went

abroad when she was 19 to work in the middle east along with her sister. She stayed there until the house was built, and she references her family's work in the middle east as the reason they were able to build the house to what it is today.

Shaloni went to the Middle East when she was 19. She was 35 when she got married. She says she earned, ate, and built the house. She noted that it has been a year since her father passed away. Her mother doesn't have a job, and her husband is now working abroad, but he doesn't get paid a big salary. But it is with what he gets that they somehow make ends meet with great difficulty.

The house doesn't have a deed, as she notes there was a problem with getting the deed. They asked for LKR 85000 to give the deed. Shaloni elaborated that they asked her to pay LKR 75,000 or 85000 for a deed which they couldn't afford. Her neighbour has built gates and forcefully taken some of their land. She said she pleaded with them [the authorities] to come and measure for that. They have told her they will come on Tuesday. She noted a total amount of about LKR 100,000 will have to be spent including that work - to get the deed, to pay for the surveyor if it has to be measured. She noted that they need to get the deed so they can get their child into school.

Shaloni notes that children from Seevalipura get into schools like Kannangara - they don't get good schools. In order to apply to a good school she needs to pay off the water bill and the electricity bill. There are payments overdue for electricity which she has to pay off. The bills are in her family's name, now they only must get the deed. However, they have a card issued by the NHDA. She elaborates that while they have the NHDA card they want the deed as they are worried problems might come up subsequently. She said it's her priority to get it done within this year so that they can enrol their son in school next year. Her brother lives upstairs with her sister-in-law - they are worse off than she is. Her brother does garage work, but he doesn't get work every day. They have 3 children - it's difficult for them to live. She notes that they borrow money from here and there and on interest. She says that she is a bit better off than her brother because her husband is abroad, otherwise she would also have similar problems.

Shaloni's daughter goes to school close by. Her son is yet to go to school, hence they want to organise their documentation so that he can have a good chance at applying to a better school. When her daughter was applying to school, she found it very difficult to get her into a good school as they didn't want to have too many Muslim children. She had to call a favour and speak to the principal to get her into the school. They asked Shaloni for a donation of LKR 75,000 to buy a computer for the school, in return for a place at the school for her daughter. Shaloni said she was only able to offer LKR 50,000 and said she would pay the balance later. She says she has yet to pay the balance, and she won't unless they remember and ask.

This is partly why she doesn't want to use contacts to get her son into a good school, she says if you go through contacts you have to keep paying them money. She notes you have to pay about LKR 200,000 - 300,000. When she tried to enrol her daughter to another well

known school, an individual asked for about LKR 350,000. She elaborates that there isn't space in schools for those who are poor.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her husband works in a company in the Middle East and gets paid a monthly salary of about LKR 50,000. He usually manages to remit home about LKR 40,000 - 45,000. She notes that she manages with that amount somehow by joining *seetu* (Rotating Credit Schemes) etc. They don't have an extra form of income though they have been trying to look for alternate ways of earning an income. Her mother is a heart patient so she cannot work, however she cooks and supports Shaloni a lot. If Shaloni goes to work, and her mother gets sick there is no one to take her to the hospital. Similarly, if Shaloni's children get sick, her mother is too frail to take them to the hospital - so she has to stay at home. They are very dependent on her husband's income, and say without that they won't even have money to eat.

Shaloni notes that people visit this area to give out loans, however you can only get it if you are doing business. Shaloni took out a loan to do a rice and curry business, however, she notes that there isn't enough business to go around in this community. Everyone's doing business. So the money was spent on house expenses. She has taken this kind of loan before and pays it off weekly. There's also a group of women who have asked her to join their *seetu* and they pay an amount weekly. If they give LKR 20,000, Shaloni will pay about 1300 or 1200. Once that finishes, they will give us another amount. It is a system of interest. When they get that money it's usually spent on food for the home, and other amenities for the children such as books, snacks, McDonald's, fried rice and pizza. As she has taken quite a few loans, she has pawned her things to pay them off.

Shaloni notes that their main expenditure for a month is on food. She doesn't spend too much on tuition. But it is mainly spent on food, books, and clothes to wear. They also note that they spend a lot of money on buying milk. They buy milk packets for their daughter - she is given Anchor Pedia and needs at least 8 of them. They were advised to give goat's milk to her son. Both children have phlegm in the same way, so there's a 2-month course of medication prescribed for them. Shaloni has been told not to give them milk, however she says she cannot give them an alternative such as plain tea as they will get gastritis.

During COVID, Shaloni notes that as her husband was able to work in the Middle East at that time, she was able to get money to survive. She notes that the community didn't even give her "a single grain of rice" during that time. She received LKR 5000 in assistance once but notes that other families got rice and bags of goods that she did not get. She says this is due to the political party she supports. The people in the neighbourhood support the Rajapakse's, and they tell the people who donate food not to give Shaloni's family goods as they support the UNP and not the Rajapakse's.

During COVID, Shaloni notes that they didn't pay any bills, they only spent their money on food to eat. Shaloni had also bought land during COVID and couldn't pay back her loan. There's approximately LKR 200,000 outstanding from that. She bought it on LKR

20,000/month instalment payments. Shaloni continues that she has a lot of loans to pay back, not just for the land but for food she has bought on credit as well. In addition she spends about LKR 10,000 at Nawaloka hospital on medicine for her mother.

## GRID ACCESS

They got their piped water connection 20 years ago, but they have been told that they will be getting a new line soon. They don't have problems with the water pressure or supply. Shaloni did note though that the water pipe is located outside, and sometimes people steal it, so this disrupts their water supply.

The toilet that she recently built cost her LKR 250,000 to build - she buried concrete rings 6 feet deep. She is still struggling to pay the loan back for this so she buys many of her goods from the shop on credit. If she pays for these improvements with her salary, she will have to pawn some jewellery. She has already pawned about LKR 500,000 worth of jewellery.

They don't use a public well. Their two houses usually have a combined water bill of about LKR 5000 - 6000. They previously had an accumulated bill of LKR 77,000, where their connection was ultimately suspended. However they can to somehow pay the bill to get it reconnected.

Shaloni has fixed an A/C in their house as she says her children can't sleep because of the heat. Her monthly electricity bill is about LKR 18,000 which is predominantly driven by the use of the A/C. During COVID, they accumulated an electricity bill of LKR 90,000 which they had to ultimately pay. Since then, there is a further outstanding of LKR 45,000 that is yet to be paid. Given that this cost is predominantly driven by the usage of the A/C, she believes they will have to disconnect it in the near future. Shaloni has also disconnected their washing machine as it takes too much electricity - she now washes clothes by hand.

Their house doesn't usually experience flooding when it rains.

## FOOD PURCHASING

It is Shaloni who usually buys the food for the house, but it is the mother who cooks. When it comes to dry food, her children don't eat so much chickpea, mung beans etc, only some lentils. They don't eat vegetables either but they somehow feed them vegetables. They buy the dry food from the shop near the bo tree, and they give her food on credit. She commends the shop owner for being discreet on who buys on credit and who doesn't. She buys her vegetables from the vegetable shop in the neighbourhood, owned by a man called Ukkuwa. She also buys fish and eggs from shops in Seevalipura. Shaloni will buy vegetables for about two days at most. Given that the shops are close to her house, she will go every day to the neighbouring shops to buy what she needs, such as vegetable or fish. She doesn't keep food (fresh or cooked) in the fridge as they had to disconnect it as their electricity bill was too high.

They don't usually like to buy food from outside as the children love to eat food from

outside and they don't want to make it a habit. She will only bring if she has to go to the hospital and it gets late to come home and cook - in instances like that, she will buy fried rice. When they have money they buy vegetables such as bananas, apples, mangoes and wood apples. She notes that an apple used to be LKR 25, and now it's being sold for LKR 50.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

When it comes to food preference, vegetables - they usually eat anything. They eat fish every day, and buy a bit of chicken for the children, although not every day. Even though Shaloni converted to Islam after marrying her husband, she does not fast during Ramadan. Shaloni says she used to wear an Abaya and a shawl, however, she got a lot of hate from her community - they used to call her 'Hambaya', so she has stopped wearing it now.

Shaloni's mother does the cooking in the house - they usually cook once a day at lunch time and have the leftovers for dinner. If the children want something else like string hoppers for dinner, they will buy from outside and give. However, they mostly eat rice for dinner.

During the time when the gas cylinders were exploding they cooked with electricity using the rice cooker. They bought an extra rice cooker to help them cook their food faster. They used to have a kerosene oil cooker, but they gave it to her brother upstairs as they didn't have a way to cook.

Whilst Shaloni and her mother would like to grow food in their house, they don't have the space to grow. They have a bit of spinach and beans planted outside their house, but they find that rats come and eat them at night. Shaloni goes on to say that the land she bought out of Colombo would give her space to grow, however they can't move because they want to give her children the best education possible. Given that some of the best schools are in Colombo, moving out of Colombo would take that option away from her. Additionally, the other land doesn't have a hospital close by in an emergency.

In Shaloni's opinion, a nutritious meal would consist of rice with 2 or 3 vegetables like beans, thalana batu, fresh green salad and a fish. Currently, they cook two vegetables to have with rice. Whilst they do cook two vegetables, they find it expensive. They cook about 250g of each vegetable. When her husband comes home he eats more, so they have to cook about a kilo.

Shaloni says that no one has advised her on nutrition. But they know of what they learnt when they were small - what to eat for breakfast, lunch etc.

She usually sends rice for her son to school but sends buns for her daughter. Shaloni's daughter's teacher had scolded her, saying she would turn "into a ball, by eating buns every day". The teacher monitors what she brings every day and the teacher has told her not to bring buns every day. Also, as her daughter has put on weight, they've asked the

mother to send rice. In the morning when they wake up, her daughter will usually drink some milk, which is enough for her. As they must leave for school by 6.30am, there is hardly time to cook, so she is sent buns. There are many shops in the neighbourhood selling buns, and she will buy one from the neighbourhood. For her son, the teacher at the Montessori has specifically said not to send anything if there's no rice. He doesn't like to eat vegetables so they usually send plain rice and Keells sausages, or yellow rice and an egg.

## COMMUNITY

Shaloni would like to move from Seevalipura. She refers to her neighbourhood being full of drugs - as her neighbours use drugs. She elaborates that this has been going on for a long time and is widely known in the community. They do not venture outside or fraternise with their neighbours as they are drug addicts. They often have parties going late into the night which affects the children trying to study at night. Shaloni had previously fought with them. In addition to drugs, they also smoke marijuana and drink on the doorstep until late at night. Whilst she has called the police and lodged complaints, their families have a connection at the police station, so they are never prosecuted, nor are their complaints taken seriously.

Shaloni said that there is a lot of dog breeding happening in Seevalipura. Many people breed pedigree dogs and sell them.

At the moment, Shaloni is thinking of giving their property on rent and moving. They would much prefer to move somewhere simple and away from the toxic society however, the reason they stay here even with hardships is because it's close to everywhere. If they don't have money in an emergency, they can even just walk to the Nona Wattuwa [a nearby government clinic] and get medicine. Shaloni only takes her family to the "Non Wattuwa" when they don't have money, otherwise she will take her children to Nawaloka hospital, even if they must take a small loan to do it. This is because some medicine given at the Nona Wattuwa doesn't sit well with them.



## (10) Mariyam (Interviewed 24/03/22)

## PROFILE

Seevalipura is Mariyam's hometown, and she has been living there since birth. Her husband is from out of Colombo, and came to Seevalipura after getting married. She has a NHDA card to prove ownership of her house, and her vote is also registered to that address. She lives in her house, with her two-year-old baby, and 6 year old son.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her husband works overseas. He gets paid monthly, and when he does, he remits her money. Their monthly income is about LKR 41,000 which is provided by her husband, and that is their only source of income. She doesn't take loans from women's bank or rotating credit. She notes that the majority of her expenditure (50%), goes on food, and the balance is spent on the children's class fees.

## GRID ACCESS

Mariyam's house has an electricity and water connection, and she says she has had it since she was born. She notes that she doesn't have power cuts, and attributes it to the proximity of the prison. Her bill for the month is usually LKR 800. She uses a fridge, and other electrical appliances like a grinder too. They also have an uninterrupted water connection, with good water pressure. They used to have a problem with water pressure, however after a new line was installed about two months ago, the water pressure has increased. They usually drink water directly from the tap without boiling it. Mariyam will use a public well, only if there is a water cut in the neighbourhood. Despite living close to the canal, her house doesn't flood when it rains. Even if it floods in the neighbourhood, her house never experiences flooding. Their toilet is connected to a pipe that goes to the canal.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Mariyam buys her dry food from a shop in Dematagoda. She usually buys for the month in one go, when she gets money from her husband's salary. She buys her vegetables from the high rise market, along with her meat and fish. She shops from the market in the high rise, as she finds it convenient because everything is in one place. She usually buys her meat and fish once a month and keeps it in the fridge/freezer. Vegetables, she will buy weekly. She usually buys carrots and cabbage. She also sometimes buys fruit such as grapes, bananas, or oranges from the same market. She also finds it convenient as it is open until 8 at night, and so she can and buy at any time.

During COVID, she notes, everything was much cheaper compared to how it is now. She has felt the rise in prices; however, she doesn't stop buying what she likes/needs. She just buys a lesser quantity. Mariyam used the example of tomatoes - she finds tomatoes expensive now, however, she will even buy one and use it. Even with cabbage, she used to buy 500g, now she buys 250g.

Mariyam buys her spices from the chilli grinding mill in Dematagoda. She usually goes there by three wheeler. She will also buy food such as biscuits, ice cream once a month. Her children drink tea, so she will also buy tea for them. She doesn't usually buy food on credit.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

For breakfast, Mariyam will usually wake up in the morning and cook noodles or macaroni. It takes her about one hour or one and half hours to cook. Then she will cook lunch which can take between two to three hours. What she cooks at lunchtime, the family will eat for dinner as well. For lunch, she will usually cook rice, some fish, and two vegetables. She will make a vegetable curry with coconut milk or she will cook something in oil, such as capsicum. Mariyam doesn't usually buy food from outside. The young ones find it too spicy, and she is also worried about the quality/hygiene of the food. Perhaps, once a month, they will order something from KFC, which they will usually deliver to her home.

When considering a nutritious meal, Mariyam thinks it would consist of rice, eggs, a coconut sambol, chicken and maybe 2-3 vegetables. Mariyam notes that she used to make a mallung with her vegetable curry however, now she cannot afford it. A bunch of leafy greens used to LKR 30, and now it's LKR 60. Mariyam says on Fridays she will usually cook something special as it is their day to go to the mosque. She usually fasts during Ramadan. She notes that no one has advised her on nutrition.

She uses her fridge to store vegetables, meat and fish. She also uses her fridge to keep cooked food. She will usually heat up the remaining food the next day and have it as a meal, or as part of her meal. Mariyam uses gas for cooking, alongside the wood stove. Due to her balancing out her usage with the wood stove, she has been able to rely on the gas cylinder she already has. However, with the price of gas increasing, she is planning to buy both a kerosene oil cooker and an electric cooker. As kerosene is unavailable sometimes, she can then use the electric cooker. She mentioned that at one point their source for firewood were the houses that were recently demolished and whose residents were relocated. While her mother cooks curries using the rice cooker, Mariyam only uses it to cook rice.

Her son goes to a school in Dematagoda. Mariyam went on to elaborate that the teacher in school checks the lunch she sends her son. If she doesn't have time to cook and sends something from outside (such as buns), the teacher will advise her not to do that, and will encourage her to send food from home. The teacher recommends sending nutritious food such as chickpea, cowpea, rice etc.

## COMMUNITY

Mariyam believes that the people and society in the area have changed a lot and if they are given a flat in a high-rise they will move there. The main reason is that she says there are a lot of drug issues and she finds it difficult to raise her children therefore.

## (11) Malshani (Interviewed 18/05/22)

## PROFILE

Malshani has been living in Wanathamulla all her life, living in a nearby settlement prior to moving to Sirisara Uyana. Malshani (30) currently lives here with her mother (62), and daughter (8). She moved to Sirisara Uyana and initially stayed on rent and subsequently bought her current flat 3 years ago for LKR 1.4 million. She moved with her family as they weren't keen on staying on in the settlement. She has a document from a lawyer proving ownership of the house. However, this document is in the previous owner's name. Thus, when she was applying for school admission for her daughter, she had to show documentation that showed ownership of her mother's house. She went on to elaborate that even her vote is registered to her mother's house, and that she doesn't use her current address to register anything. Malshani didn't want to register anything to the current house as she was "unsure" - as she didn't know whether the government would try to take this property from them, as not everything is fully registered in their name.

When she used to live in the nearby settlement it used to flood. The water came inside their house. They have now elevated the house and because of that, the water doesn't come in. It used to be a big issue for them and was a key factor as to why they moved to the high-rise. Malshani goes on to elaborate that there was a planning error when the watta was built. The drains were built with an elevation, so the houses that were on less of an elevation were affected. Malshani's mother's house is one such house. Hence, whenever it rained, the water used to flow into their house without flowing into the drain. They used to have a water connection and an electricity connection at their previous home. When compared to their previous home, Malshani and her mother much prefer living in the high rises. She says there is no trouble here, and that they can close their door and mind their own business.

No one in the family has diabetes or heart disease. In the past, school used to be the predominant expenditure for their family, however more recently, they have realised that food is becoming the most significant expense for the month. She also spends a lot on three wheelers. Her daughter used to go to a nearby government school, but now she goes to an international school. They had to move her from the government because she went to an English-medium Montessori, so she is finding it difficult to grasp Sinhala, which is the mode of instruction at government school.

She only went to the government school for three months before COVID hit. Malshani notes that they didn't do much online education during that time either. Even though the teachers were interested in teaching children online, the mothers didn't have the facilities to enable this. A lot of mothers who send their children to the government school didn't have money to buy facilities to enable online learning. They didn't have phones. Additionally, 2 children came to Malshani's house to do online lessons. However, it eventually stopped because there were problems like that - the online system wasn't successful.

Malshani takes a three wheeler to take her daughter to school. It used to cost her LKR 400 to go and come, it used to be LKR 150. She says it's cheaper to go in a three-wheeler than to go by bus. However, with the shortage of fuel, Malshani has been unable to send her daughter to school. She says eating and drinking alone is difficult, but travelling has become very expensive. In addition, her daughter's school bag is very heavy to carry.

#### LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Malshani is the only one who provides the family with an income. She works for a bank and is paid on commission. She also gets an income from her mother's house that has been rented out. Monthly, she is certain that she will get LKR 25,000 in rent - the rest depends on how many commissions she can get. Malshani noted that a lot of people have reduced taking loans considerably now.

#### GRID ACCESS

Malshani notes they don't usually face power cuts at Sirisara Uyana. Water cuts only happen if there is a problem. Malshani notes that the electricity bill is higher here than her previous home. She gets charged over LKR 5000 here. She has been told it's because of the ceiling fan that they use, however they used to use a ceiling fan in their previous home and never had trouble with high electricity bills. There isn't a considerable difference in the water bill. They say the water pressure in the building is good and they don't have any problems with any of the plumbing or drainage in the building. However, during the power cut periods, they noticed a slight reduction in water pressure, but it wasn't significant. Malshani says that if they ever have a problem, they try to get it attended to as soon as possible. They are careful about what they put in the sink, as a blockage on their floor (9th floor) can impact the lower floors.

Malshani says the lift next to their house is broken. There are only two lifts in the building, so when one breaks, they all must rely on one. The issue with the lift is that it doesn't stop on their floor as the button is broken, so Malshani's elderly mother has to go to the 10th floor, and walk down one flight of stairs. The lift has been broken for 6 years now. It hasn't been fixed yet. She notes that her neighbour was in labour and they had to carry her, as she was unable to use the lift.

With regards to safety, Malshani says they don't go out after 10 at night. After 10, they close our gate and mind their own business. They built a gate for their safety. To the best of her knowledge there hasn't been theft on their floor, although some say theft happens. However, she notes that if she fixes lights in the common areas, those will be stolen. They have to pay LKR 300 for a month for garbage collection. Malshani says that if they come one day, they won't come for the next four days, nor do they come on Poya days.

#### FOOD PURCHASING

They buy all their goods from Udayagiri stores in Mount Mary, close to Nalanda college. They shop there as it is cheaper, and they get a discount. Malshani notes that if they buy a packet of biscuits, at least 5 rupees will be discounted. Malshani usually goes with her sister, as her sister's husband owns a three-wheeler which they usually travel in.

She buys her vegetables from the vendors outside the Sahaspura complex, and sometimes from Kele Market in Pettah. If she goes to Kele market she will buy for a week, otherwise she will buy vegetables daily. She will keep her vegetables in the fridge. Her meat and fish are also bought from the vendors outside the Sahaspura complex, on a daily basis. They only buy from the small shops in the building when they need something urgently. Spices are brought from the mill in Borella. Her shopping is based on when she gets her income.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

They used to use gas for cooking, however, now there is a shortage of gas. She has a small can of gas remaining which she uses sparingly. She cooks using the rice cooker predominantly to reduce the strain on the gas. They have noticed a significant increase in their electricity bill after using the rice cooker more. When their gas finishes, Malshani says she won't know what to do. She says she wants to keep 3 stones in the corridor and use a wood stove and invite her neighbours to use it too. Given that with the rice cooker, they have to pay for electricity, which becomes expensive. There's no kerosene oil to cook using kerosene and they have to stay in queues to buy it. They can't buy a hotplate as that too uses electricity. She says that's the biggest problem in their building - they have very limited space.

It takes them a lot of time to cook. Malshani's mother mainly cooks, sometimes Malshani will cook. In the morning, if the daughter is going to school, there will be a type of grain that they cook. They manage with that and cook it using the rice cooker. When they cook rice, they keep it for dinner too. They don't usually put that food in the fridge, but rather, will keep it in the saucepans. They also buy food from outside quite often; they eat pizza a lot (from Pizza Hut). They either get it delivered or they will go and eat.

Their meals usually consist of rice, a vegetable and fish or a meat. They mainly buy sailfish or yellowfin tuna. They also like to have a mallung with their meals. However, it also depends on what is available in the market below. If they go early in the morning, they can buy all of this. If they get a little late, there's limited availability of stuff. Sometimes, they would make 2 vegetables, a mallung, and a meat. Otherwise, they can manage even with just one vegetable. When it comes to fruit they buy bananas, narang and watermelon. They also buy oranges and apples although they are in limited supply now. Malshani notes that her daughter really likes fruits, however, given the fuel crisis, fruits have become very expensive.

When considering the ideal nutritious meal, Malshani says it would consist of rice, mallung and fish. Vegetables such as luffa are good. They usually buy carrots and beans because it's easy.

When comparing with the time of COVID, Malshani says they are buying a lot less compared to then. For example, chicken - previously, even during Covid times, if they used to buy for LKR 300, it would be sufficient for two meals. They could eat for lunch and then for dinner too and could feed even another person. Now it's not possible. If they buy

for LKR 300 and after her daughter and her mother eat, Malshani doesn't get to eat. Back then, they didn't eat fish as they thought it was cheaper to buy meat. Now, they say no to both fish and meat, and fry 2 or 3 sprats because it's cheaper. If they buy fish, they will buy 250-300g to last for dinner as well.

The school has said that chickpeas, cowpea, mung beans or a type of grain are mandatory 3 days a week. One day of the week they must bring a root vegetable such as manioc. Malshani has been informed not to send buns.

When it comes to using the fridge, if there are leftovers at night, they will put them in the fridge. If there's a lot of rice leftover, they will put it in water and make porridge. Otherwise, they will keep it in the freezer and take it in the morning to make fried rice. Malshani will make fried rice to eat on school mornings.

They've stocked up on milk powder, so they don't have problem getting milk powder. Her daughter only drinks fresh milk, and the Kotmale milk is there in Food City. Rich Life is also available so she hasn't felt the impact of a reduction of fresh milk in the market. She was able to order Ambewela milk off a shop on Facebook. She orders things that she can't find elsewhere off Facebook if she comes across it.

#### COMMUNITY

Malshani notes that there isn't an association/committee for the building - if they have a problem, they speak to the UDA officer downstairs. However, now, they don't even tell them their problems, as it's easier to solve it by themselves.

## PROFILE

Akram was born in Kandy but has been living in Colombo for over 30 years. He used to live in a settlement around 4km away but moved to the high rise 6 years ago, taking the property on lease from a friend. His wife is from Slave Island. Akram noted that those who lost houses in Slave Island due to demolitions in that area were given properties where he is staying now. *"The idea was to give housing to poor people. But what they demolished, labelling them as unauthorised constructions, were good houses. They weren't unauthorised."* He goes on to elaborate that while each house was given an apartment to relocate to, that wasn't fair as some families were bigger than others and an apartment such as his would be too small for them. He also says the government didn't take into account families living on multiple floors in the same house - and they were all just given one apartment to live in. Akram also says that there were people who were well off that got apartments, and some whose houses weren't even demolished sometimes got 2 or 3 apartments.

His vote is registered to the current flat that he lives in. There are currently 6 people living here - four children and Akram and his wife. No one in Akram's family has any non communicable diseases. Two of his children go to a nearby government school. Their ages are 15 and 7. Akram usually takes two children to school in a vehicle, but is finding it difficult, financially, to do so these days. His other two children stay with his mother-in-law because he is unable to provide for the whole family. They live in Slave Island.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Akram is the only one who provides an income for the family. He repairs phones from his flat for a living. He used to also push a fruit cart in the past. In the past, he used to work in the Middle East. There is no other way the family earns an income, apart from Akram's work. No one in his family gets social security benefits nor have they applied for any benefits from the state. Akram says his monthly income can range anything from LKR 200,000 – 300,000 a month to just 30 rupees. He says he doesn't charge a lot to fix phones, as he tries to give back to people who are struggling financially. While their income fluctuates quite significantly, they usually don't have to skip meals. He attributes this to the good people in his building and those he associates with, being able to provide food for his children even when he is unable to.

## GRID ACCESS

Their previous house had a metered water and electricity connection, nor did it flood. They came to their current flat after obtaining a lease, however the owner of the property died.

With regard to Sirisara Uyana, he says the lift breaks down suddenly which makes it difficult for him and his family. He also goes on to say that in the last 8 months, the security of the building has also reduced, perhaps due to the economic situation of the country.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Akram usually buys the groceries for his house. He buys dry food from the shops outside their building on the road. He says he likes Samba rice, so that is the rice that they usually buy. They also buy their vegetables and meat from the same row of shops. However, he notes that that market is quite expensive. While they do sell halal meat in that market, they have stopped buying halal as Akram says it has become a marketing gimmick where they use a label with a stamp to make more money.

#### COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Akram says they eat all 3 meals, even if they don't cook. His wife makes their meals in the rice cooker. They have two rice cookers, which they use to prepare their meals. She will usually cook in the morning and they will eat that for lunch as well, and boil more rice if need be. She notes that while the rice cooker works well to make curries in it, it doesn't work that well for tempering. Whatever is leftover from lunch, they will have for dinner. Their breakfast is the smallest meal of the day. For lunch, they will usually have rice, meat or fish and a dhal curry. When it comes to vegetables, they don't eat that many fresh vegetables, and mainly rely on dhal. They sometimes buy bananas to eat, as his wife likes them a lot. Akram doesn't like to buy food from outside, although his two children enjoy it.

Akram's wife notes that the teachers at school sometimes check what the children have brought for their mid-morning meal to make sure it's nutritious.

When comparing with the time during COVID, he says his eating pattern has changed considerably. Akram notes that his family had plenty to eat during COVID. He was also doing a vegetable business, so he had money off that. He says that food was much cheaper back then.

Akram's wife notes that their electricity bill has increased since they started relying more heavily on the rice cooker. They even boil eggs in the rice cooker. They don't have a fridge. They would like to use a wood stove, but they can't as the smoke and ash would blacken the house. However, his wife still prefers gas as it is easy. If not gas, she says she prefers kerosene oil. Prior to using the rice cooker she used to cook using kerosene oil, but now it's difficult to buy it so she switched to the rice cooker.

#### COMMUNITY

They note that they don't know if there is a residents committee in their building.



**(13) Ali (Interviewed 07/05/22)****PROFILE**

He first moved to Sirisara Uyana around 8 years ago. He used to do welding work to earn an income, but due to COVID lockdowns he was unable to continue his work. He says that now he faces a lot of financial problems as he is unable to find work. Whilst he used to earn a fair amount, he has now lost all the money and gold he used to have because he is unable to find a job. Within the year (2022), he says that 22 pounds of gold he owned had to be pawned to get money for household expenditure. These days, he is only eating coconut sambol and rice as he cannot afford to buy food for his family. In order to survive, he is giving his house out on lease to earn some money.

Ali attributes his lack of work to the lack of demand for construction work. He had to stop working as the gentleman he was working for said he didn't have money to pay him. He took on a job worth LKR 100,000 but only worked for two days. His boss had told him, "Ali I'm unable to pay the people in the office. I'm a bit stuck. We shall resume when I let you know". He said another two jobs have been stopped in a similar way. In order to get money, he is forced to lease his flat for LKR 1.5 million. After giving this property on lease, they plan to rent a house in another area in Colombo.

Ali has three children, ages 20, 18 and 9 and has been married for 21 years. His children go to a school, which is close to his previous home. Even after relocation, they continued to send their children to the same school even though it was further away, so as not to disrupt their schooling. His second child travels to school by bus. His eldest child has finished his A/Levels and wanted to enrol in an engineering course at a private Institute in Malabe. However, that would have cost Ali LKR 1.2 million for him to do that course. Because of his financial troubles, Ali was unable to pay for it.

**LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME**

When he got married he was a cashier in a cafe. Three months after he got married, he lost that job and his friend introduced him to a welder who taught him the trade. He says he taught himself a lot and was able to build his skill. Whilst he can walk into a job at any point now that would pay him LKR 100,000, he says it isn't worth it because his eyes usually get burnt, and his eyes are worth more than that. Before COVID, he was well off. He even lent money and got interest. He is supposed to get LKR 3 million from that, but they have not paid him back yet. He says all construction work was put on hold during COVID. During COVID, however, they received a lot of aid to their property.

Ali used to own a three wheeler, but during COVID the payments went into arrears and he lost it. He says if he is giving his flat on lease, he will try and buy a three wheeler to drive around and make money. He says that if he wanted to sell drugs and weed he could make a lot of money, but he doesn't want to do that. He says, *"it's very difficult with this government. We are in a situation where we can't even buy bread and eat, with how much things have collapsed. If we buy a loaf of bread, there's not enough money to buy a coconut. That's how the times are"*.

In order to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis, Ali said that his wife (for the first time in 21 years since they got married) has started to make cooked food at home such as roti and sell to shops to earn additional income for the home. She supplies to a shop in her building. Ali said, *"I really don't like that she has to do it. I never in my life thought this would happen. But there's nothing we can do about it with this financial situation. I really don't like to make her earn money."*

#### GRID ACCESS

Soon after getting married, Ali bought a house for LKR 45,000. Two years after they got married, the house was identified for demolition by the state. They were given his current property for relocation, however he had to pay LKR 60,000 to move here. Additionally, he had to pay LKR 10,000-15,000 for electricity. He has to make a monthly rent payment of LKR 2639, but he has only paid for 2-3 months, and has arrears of LKR 217,727. He says his payment towards the flat and water bill come together through the UDA. He says there were 100 houses that were demolished - half of the residents got resettled in Sirisara Uyana, with the other half being relocated to Dematagoda.

Ali goes on to elaborate that he wasn't given much notice about the demolition of his property. He said once you are informed, within about 3 days they will allocate a relocation site to you and expect you to move. As he had spent a lot of money on the house he had bought, he was in debt for that too. His wife had to take a loan from the women's bank to pay for current flat. He goes on to elaborate that "it's very unfair" and that they should be relocated for free if the State demolishes houses that they own.

In his previous home he didn't have a water or electricity connection, as he didn't have much money. As soon as he got married, he rented a house and paid an advance for a year, but in less than even 3 months, they felt disturbed there due to the noise as it was on the side of the road. So upon deciding that they couldn't live there, they rented another place in close vicinity to their home. They stayed for about one and half years there on rent - after which the owners wanted the house back. There was a house for LKR 25,000, and his mother-in-law bought it. They then stayed there for some months. In front of that house, there was a plot on sale for LKR 45,000 which his wife asked him to buy. There was a big garbage dump there and he refused to buy it. However, somehow, his wife persuaded him to buy that and pawn all the gold jewellery. He notes that he had about 6 pounds in gold jewellery which he got LKR 38,000 for. The balance he paid from his pocket - on promise saying he would pay the balance later. After about a year of the plot of land just being empty, he got some wooden planks for about LKR 5,000 and built a structure. Then slowly, he was able to add some tar and 6-7 months later he was able to put a cement floor. After that, they moved into the house. The house used to flood even if it rained for 5 minutes, he says. Soon after that his son was born. About a year after he received some money which he used to elevate his house and rebuild his house with bricks. He also got an electricity connection at that time. 6 months after that, his house got demolished.

After moving to Sirisara Uyana, Ali did the tiling and painting of his property. Ali says his

previous place was better, even though the house was small. In the past year, he had more than LKR 6 million of money with him and gold jewellery, however now he has lost it all. He says that there used to be a TV in his house, but he had a fight with his wife and broke it because of all his problems. He said that he has broken two tvs in his house, for the same reason. He said he has broken goods in his house worth LKR 1.8 million, due to his anger management issues. Hence, he bought a fish tank to help him relax and calm down.

#### FOOD PURCHASING

They buy their food and vegetables from the market outside their property. They haven't been able to afford meat and fish lately, so it is mainly rice and vegetables that they eat. Today, they had cooked rice with some coconut sambol, and that was their meal. The previous day, they were able to afford some fish so they cooked and ate that.

Ali used to make close to LKR 100,000 a month, however it wasn't easy. If he got a daily wage of LKR 3000, if he eats from shops, a meal is about LKR 350 or 400. He also smokes. He spends about LKR 1000 where he works and another LKR 200 to get home. Therefore, his expenditure itself is LKR 1,200. LKR 1,800 is the balance. He keeps the balance for the household; however LKR 1800 is not enough to feed a family of 5 to eat 3 meals. He also says there is no milk powder either, rather, the shops sell it by grams. 50 grams of milk powder is LKR 160. Even if he were to make tea, they wouldn't be able to do that with 50 grams, they would need at least 150-200g. As a result, he has switched to drinking plain tea. However now, there isn't even milk powder anymore, nor gas or kerosene. A bottle of kerosene oil is about LKR 250. However, if you buy it from the shed, a litre is 90, but the shops sell a bottle for LKR 250. As they really need it and cannot afford to spend their day in the queue for kerosene, they buy a bottle from local vendors.

#### COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Ali's family used to use gas for cooking but have now switched to kerosene. Even when the neighbourhood shops get gas, and they get an alert to say it has come, Ali says by the time he goes, there isn't any gas. He says the gas that comes to the area is less than the demand, which means only a few people get it.

Ali noted that during COVID they couldn't step outside their apartment. He said that there were police personnel stationed at their building to make sure they wouldn't go out. During this time, Ali had to pawn a lot of gold jewellery to ensure the family had some money to survive. He further goes on to elaborate that whilst they were given food stuff such as rice, they only gave white rice which his family don't eat. They were given soya, sprats and tinned fish which they ate. However, he said they got this in excess and says, "how much soya meat and sprats can we eat".

Before COVID, they used to eat all 3 meals. They used to eat breakfast from the shop. They would have home cooked food for lunch and dinner, they would usually cook something extra. Any leftovers from lunch were for dinner. However, Ali says that most of the time he would buy dinner from the shop. They used to spend over LKR 5,000 a day -

LKR 3,000 on fruits and about LKR 1000-1500 on cooked food from outside.

Ali noted that the children don't get food from school, and that they usually have to take food and go. Ali says he usually gives money to the elder son to buy something from the canteen, but for the daughter, they will prepare some food at home.

#### COMMUNITY

Ali and his family were hoping to move out of their home the next day. He said he hadn't sought permission from the UDA to give their home on lease.

He said he hasn't had any problems in their home - the neighbours are multi faith and multi race, and they all live together in harmony. He also noted that there are a few people from his previous neighbourhood where their homes were demolished, that live in the building.

## PROFILE

Abirami has been living in the high rises for about 9 years now. She lives with her mother, father, her son and her younger brother. Her vote is registered to her current home. Her hometown is Borella and used to previously lived in two other places. She moved to the high rises as her old home was demolished by the government. When she moved to the high rises she had to make a down payment of LKR 5000 and a monthly amount of LKR 2000 to the government, which they get an invoice for monthly with the water bill. She noted that she would have to pay this for around 30 years, after which she would get a deed to the property. They were able to get a leasing agreement to show that they have been paying without arrears, to show documentation when they were trying to get her son into a school. However, that document has no legal standing and some schools don't even accept it. She goes on to say that her son was rejected from a school, because he didn't have enough documentation.

Abirami was confirmed pregnant with her first child only after arriving at the high rise. So, everything of her child is under her current address. Their son's bank account, hers and her husband's bank accounts, everything. At the interview, the teacher had given her son 89 marks, however after passing to the next round they were told that their addresses can't be accepted, and that the application is rejected.

Her elder son who is 7 years old goes to a semi-Government school in Angoda. The child stays in Wellampitiya and commutes to school from there as it is closer. Her younger son goes to this school because it's difficult to get into government schools. He is 3 years and 5 months old. Abirami's mother has diabetes, and her brother has high cholesterol. As a result, they are careful with what food they consume. For example, they don't eat sugar, and focus more on eating things like leafy greens and beans.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Abirami and her brother are the only income earners in their house. Abirami and her brother make and sell art and hand-craft items. They sell to vendors in Pettah but also have a shop on a leading e-commerce platform. She said there is no demand for their products in her community as no one can afford to buy items such as those. They are finding it very difficult to run their business owing to the high price of raw materials. Polythene, which they use to package their products, has gone up by over 200%.

In addition to selling to vendors in Pettah, Abirami also sells online via e-commerce platform. Abirami and her brother have also started a small shop selling these items near a school road, where she stocks her items. When she gets an order, she will take it to the e-commerce hub and they will deliver it to the end consumer from there. While she does this in the morning hours, she puts her son at a nursery, so she can focus on her work.

Abirami used to be part of a seettu, but she no longer is. She first joined when she was 15 years old, even though they only give membership at 18. She was able to do a lot through this, however, after COVID they were unable to make a lot of repayments. Whilst

she noted that they weren't refusing to pay, they were just unable to pay all at once. They asked if they could pay back their loan in smaller instalments or to push back the payment due date. They said that they were unable to do that and asked them to make the accumulated repayments for many months all at once. Abirami was unable to do that with their income. They had bought land from that too. When they went to the police they were told that they couldn't take on the case.

Abirami's monthly income for the family is between LKR 70,000 - 80,000 a month. Abirami notes that in April their business slows down, but they experience higher sales in November and December. Their income fluctuates with the change in sales.

#### GRID ACCESS

When Abirami used to live in her previous home, they had a metered electricity and water connection. However, it used to flood when it rained. They much prefer their earlier home, as they said they had everything there, and in their new home they feel cramped. Their son can't even play outside.

Only 20 out of the 82 families that lost their house to demolition were resettled in their building. After their houses were demolished, there was a lottery system at the UDA office and people who picked below number 50 went over there. Around 60 houses were moved there. She says that in her current building no one talks to one another. After their houses were demolished, they stayed in temporary housing for about one and half years. The others didn't have to go through that.

At their previous home they were able to grow manioc, ambarella, sweet potato etc. However now, they can't grow anything, they don't even have a way of lighting a wood stove to cook. It's a safety concern to use a wood stove in a high rise, and also a lot of people dry their clothes in the corridor so it's virtually impossible to do it. Abirami also says the community life in her previous neighbourhood was also so much better. They are scared to even keep their house closed for a day and go anywhere. She notes that when someone parks a three-wheeler outside the building, it is highly likely that their petrol will be stolen. Sometimes, phones are stolen from window ledges of homes. There is also a problem with drug and drug use in the building.

The water is only cut in the building if there's an issue. Once they cut their water connection as they were unable to pay a bill for 3 days. Another time when the building had a problem with water, they brought water in bowers and supplied. Abirami and their family boil water before drinking. They have no issues with the water pressure, if at all they say it's too much.

Both lifts work on their floor. Although two are in operation, sometimes one stops working intermittently. Abirami highlights that a lot of people use the lifts badly, without

maintaining it. Abirami pays LKR 300 a month for garbage collection.

If they could improve this building, they would like to have proper CCTV cameras installed for safety. There are flats in Kalinga Mawatha that have walls, gates and security - which help to maintain a high degree of security. Those flats were given to people by the railway authority through the state. Whilst Abirami had to pay money for this property, others did not have to for the flats in Kalinga Mawatha.

#### FOOD PURCHASING

They buy their dry goods from the stores outside their building, along with their other items. They only buy from the shops in the building if they need something in an emergency, like a bit of sugar, coconut oil, soap etc. They usually buy carrot and leeks to make fried rice for their son to take to school on Monday. In addition to that they buy leafy greens, jackfruit, manioc, radish, snake gourd etc. They also buy fruits such as bananas often.

#### COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Abirami mainly uses her income from the online shop to cover her and her younger son's expenses. From what her brother contributes, 50% is spent on electricity and food. However, now things such as gas are also becoming more expensive. They used to cook with gas but as it became too expensive, they switched to cooking everything in the rice cooker. As a result, they have seen increases in the price of their electricity bill. What used to cost LKR 1500 now has doubled to LKR 2000. To mitigate the shortage of gas, they paid LKR 3500 to buy a kerosene oil cooker, however kerosene is unavailable right now so they are unable to use it. Abirami's mother is the one who selects the goods and does the cooking. It takes her about an hour to cook. Whilst the rice cooker is fast, it still takes longer than what the gas cooker used to take.

Abirami only cooks once a day and in the night usually has bread for dinner. However, they have also noticed a price increase in bread which is making it more unaffordable. They used to cook twice a day but with the rising cost of cooking, they switched that down to once a day. They don't usually eat breakfast in the morning – the younger son will drink some milk and Abirami's parents will make some kanji made with leftover rice. They usually cook for lunch and make enough for dinner as well. Sometimes they will buy food from outside, although they say that the price of that is also increasing, so they will have to reduce the frequency. They buy hoppers, roti, fried rice etc.

For lunch they will usually have, rice, fish, a vegetable and a sambol. Today, Abirami had made a jackfruit curry. They eat kora rice because it is comparatively cheaper than the rest.

Abirami says that the school monitors the nutrition of the children, and they even provide a schedule of when to bring certain food. For example, Monday -roti, Tuesday - rice, Wednesday - noodles etc. If they send food outside the schedule, she noted that the teacher would complain about this. They allow them to send things like buns once a week

but don't encourage it. Even if the children don't like to eat certain types of food, such as roti - the teacher will force them to eat it, and some children will even vomit, as a result.

During COVID, Abirami's family say they got a lot of support. Weekly they were provided with goods worth LKR 5000 when lockdowns were imposed. In total they received something like 120kg of rice.

They put cooked food in the fridge, if there is any leftover food from the day. Otherwise they will use it to store coconuts, vegetables, anything that can be consumed the next day.

They have received nutrition advice from the clinic due to the diabetes and cholesterol problem. If they consider the most nutritious meal it would have rice, leafy greens, dhal etc.



## (15) Mumtaz (Interviewed 07/05/22)

## PROFILE

Mumtaz's hometown is Slave Island and she used to live there before moving to the high rise. Her family was in a transit camp before moving to a high-rise. Afterwards they moved to their current home which is rented for LKR 13,000 a month. That contract will end at the end of this year.

Mumtaz lives with her father, mother, husband and three children in their home. Her elder sister's son also stays with them. They used to all live together in their previous home too. Her mother had gone to the clinic and she was told that her leg needed to be operated, however they didn't have the supplies to undertake the operation.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her father (75) earns an income by working as a key cutter. Mumtaz's husband also does construction work and used to earn an income until cement became expensive. Now he doesn't have work. Her father keeps his tools locked up in a small shop near his shop and locks it up each night. Her mother has a bad leg, so she cooks food and supplies them to shops - however with the rising price of flour and other ingredients it's becoming too expensive to afford that. There is no other way for the family to earn an income. They don't get anything from the women's bank or Samurdhi.

Mumtaz says she needs LKR 3000 for a day to just do the cooking. The electricity bill is about LKR 5000 for the month. An additional LKR 500 goes for the children's bus fare and school expenses. Her daughters go to a school in Panchikawatte. They usually travel to school by bus and take a three wheeler back home. Her son will be sitting for his O/Levels this year. He also goes to the same school. They used to go for tuition but they stopped after COVID.

## GRID ACCESS

The house they lived in previously was very spacious and comfortable compared to the one they live in currently which is cramped and small. In the past her elder sister was able to visit and stay with them, but she no longer can do that as they lack the space. The people who used to live in her community now live in Dematagoda, while about half of them live in Sirisara Uyana. They didn't receive any compensation for the house. First, they had to pay LKR 25,000 upfront, and even then they had to pay rent of LKR 1000 a month. Even for their current home, they had to pay LKR 50,000 and after that they were asked to pay LKR 2600 monthly. In their previous home they had electricity and water connections. Their vote was also registered to that house. Mumtaz notes that the bills at her previous home were less than they are facing now. Their previous house didn't flood when it rained. When there are water cuts in the building, they would inform Mumtaz and her family beforehand, allowing them to fill up water into buckets. Mumtaz says they don't face any issues with the water and usually drink tap water without boiling it. They also don't experience any power cuts in the building.

At their current home, when her father returns from work, he will shout his granddaughter's name and then she will press the button for the lift. As the lift is broken, he has to go to either the 3rd or 4th floor and climb down. Both her parents have a bad leg so it makes it very difficult for them when the lift isn't working. While there are two lifts, only one of the lifts functions regularly, which means there is a big demand on only one lift. Whilst Mumtaz says the building is safe, she says the location isn't that great, especially if you have boys due to the prevalence of drugs. She is also worried about the exposure of drugs to her daughter, so she isn't allowed to go down and play, either.

When considering infrastructure, they would still prefer their old home, compared to where they are living now. They had a much bigger house, with three rooms. Now, her family has to live in different places, whilst previously they used to live together. As they are living on rent here, when their contract comes to an end, they will have to think of where to move to next. They have to find money to put down a deposit for their next house, and they are struggling with trying to decide if it's better to spend money on house expenses or save money for rent.

Mumtaz noted that they don't grow anything at home as they lack the space to grow. Mumtaz knows her neighbours as they are some people she used to live with previously. When asked what she would like to see improved, she said that a bigger house for them would be more suited as they are a big family. The bathroom is also small, there isn't even space to grow plants in the bathroom, let alone the balcony.

Mumtaz doesn't have access to any public taps, so they are solely dependent on the piped water they get. She notes that it's difficult to use the bathroom sometimes with kids when there is a water cut, as there is not enough water sometimes. Sometimes there is a time lag, when one side of the building gets water, and only half an hour later will their side of the building get it.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Mumtaz's father buys vegetables for the house when he is on his way back from work, if he has got some money. He will usually bring 2-3 vegetables. Recently he had bought beans which he noted had gone up in price. They mainly buy cabbage and beans. They don't eat a lot of fruits, only bananas - which they buy every other day. Mumtaz noted that they don't shop from the market outside their building as they sell it for much more. For example, if something costs LKR 150, they will sell it for 20 rupees more. With regard to the shops inside the building, they buy things in an emergency even though they are comparatively the most expensive. Mumtaz noted that they don't even give a LKR 5 discount, and sell for more than what the vendors outside the building would sell for.

Their biggest expenditure for the month is food. They get some support from the school in terms of books. She used to work previously at a bank serving tea, however she lost her job during COVID but they still continue to help with books and bags for her children's education.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

In the morning, her mother will prepare food to be sold to shops. If there are string hoppers, dosa or something like that, the children will take that to school. If her son needs to stay after school, she will cook food in the morning itself and send. If she cooks dinner, Mumtaz will serve the remainder as lunch the next day.

Her mother sells food to shops in the building. She gets paid for what is sold. Sometimes there is some left, so they make a loss. A packet of flour is LKR 200 or 300. It used to be LKR 100-something. If there's food left, she makes no profit. It's a loss for her. On top of that, there's no gas. If they buy kerosene oil from the shops, a bottle is LKR 250. They are compelled to buy from the shops at a higher price, because otherwise they won't get any kerosene if they buy it from the fuel station. They used to cook with gas until they heard about explosions that were happening because of gas cylinders. At that time, they switched to the kerosene oil cooker.

Mumtaz says that the school checks the nutrition of the children and advice what to bring to school for the mid-day meal. They have asked them not to bring buns, but to bring rice and a bottle of water.

During COVID there wasn't much of a problem with their food. They were given dry rations for the house by the state, such as rice. They also got meat, fish, and flour from people who knew them and did jobs. These days, Mumtaz spends a lot of time looking for items such as milk powder to make milk for her little ones, as milk powder is in short supply. Additionally, given the rising price of food, once they make food for breakfast, they have to think of what they will have to eat for their remaining meals of the day given the high price of food.

Mumtaz has a fridge that they use for things such as ice and ice water. They also use the fridge to store cooked food. However, when they buy vegetables, fish and meat they won't use the fridge to keep those items.

Mumtaz's father has diabetes. They somehow control it with the food that they cook at home. They don't cook samba rice, instead, use nadu rice. They put less sugar when they make tea. Whilst he is supposed to go to the clinic to get more medicine as his current medicine has finished, Mumtaz says there's no point in him going because there is a shortage of medicines and they don't have his medicine in stock.

When compared to life before COVID, she says their lives have changed a lot. In the past they could eat anything they wanted to, as they had enough money to eat and drink. Now, when they think of the price of goods, "they don't even feel like eating". They can't afford to eat food from outside anymore. They used to previously buy kottu and fried rice from the shops but can no longer afford to do so.

No one has advised Mumtaz on nutrition.

## (16) Sujeewa (Interviewed 07/05/22)

**PROFILE**

Sujeewa was born in Wanathamulla, and she considers this her hometown. She moved to the building in 2016, when her husband's home was demolished in a watta (informal settlement) close by. She doesn't have a deed for the house she is living in currently, however for her previous home she had a card from the National Housing Development Authority that showed her ownership.

When she moved here, she had to pay LKR 2750 monthly over a period of 10 years - and was told she would get ownership of the property later on. Her vote is registered to her current address. Sujeewa lives with 5 others, her three children (16,12,4), her husband and father. Her children are all attending government schools close by. They usually walk to school. No one in her family has any heart diseases or diabetes, but her father has a wheeze. He can't take the stairs as a result and is reliant on the lift.

**LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME**

Only she and her husband work in their household. She works at a State Institution. She got in as an assistant around a year and a half ago but hasn't been made permanent still. Her husband is a manpower worker in a different state institution but he hasn't been made permanent either. He has been there for about 16-17 years now. They both get their income monthly, and they have no other way of earning an income, not from women's banks or rotating credit. No one in their family gets samurdhi support either. Their household income for about a month is LKR 40,000. She has a loan that she must pay to the women's bank - LKR 13,000 monthly. Their biggest items of expenditure are for food and tuition. Sujeewa notes that her income has increased since COVID.

Sujeewa's office is 5km away. Her husband works 6.5km away - and they both take the bus to work. However, that also has gone up in price. In the past it used to cost LKR 10 to go from her home to borella, now it's LKR 30. When she was hired, she got a salary of LKR 22,500. The salary has remained the same. Prior to this, she used to be a nursery teacher. However, they stopped paying her after 12 years as they said they stopped getting funds.

Sujeewa worked as a community liaison with the police during COVID so she was able to leave her house. They would buy vegetables for the community from outside and come and deliver it. She was in charge of her floor. Sujeewa said she didn't get her full salary during the lockdown, she got about LKR 16,000. They were supposed to get a separate LKR 24,000 for being a community liaison but she never received it. She only received LKR 1600. However, people from other flats who played the same role got it. They informed the inspector general, and other people but they never got it.

## GRID ACCESS

Despite island wide power cuts, Sujeewa doesn't face power cuts in her building. Their previous home had an electricity meter and they didn't usually experience power cuts. When compared to their previous home, Sujeewa says that there is no garden for the children to play in, and if they allow their children to play outside their house now, it bothers some people. Also given the structure of the flats, whenever their neighbour or her opens their door, they can see right into each other's houses, so there is limited privacy. As a result, they have to keep their door closed, like many houses in the building. As a result, the children feel stuck inside, and the adults feel it too. In their previous home they also had a water connection, so they haven't seen an improvement in their infrastructure since moving here. They used to rely on facilities in their home, so there wasn't a need to share with others either. Also, given there are no public wells or taps in the vicinity, if there is a water cut you can't do anything. Over the last few weeks they have experienced quite a few water cuts, which makes it very difficult as they cannot flush. Additionally they have young children who use the toilet constantly which makes it very difficult.

While their previous home used to flood, it used to happen very rarely. They have more problems here than they had at their previous home. Not only do they have mosquitoes here, but they also have mice who come through the pipes. Sujeewa noted that many people in the building are having issues with mice.

When compared with their original settlement, she prefers her old home as they have less freedom here. Their flat has a water leak and is cracked in several places. They can't fix it themselves, as they don't know the structure of the building. The bathroom has mould and leaks. Additionally, the stench of the pipes also comes to their building, which makes it unbearable. To get anything fixed they have to submit letters to the UDA, and it takes a long time for them to come and fix it. The mail is usually delivered to their doors by the postman. If no one is at home, it is slipped under the door. There is also someone who comes to collect the garbage. You have to pay him LKR 300 for a month. They used to separate the garbage but now they don't - they stopped during COVID.

They usually boil water from the tap and drink, but sometimes they also drink straight from the tap. In her previous home they used to drink from the tap too.

While there are two lifts in the building, only one is working. The one closes to them has been broken for a long time and hasn't been fixed in many years. During COVID it was even more difficult as multiple people were cramped in a small space if they wanted to use the lift. Also, people wouldn't wear masks, and would take offence if you asked them to wear masks. Also, residents get in the lift, beyond the recommended limit. Despite numerous complaints, the UDA still hasn't fixed it.

When considering improvement to infrastructure, they note that they could have been given bigger houses, with better finishes. Bigger rooms, with outdoor facilities for

children, whilst also making sure that flats don't face each other, so you have some privacy. Also, there's no way to get inside the house in an emergency. It has happened to Sujeewa, along with some other people in the building, where the door has closed, trapping the children inside.

### FOOD PURCHASING

They buy their vegetables from shops outside Sahaspura. Sometimes there is a vegetable truck parked around the corner from their building (in front of the other gate of Sahaspura) which usually sells cheaper vegetables. They would buy from there as well. They buy their fish and meat from the shops below. They only buy food from the shops in the building in an emergency.

They usually buy their groceries for a week from Kele market. If Sujeewa is unable to go, she will buy her groceries locally. She mostly buys carrots and pumpkins. Especially pumpkin as her children like to eat it. When Sujeewa buys, she does it according to preference. She buys her spices from a shop in Dematagoda - a chilli grinding mill. They used to buy for a month and store the spices, however, as things have become more expensive now, they buy for a week at a time. She usually goes and buys when her salary comes in. She doesn't buy food on credit.

### COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

Sujeewa and her family eat all three meals. They cook in the morning and eat for lunch as well. At night, she will cook something extra. For breakfast they will have rice, fish, 2 vegetables and a mallung. Sujeewa usually does the cooking, and will take her lunch with her to work, so do her husband and her children. For dinner, they will have some rice, and at least a coconut sambol. In the past they would eat fried rice or kottu from the shops, however now they can't afford it. There is one shop below that they usually buy food from. They mostly buy their goods when their salary comes in (on the 10th of each month). If Sujeewa is getting late, her husband will buy on his way back from work.

Sujeewa uses gas to cook, however is running low on her supply. When she runs out of gas, she is going to switch to the rice cooker. She can't use a wood stove as there is no stove and it's also a health risk. A lot of people in her building have switched to the rice cooker. Sujeewa goes on to say that during COVID she used to eat well. While the price of goods was high, it wasn't as high as it is now. During lockdown, her husband still got a salary so they were able to afford it. Now, times are so bad they sometimes eat only one vegetable with rice. Even things like dhal have become unaffordable.

Sujeewa usually wakes up at 4 in the morning to cook, and it takes her about an hour to cook everything. They have a fridge, and they use it to store meat and vegetables they have bought. If there is leftover coconut, she will also keep that in the fridge. She sometimes also puts cooked food in the fridge. She notes that when food is kept in the fridge, it becomes "cold and different". If she didn't want to put it in the fridge, she would leave it out overnight and nothing would happen by the next day. She would have the curries with bread, however now bread is unaffordable so she can't do that.

Everyone eats the same food at Sujeewa's home, so she makes the same thing for everyone. For the little ones, she will make it separately without using chilli, but that's the main difference.

During COVID, the government gave them a lot of support, Sujeewa says. They got rice, coconut, lentils, soya and biscuits. They even got cakes for the children. Cakes and biscuits were only given once, but the other items they got at least 4 times a month. They received this continuously while the lockdown lasted. Sujeewa said they experienced 3 lockdowns in their building.

No one has advised Sujeewa about nutrition. She noted that they monitor the food the children bring from home - they have been requested to send rice and not items such as buns etc. Sujeewa usually prepares rice and sends it to school.

## COMMUNITY

Sujeewa thinks her previous community was better, as they all knew each other. At the moment, a lot of people have come from different places to these buildings. In the past they used to live on a shared understanding of the community. However, now, there are a lot of unknown people and many who take drugs. Because of the prevalence of drugs, even a tube light outside will be stolen. The stairs are also a place where drugs are consumed. Sujeewa says she is able to identify when someone from outside enters the building, she says they have a different look. Sujeewa notes that a lot of the people in her building use drugs, and there is a lack of safety in the building as a result. If she buys a new pair of slippers and leaves them outside of the house at night, by morning someone would have stolen them. Even some three-wheelers downstairs have been stolen, bicycles have been stolen. However, her children haven't been harmed so far. A lot of the community is known as they are people who were relocated from Castle Watte, and Cotta road. Some of Sujeewa's old community is in this building, and others are at Sahaspura.

The building doesn't have a committee or a residents association.

Sujeewa says she wouldn't like to live here in the long run. They would like to move into a standalone house in Colombo in an area that isn't overly populated. Otherwise, somewhere close to Colombo like Kelaniya or Gampaha.

## (17) Ruwani (Interviewed 18/05/22)

## PROFILE

Wanathamulla is Ruwani's hometown. She used to live nearby, before her home got demolished. They had a deed for the house they were living in. She lives with her two kids, husband and her husband's mother at home. They only moved here 3 years ago so they haven't even got their vote registered to this house. They have a house in North Colombo and their vote is registered to that house. They have applied to have their vote registered to this address but are still waiting for it to come through.

When her house got demolished, they were given a place to stay in North Colombo a few kilometres away. She had an issue with the deed and was given a place in North Colombo, where she stayed for about 5 months in a flat. She asked for it to be changed to one in Colombo as it was too far. It was quite a straightforward process, Ruwani says. Ruwani's mother is the only one in the house with a NCD - diabetes. Ruwani's children go to school nearby. They usually travel to school in a three wheeler. Her husband would drop them on his way to work, and she would go and pick them up. Her husband has been finding it difficult to get petrol for his three wheeler. They haven't been able to send the children to school due to a lack of fuel. If they take a three wheeler from the road, it would cost them LKR 500 each way. Her husband was able to get two bottles of fuel from her brother - and hence he was able to go to work. Otherwise, he would leave the three wheeler at home, and take a vehicle from the road.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Only her husband earns an income in their house - he's an electrician. He also undertakes repairs at homes, washing machines, fans, grinders etc. Ruwani's mother receives a pension from the CGR. It's easy to collect as she just withdraws it from the bank using her ATM card in Dematagoda.

Their monthly income is about LKR 40,000. They don't have any loans - but they must pay the electricity, water and rent bill monthly. They have been told they have to pay this for about 20 years. Their monthly rent payment is LKR 2660. Their biggest expenditure for the month is food.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

In their previous home, they had both a metered water and electricity connection. Ruwani says these houses are better than the "shacks" she used to previously live in. There is a feeling of being "stuck inside" but it is easy to mind your own business and stay. She says this is much harder in a wattle. She says she doesn't mind living here. In her previous home, they had to share one toilet between three houses, thus they enjoy not having to share a toilet with others, currently. While some of the houses in their old neighbourhood used to get flooded, theirs didn't.

They don't face power cuts or water cuts in their current home - and if they are to, they will be informed in advance. They don't have access to public wells or taps, so they have to



make do with what they have if there is a water cut. They use the lifts, even though one is usually broken. With regard to safety, Ruwani says that the building lacks safety. She allows her children to play outside in the corridor in the evening but she doesn't allow them to go downstairs and play.

### FOOD PURCHASING

She buys her dry goods from Udayagiri stores. She shops there because it is relatively cheaper. However, she has noticed a price increase. What used to cost her LKR 10,000 - 12,000 a month ago, is now costing her LKR 15,000. She usually buys her rice, curry powder, flour and sugar for the month. Her buying pattern is linked to the income coming in. She doesn't buy anything on credit. She buys vegetables, and fish daily from the shops in the market below. She notes that it's expensive, but when you have to buy daily, there is no other place they can go to. She will usually buy beetroots, carrots, beans and leeks. When it comes to fish she will buy Yellowfin Tuna, Bollu, Mackerel Fish etc.

When compared to life before COVID, she notes that food has become much more expensive. An egg used to cost only LKR 10, but now it's LKR 35, and a big one costs LKR 50. A kilo of meat is LKR 1000, it used to be LKR 400. As a result, they have cut down on their meat consumption and only eat it twice a week.

### COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

She used to cook using gas, but now she uses the electric cooker, because there is no gas or kerosene. They have a kerosene oil cooker as well, which they rely on whenever they are able to source kerosene. As a result of their reliance on the electric cooker, they have noted a rise in their bill. Their electricity bill which used to be 2,000 is now 4,000. Their bill has doubled. She uses her fridge to store vegetables and fish that are bought. If there are any leftovers, she will put that in as well.

Ruwani cooks about twice a day. For breakfast she will make noodles, milk rice, roti. For lunch she will cook 2 vegetables and a fish. Very rarely do they buy cooked food from outside. In the past they would buy fried rice or kottu. Going forward, she says she will continue to use the electric cooker, or even gas if she is able to procure it. She cannot use a wood stove because space restricts it. It takes Ruwani about 45 minutes to an hour to cook. She finds it faster than cooking on a gas stove.

Ruwani says they don't check the nutrition of the children at school. She says she sends rice, noodles, milk rice etc.

### COMMUNITY

Ruwani notes that whilst there is an association for the building, she doesn't attend the meetings all the time. The association looks into things like cleaning. Once a PHI came and advised the association on nutrition as well.

## (18) Yogeetha (Interviewed 07/05/22)

## PROFILE

Yogeetha lives at home with her husband, son, daughter in law and grandchild. She is 58 years old, her husband 62 years, her son is 35, her daughter in law 30. She moved to the building in 2015. She hasn't got a deed for this flat, they will only get that in 30 years after paying monthly payments of LKR 2000. Her vote is registered to their current home as they were able to get it transferred. Yogeetha's husband has diabetes and she has arthritis.

## LIVELIHOOD AND INCOME

Her husband drives a three-wheeler for his job. Her son is a lifeguard in a nearby recreational club. He used to work abroad as a lifeguard, so he has continued that business here. Only her son, and husband earn an income in their household. Her son gets his salary monthly.

Her husband owns a three-wheeler, and her son owns a scooter which he uses to travel to work. They don't own any land, only the property they are currently staying in.

Yogeetha isn't aware of their monthly income, as it's her husband that usually does all the shopping. She will buy when he is unable to. During lockdown it was difficult to earn an income because he couldn't go on hires. Her son still got half a salary during COVID, even though he was unable to go to work. They didn't have to take loans during this time, as there was money saved in tills at their home.

Yogeetha takes part in a seettu - this is her way of saving. It works on a monthly basis where she gives LKR 5000. If they try to keep money aside at home, they will end up spending it, so the seettu is the only way they ensure they don't spend it. Ten people are part of the seettu, and they are people who live nearby. Once every ten months, she gets the money from it. Yogeetha noted that they used to have seettu even before she moved to this new location.

Yogeetha doesn't get Samurdhi, although she says they deserve it. All the people who get Samurdhi are well off. She noted that she had seen on the news that low-income people would be given monetary support, from overseas funding. However, she is unsure that they would get it.

## GRID ACCESS

Yogeetha noted that their electricity bill is very high in the high rises, approximately LKR 3000- 4000 a month. In her previous home, she used to only spend LKR 1000. She is not sure what the cause of it is, but she has complained many times to the UDA and no one has taken any notice. The UDA had told her this is to be expected as they have an old fridge, which perhaps consumes more electricity. Yogeetha said they haven't been experiencing any power cuts.

Yogeetha had an electricity metre in her previous home. In order to get it (in the 90s), they

had to speak to several people. There was a Municipal Councillor whose wife they knew. He ran for election, and after he got in, he got them the electricity supply. In the past everyone had to use a public tap, however, the residents association lobbied and managed to secure private water lines to each of the houses. The municipality gave a card to all the houses and were asked to form an association. However, they weren't all given permission to build toilets. Her mother was able to build a toilet in their home, because it was at the start of the road. However, as their house was further inside, the railway authority didn't give them permission to dig. The pipe wasn't allowed to go under the rail-track, the town council prohibited it. Thus, they had to rely on public toilets.

When compared to her previous home, Yogeetha thinks that the infrastructure here is good, but they lack the same amount of space they had in their old home. Their previous house was big, so they were given two houses - one for them, and one for their daughter.

Yogeetha hasn't had any problems with the water in the high-rises, but she always says she boils and drinks it. When they cut the water supply in the building for maintenance purposes, Yogeetha and her family have to fill up water into barrels and store, as they don't know when supply will be restored. They usually inform them in advance, otherwise if it's a sudden water cut, they will either inform from downstairs over a loudspeaker, or come to each house and inform the residents that water will be cut. Yogeetha notes that their water bill is quite high. It comes to about LKR 1000 a month here, compared to around LKR 500 at her previous home.

She notes that her previous home used to flood a lot. If it rained for over two hours it would flood and the water would rise above knee level. Whenever it rained they would have to clear their stuff, the clothes in the almirah, cabinets, cushions - everything would have to be removed.

Yogeetha never uses the lift - they always take the stairs. Only when they carry something heavy such as rice, will they take the lift. There are no public toilets in the building nor has there ever been a need for one. With regard to their infrastructure, the only thing they would like to see improved is more clarity on how their electricity bill is calculated. Their electricity meter is on the ground floor and they don't know which one is theirs for them to go and check.

The water bill is usually delivered to them by the UDA. Someone else usually delivers the electricity bill. Tax invoices are also handed out for people to pay, although many people don't pay it. Yogeetha says they pay everything they have to, as they want to get a deed to pass onto their children. For their grandchild's education, they had to show documentation to get access. She elaborates that many children in the building don't get access to good schools with the existing documentation they have for these flats (i.e lack of a proper deed). Her grandchild was able to get into a school, as her daughter had the electricity and water bills in her name.

## FOOD PURCHASING

Yogeetha notes that compared to her previous home, it is easier to buy groceries here, as her previous home had only a few shops in the vicinity. They had to go all the way to Borella if they wanted a market. Here, as soon as you step out of the building there are vendors selling outside, so it's like a market. She notes that the prices are the same as everywhere else - and it only goes up when the cost of goods universally goes up. They only buy things such as coconut oil etc, when they run out of their existing supply. They usually buy things like soap and rinso daily. The oil they buy finishes in two days, so they will top up that, then. Their oil finishes fast because they use that to light the lamp every day, in addition to cooking and frying. As a result, a bottle will finish in about 4-5 days.

He usually buys all the vegetables. She usually buys from the vendors outside her building. Her husband would buy from Food City, depending on where he goes on hires.

They usually buy all their dry goods from a shop on the 1st floor. They ran their shop at their previous location as well. They don't sell goods for high prices, so they continue to buy from them. The only thing she doesn't buy from them is vegetables. They will also buy things from Food City - such as vegetables, chilli powder and curry powder. They don't buy anything from the grinding mill as the packeted stuff is a bit better. They usually pay cash for everything and will buy everything without buying on credit. They also buy fruits such as bananas, oranges - usually daily.

She will buy things like breakfast, bread daily. Vegetables - her husband will buy for about 3 days at a time and they will store them. Leafy greens they would buy daily. Yogeetha has noted that their expenses have tripled since coming here because the price of goods has gone up. She couldn't grow in her previous home as she didn't have space to do so.

During special religious festivals they will usually buy ghee etc for offerings.

## COOKING AND CONSUMPTION

They used to use gas to cook on, as they don't want to rely more on electric devices as their bill is so high. They had bought a kerosene oil cooker recently as gas wasn't available and had to spend LKR 7500 on it. Her husband would spend a long time in the queue to buy kerosene, but after about three times, he ended up buying from people who were selling in houses in the high-rise.

Yogeetha usually cooks the food for the family. She cooks something small for breakfast, again for lunch and again for dinner as her husband doesn't like to have rice for dinner. She will usually make a chapati for dinner. Occasionally they will buy food from outside such as string hoppers, hoppers and fried rice. Her husband will buy it on his way home

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from a shop down the road of their previous house. This happens maybe once every two weeks. They didn't buy as much food from outside when they were living in their previous house. There are quite a few people on the upper floors of her building that will also make and sell food here.

For breakfast she will usually make milk rice or roti. She uses atta flour or she makes kurakkan flour pittu or red string hoppers as her husband is a diabetic. They used to buy bread daily but have reduced that to twice a week as the price is too high. For lunch, they will have two vegetables, leafy greens and fish with rice. On Fridays, Tuesdays and Poya days they are vegetarian. On other days they will have fish, eggs, dry fish or sprats. For dinner, she will cook dhal curry and Coconut Sambol and dry fish and give her children with rice. For her husband, she will give the same curries with chapati. Some days, she would make it using wheat flour.

She cooks just enough so nothing has to be put in the fridge. If anything is leftover, she will keep it in the fridge and take it in the morning, but that happens rarely.

For her husband, she will cook red parboiled rice separately, and will make samba rice for herself and her son separately. Even vegetables she will cook separately for him, such as eggplant, snake gourd, wetakolu, beans. She will also boil vegetables and give them to him so it's healthier to consume.

Due to the economic crisis, she notes a lot has changed. There's no milk powder to drink with tea - so her husband will stay in long queues and bring milk powder whenever he can find it. In the past they used to drink milk tea in the evening and have got used to it. Now they have had to switch to plain tea. For their morning tea they definitely need milk, so they use fresh milk if they can't find powdered milk. They haven't cut down on their meals yet but note that it has gotten more expensive.

It takes about 2 hours for her to cook, and this is because she cooks separately for her husband. Even things such as parboiled rice take longer to cook. She cooks the curries on the gas cooker, and they try to use the kerosene oil cooker for everything else to reduce the reliance. Nobody uses wood stoves in the building as it is risky. Sometimes, Yogeetha's daughter will also help her to cook.

She uses the fridge constantly and there are no times when it is switched off.

Since moving to the high-rises, there haven't been any programmes on nutrition, but there have been some meetings whilst she was in her previous home.