

# The Plantation Human Development Trust



## Improving the quality of life on the plantations of Sri Lanka

LPG is a clean, modern fuel that brings comfort to tens of millions of consumers worldwide. It improves the quality of life of people around the world due to its clean burning characteristics. The WLPGA acknowledges efforts to expand LPG use world wide and the success that many countries have experienced in switching to LPG, and how it has changed their lives for the better.

This case study looks at the critical role of the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) in helping to improve the quality of life of the plantation population in Sri Lanka. The Organisation has carried out a number of projects that focus on infrastructure, child development and providing access to clean burning LPG as an alternative cooking fuel.

A WLPGA case study for Exceptional Energy  
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# 1. What is the PHDT?

The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) was established on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 1992 under the Companies' Act No: 177 of 1982 as a non-profit organization. The PHDT is a Tripartite Organisation consisting of the Government of Sri Lanka, Regional Plantation Companies, and Plantation Trade Unions formed by the Government. The PHDT is an observer member of the WLPGA.

The project aims to implement social development programmes and infrastructure in order to enhance the quality of life of the one million plantation community in the Estates, managed by the Regional Plantation Companies. The PHDT functions under a Board of Directors, and consists of a main office team that is strengthened by seven regional offices located in the Plantation areas consisting of directors, management and staff in every office to implement the initiatives undertaken by the PHDT.

In addition to this, the project has also been further developed with WLPGA member Laugfs Gas PLC, a leading company in LPG distribution, emission testing, as well as hospitality and property development. Laugfs Gas has done all of the funding for PHDT, absorbing all expenses, in an effort to help better the lives of the plantation community.



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# 2. A Brief History of Sri Lanka

Two centuries ago, the British introduced tea to Sri Lanka. They brought the Tamil community from southern parts of India to work in the coffee, tea and rubber plantations as laborers. Since then, this community has worked and sacrificed for the development of the Sri Lankan economy.

The plantation sector accounts for nearly 45% of the country's tea production and 42% of its rubber production. The Tamil population in Sri Lanka is 20 million, with nearly one million people from the Tamil community residing on the plantations, all of whom are now Sri Lankan citizens. Of this population on the plantations, 320,000 of the individuals are employed in the sector, leaving the remaining population as dependants.



### 3. The Real Issue

There are currently 244,500 families living in 435 plantations that are managed by 25 Regional Plantation Companies. The quality of life of the Tamil community residing on the plantations is very poor. The plantation workers recorded the lowest education levels and the poorest quality of life, but the highest morality levels in independent Sri Lanka.

Because the plantation community has been a marginalised group throughout history, they have been more vulnerable in quality of education, health services, employment, housing, water supply and sanitation. Educational achievements were lower than that of the national level; the plantation health sector was never integrated with the national health division; and living conditions consist of identical housing patterns that were introduced by colonial planters and suffer from lack of privacy and overcrowding.

It is safe to say that workers and their families lack basic facilities in these plantations and the PHDT has acknowledged this issue and works towards improving the quality of these people's lives.



### 4. A Need to Help

The PHDT has worked to address many of the issues that exist within plantation life. The estate population is now served by a network of hospitals, dispensaries and maternity wards that are managed by qualified staff through which essential drugs and medicines, sourced by PHDT from the ministry of health, are made available to the community free of charge.

Safe water has been provided to protect the citizens of diseases. This has improved health by protecting the plantation population from waterborne diseases, as well as reduced the cost of healthcare.

The PHDT has also worked to create child development centres. This allows for mothers to continue their work on the plantations during the day rather than go home to check on their children before returning to work. At present, there are 1,550 development centres managed by trained and qualified child development officers, serving a child population of 80,000.

Wet roads on the plantation can be dangerous and are being transformed into solid, concrete roads, allowing for the transportation of goods to the estate as well as providing a more practical way for children and adults to walk to work and school.

All of these efforts to enhance the everyday life of the plantation population have proved great success.

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## 5. Cooking with LPG

Among the various aspects of plantation life that PDHT has helped to improve, the introduction of gas cylinders, cookers and accessories has come as a blessing. Women who work on the field, cook for their families, attend to household chores and watch after the children benefit greatly from LPG.

For women, cooking meant collecting firewood and this brought a loss of time from working on the field as well as exposure to the emissions of toxins caused by burning firewood, also known as Household Air Pollution.

The PHDT has managed to provide the people of the plantation sector concessionary rates on the cylinder, LPG and cooker, along with over 8 months to pay on interest free terms and CSR initiatives with the help of the Estate Worker Housing Co-Operative Society (EWCHS) and Laugfs Gas. All of these aspects in providing LPG as a clean, accessible, and easy fuel for cooking has significantly changed the lifestyle of plantation workers for the better and especially that of women.



## 6. Success for PHDT

The PHDT has encountered great success in their mission to improve the quality of life of the plantation population. They have completed a number of projects since 1994, including new housing, re-roofing and installation of latrines, clean water supply, concrete roads, play grounds, volley ball courts and upgrading child development centers. The PHDT currently has about fifteen ongoing projects as well.

For women, cooking meant collecting firewood and this brought a loss of time from working on the field as well as exposure to the emissions of toxins caused by burning firewood, also known as Household Air Pollution (HAP). Each year, 4.3 million people die from cooking-related indoor air pollution caused illness. WLPGA's Cooking For Life Campaign aims to combat this. For more information about Cooking for Life visit [cooking-for-life.org](http://cooking-for-life.org).



## 7. Acknowledgements

PHDT, Sri Lanka ([www.phdt.org/phdt](http://www.phdt.org/phdt))

Ilyas, Ahmed H. "Estate Tamils of Sri Lanka a Socio Economic Review." *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology* 6, no. 6 (June 2014): 184-91. doi:10.5897/ijasa12.061.

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