

# Conclusions

## Alcohol

### 5.1.1 The role of alcohol

One question addressed in this study was the role of alcohol in different social settings in Sri Lanka. The second was the extent to which alcohol creates, perpetuates or worsens poverty or hinders development.

As regards the first question, our study showed that alcohol plays a large and important role in all the social settings we looked at other than in the Muslim community in Puttalam. Alcohol, and the consequences of alcohol use, influence greatly the everyday life of poor people. Not only are the lives severely affected of those who drink, but, perhaps even more, the lives of others such as their wives and children. Even the households where no one touches alcohol are heavily influenced by the alcohol drinking. We saw also that people are allowed to behave in obnoxious ways after using alcohol. Behaviour that would not at all have been accepted of a sober man is met with forgiveness and a smile if the man is drunk.

If the norms about alcohol in everyday life are permissive, the norms about alcohol on special occasions are prescriptive. We have heard numerous stories about how a wedding without alcohol is unthinkable, and about the severe sanctions against people who dare to go against the norms and, for instance, try to arrange a wedding without alcohol.

To return to a concept introduced in chapter 1, we too found that the meanings that people ascribe to alcohol can be linked to status along both horizontal and vertical dimensions. It serves to integrate as well as to separate people. Along the horizontal dimension, we did see that drinking can be an expression of group membership, as when the tea estate worker felt that he could not pass the bar where his friends were drinking without joining them. Just passing them would mean excluding himself from a group to which he wanted to belong. And we saw how the young men coming from remote villages to the boarding houses in Colombo, pay a high price for the membership in the male drinking groups. The decision to drink, of how much to drink, and of which beverage, and the choice of whom to drink with, all become means for claiming and living out an identity (cf. Room 2002:36).

Along the vertical dimension, we saw how disobedience and resistance may be communicated through drinking. In Katharagama we were told that some people who drink want to show that there is nobody better than them in the village, as if they directly or indirectly are expressing: *“I can do this and that, who’s there to stop me. I’m not afraid of anybody”*<sup>1</sup>. They are setting themselves apart through their drinking.

The vertical dimension is also visible when people place themselves in a situation of lifelong debt, because they choose to celebrate a wedding or another special

occasion with such large amounts of alcohol. It seems that celebrations like that include an element of distancing oneself from the poverty of everyday life. The show off element is important both to the family, who have to live with the debt afterwards, and to the rest of the village.

We have described drinking patterns, drinking situations and the consequences of alcohol use. There are however, four aspects of alcohol consumption that we should highlight particularly. That is the money spent on alcohol, the role of alcohol in making the socially unacceptable acceptable, the subjective effect of alcohol, and 'fun' and illicit alcohol.

### 5.1.2 Money spent on alcohol

Most people do recognize that calculating the rupee cost of reported alcohol consumption is too narrow a measure of the burden of alcohol. It is recognized to be too narrow even as a measure of the economic impact of alcohol. But how much money people actually spend on alcohol, especially in relation to their incomes, is still worth calculating.

In many studies and censuses the money spent on alcohol and various other things that people buy are surveyed and calculated. There are several studies in Sri Lanka too assessing the 'economic impact' of alcohol, which refer to the proportion of people's income that is spent on alcohol (ADIC- FORUT 1998).<sup>2</sup> Such studies report the expenditure on alcohol in the past week or on a typical day and so on.

Our study suggests that the calculation of expenditure on alcohol is heavily underestimated, and this due to factors

beyond the deliberate and unwitting 'underestimation' of costs in self reports.

In discussions with all of the groups sampled we found a highly significant 'subsidizing' of the costs of alcohol by those who drank little or no alcohol. People who don't themselves consume alcohol contribute significantly to the costs of alcohol purchases for special events. Payments for others' alcohol use are not usually included when expenditures on alcohol are calculated or studied. The cost of alcohol for which others pay does not get accounted for by the consumer either. So a large amount of alcohol expenditure is not recognized when studies of alcohol related expenses are studied. This is because the users too don't count the expenses of others who subsidize their alcohol purchases while the people who pay for others' alcohol don't count that money either.

Much of this 'uncounted' expense is for alcohol purchased for special occasions. For some, these special occasions arise rather frequently. Many of the young people in the boardings and the three-wheeler stands reported such events at least once a week. Community residents too described the same phenomenon. We also saw how money was taken away from non-users in a rather forcible way too, possibly even as a way of keeping them economically equal.

Another expenditure that is not counted, is money that is not considered part of 'regular' income. Most illegal income is readily spent on alcohol (or other drugs) because the money is not 'real'. Sudden windfalls too go this way. Gifts and other extra income that people get often gets channelled solely for alcohol purchases and other accompaniments.

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Even non-celebratory or non-event based alcohol use (namely regular or day-to-day use) is subsidized in many ways. Irregular income, such as through lotteries, bribes, fraud and cheating, gets into the alcohol pool. Different individuals in a drinking group contribute in this way on different days. 'Loans' taken and not repaid, forcible donations gathered from various sources and collections for alleged good deeds are channels through which regular drinking too gets subsidized by people who are not in the drinking group. A large contributor to the regular alcohol purchases of heavy daily drinkers are their wives who contribute part of their earnings for the man's alcohol, so as to keep the peace within the home.

Perhaps much the larger 'unaccounted' (or, more strictly, 'uncounted') expense of this kind is for alcohol served at weddings and 'big girl' parties. This, in relation to people's income, is huge money. Because this is a 'once-off' cost, the amounts involved are never added to the alcohol expenses calculation, but a family may spend the rest of their lifetime paying off debts, or forever paying interest, incurred for wedding expenses. A sizeable part of these expenses is for alcohol.

Our impression is that this contribution from 'invisible' sources that never get accounted for is substantial. It may even amount to more than half of all expenditures on alcohol. This quantum is not captured in any econometric analysis of the expenditures on alcohol. Neither those who subsidize the alcohol purchase nor those who consume the free alcohol recognize this money as an expenditure on alcohol. There is accompanying expense on tobacco, other substances and

accompaniments that go with alcohol consumption which do not get tallied as an alcohol cost but is nonetheless an alcohol-related cost.

*Conclusion: Research on alcohol expenditures have to take note of this huge cost that informants never report - because they themselves do not notice it.*

### **5.1.3 The role of alcohol in making the socially unacceptable acceptable**

A repeated finding from all our social settings was that of people talking openly and light-heartedly, in the drinking setting, of behaviours that would be considered vicious or nasty in other settings. This is different from the usual permission to have 'time-out' or 'freedom from usual norms' during alcohol consumption. What happens here is that people can talk openly while 'drunk' about flouting norms of decency during times that they were *not* 'drunk'. The 'permission' to break usual rules is extended, retrospectively, to things that were done in the non-intoxicated state. This extension is achieved by using the 'freedom from usual norms' attitude in the alcohol setting to boastfully reveal norm breaking conducted in the non-intoxicated state.

It is permissible to talk, while intoxicated, about behaviour that would be frowned upon elsewhere. By openly proclaiming, say, grabbing a chain from a frail old lady, the perpetrator is able somehow to make it okay. Because it is now out in the open, safely during the 'disinhibited' drinking session, it gets cleansed. The mechanism is often to make a joke or humorous statement about the event. In laughing

about it the group affirms that the act was not really so bad.

Many informants report that the open expression, in drinking situations, of what is normally considered unacceptable or vicious, changes the norms of their group as a whole. The open airing (even amounting to boasts) of behaviours that were considered bad or low, somehow makes them less bad or embarrassing. What was previously considered nasty is now 'cleansed' through this process, so the 'lowered' standards of the alcohol drinking session 'spill-over' to affect the standards of society as a whole. 'We can break the rules because they are a joke anyway, as we learnt at the drinking session yesterday'.

We discussed how it is possible, through the continued operation of this dynamic, to make what was the previously unaccepted now gradually accepted and later even admired. It is also possible to see how the process can apply to increasingly unacceptable levels of behaviour. Such a process can hypothetically lead, given sufficient time, to a state where there may be nothing left that is considered unacceptable.

*Conclusion: This finding is relevant to 'development' that goes beyond just the economic. A society that allows its rules to be broken in the alcohol setting risks losing those rules altogether.*

### 5.1.4 The subjective effect of alcohol

The way people evaluated the subjective experience of alcohol was strikingly different in different settings. It appears that social influences have a strong bearing on the subjective effect produced by alcohol and on how it is rated.

A significant difference was found, for example, between the younger alcohol users of the two overcrowded urban communities. In one, alcohol use is rated universally by young persons to be highly enjoyable. In the second, few younger users were convinced that the effect of alcohol is indeed an enjoyable experience.

An apparent paradox was why, or how, a large majority of occasional users in this setting, who said that they did not like the effect of alcohol, still continued to drink. They all said that they drank to conform, but it wasn't clear how nearly all could claim to be drinking to conform, and not for enjoyment of the alcohol use *per se*.

If nearly all find alcohol use not a really enjoyable experience and nearly all were drinking to conform, what was the force that made alcohol use the 'conformist' behaviour? Certainly not the enjoyment if their self reported subjective experience is to be believed. The persons questioned said that it was the done or expected thing. The implication is that the feeling that one should take alcohol in fun situations came from the wider environment – not necessarily from the members of the alcohol-using group.

*Conclusion: It will be useful to study the proportion of people in different drinking occasions who say that they enjoy the effect of alcohol. What the attributes are*

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*of those who enjoy the experience and those who do not are worth studying too. The practical implications for work on preventing alcohol-related harm are major.*

*Conclusion: There is a stark difference between the effects of consuming ethyl alcohol in different packaging – kasippu versus legal arrack or beer. The example here should be helpful in explaining the social modulation of alcohol effects. The part that chemistry plays in determining the subjective effect of alcohol and alcohol-related behaviour may be smaller than we assume.*

### 5.1.5 'Fun' and illicit alcohol

Drinking occasions are often meant for fun and enjoyment, but we hardly found any reports of 'fun' with illicit alcohol use. Why illicit alcohol users are not afforded the privilege of making the drinking a merry occasion is unclear. In the urban and rural settings described, in our report and in the 'Thotalanga' community of Sri Lanka (described in 'Illicit Alcohol' - Abeysinghe 2002) all seem not to allow 'fun' with illicit alcohol. People come, buy their kasippu and quickly drink it or simply carry it away. The study from Thotalanga reported that the illicit brew contained the same chemical or molecule – ethyl alcohol.

The easiest possible explanation is that the illegality of the brew does not permit people to openly sit around consuming it, so there is no possibility of building up rituals around the consumption. Nor is there much symbolic 'status' value built up around kasippu. It is cheap and the poorest folk drink it.

When consumers display signs of intoxication, they are permitted the liberty of suspending their 'inhibitions'. Some kasippu users therefore do shout abuse at others as they walk back home intoxicated, but no real 'fun' is linked to kasippu use. Perhaps illicit alcohol has still not penetrated the social barrier enough to become an accepted or normal ritual.

## Poverty

### 5.2.1 Dimensions of poverty

Through the descriptions of our social settings, we have shown that poverty is a complex phenomenon. As we argued in our introductory chapter, poverty is not just one thing, and it is not just a question of income. A more comprehensive approach should not only cover economical and material poverty, but also several kinds of social poverty. If we look to analyze poverty based on participatory methods, people's perceptions of wellbeing and illbeing are described in terms of four dimensions, dimensions that are all relevant to the social settings of our fieldwork too (Laderchi 2001:10)<sup>3</sup>.

The first dimension has to do with *material wellbeing*; "lack of food, shelter, clothing, poor housing and uncertain livelihood sources", and in some countries also "having enough to eat all year around.... possession of assets". Uncertain sources of livelihood is an element that is repeatedly mentioned by our informants. For instance in Katharagama, we saw how every source of income was uncertain; agricultural cultivation, gem mining, and

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income from pilgrims visiting the sacred town. Coping with the uncertain is an aspect of everyday life, at least all over the dry zone (cf. Baker 1997). The poor condition of housing is another aspect that influences the life of poor people we met during this study. This goes particularly for the estate workers in the 'line houses', and the internally displaced in Puttalam and in Vavuniya.

The second dimension is *physical wellbeing*: "Mainly described in terms of health, strength and appearance", seen as both important in themselves and as preconditions for work. In our study we saw that the health situation of the children is a problem in many of the social settings. This was particularly striking in the Muslim community of displaced persons.

The third dimension is *security*: "Peace of mind and confidence in survival.....not just in terms of livelihoods, but also in terms of sheer survival in the face of rising corruption, crime, violence, lack of protection from police and absence of recourse to justice, wars between ethnic groups, tribes and clans, frequency of natural disasters and uncertainties of season and climate".

Related to the situation in the social settings that we studied, the most striking indicator connected to this dimension is the number of women and children who are victims of gender based and intra-family violence. As we have documented, such violence is common, and it is accepted. It also appears that the battered women cannot expect much protection from the police.

Other threats to security are the existence of corruption and crime, particularly in the urban slum, and frequency of drought and flood in the rural dry zone.

This dimension also includes *freedom of choice and action*: "It means the power to avoid the exploitation, the rudeness and otherwise humiliating treatment so often meted out towards the poor by the rich or the more powerful in society. It also includes the ability to acquire skills, education, loans, information, services and resources; to live in "good places", to withstand sudden and seasonal stresses and shocks and not slip further into poverty".

This poverty dimension is particularly relevant for the communities of displaced persons. In the Tamil community in Vavuniya, we found that people had very little expectations in life. They do not have any urge to buy or make new or definitive structures. It is a feeling of transition. This is evident from the utensils they use or even their clothes. The natives too are not immune to this feeling. Living with relocated settlers in close proximity to the 'frontlines', they share the feelings of insecurity and the possible threat of displacement themselves. The field assistant concluded that the villagers seemed to have lost hope in tomorrow.

The impression of apathy was even more striking among the displaced Muslim population who lived in a village which is poor in almost every sense of the word. The marked overall apathy, indifference and despair in the community as a whole alternates with fatalistic acceptance. The lack of leadership throughout the community is striking, and so is the lack of self-esteem. They were displaced more than twelve full years ago and the scars

of that event should at least have begun to heal. One may have expected some resilience and vigour in attempting to create a new life for themselves. But all that could be felt was a sense of drift and indifference. There was in addition a helplessness characterised by the endless expectation of outside help to fulfil their requirements.

Acceptance of the displacement is not the big problem. The vast majority have accepted the fact they are unlikely to go back to their native land and even if they did, that they'd need to start again from scratch. The Muslims group reported having gone back using the current ceasefire to find not even the bricks of their own houses, and in their place outsiders (Tamils) having taken up residence in their compounds. The areas to which our study was limited did not allow us to examine the perspective of the Tamil population in these settings.

The last dimension of poverty mentioned in the study based on participatory methods, is *social wellbeing*: “Defined as good relations within the family and the community”. All the dimensions described above too can, of course, also be seen as aspects of social well being. Neither the beaten wife, nor the depressed internally displaced person, would secure a high score on a scale of social wellbeing. However, we highlight below two specific elements which are parts of the normative structure in most of our social settings, and which greatly influence the wellbeing of the poor. One element is envy and jealousy, and the other is the active obstruction of others' development.

### 5.2.2 Envy and jealousy

The desire to prevent others in one's community from overtaking the rest is a recurrent theme. All of the field assistants have, at one time or another, reported that there is an overpowering ethos of ‘We must all be at one level’ or perhaps even more ‘Nobody should improve their living circumstances from their present level’.

What we found is that this is not just a private displeasure at anybody in the community trying to grow or develop beyond the level at which they now operate. It is a more public and shared resentment at whoever dares to leave the others behind. Thus ‘jealousy’ is shared and used to create a bad feeling about whoever may be suspected of being likely to acquire something better than what the others have.

### 5.2.3 Active obstruction of others' development

The feeling of ‘jealousy’ makes people want to keep others down or prevent them from zooming higher, leaving the neighbours behind. Such people therefore have to be prevented from going higher than the level of the rest of the community. The first step in this is to brand them as anti-social or anti-fun or selfish misers. The automatic next step is to label them as proud and hostile – which opens the door to hostility in return. It is easy to do something to bring them back down when they are seen in this way.

One way of keeping others down, that we heard during our study, is to ‘borrow’ or ask for contributions continually from those who are believed to be prospering.

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This can be on behalf of those in need or for community development activities. The undertone that the prosperous must not go up too far is almost an unstated message.

Alcohol allows, more than anything else, the least developed members of a group to restrain others from moving up and leaving them behind. This role of alcohol must be noted by anybody interested in working for community development in the kinds of settings that we have described. We saw numerous examples of how people are forced or coerced, with no physical aggression being needed, to contribute to drinking parties, for instance. These parties are not rare events in the most deprived settings. This is one route through which alcohol facilitates the interference with the progress of members of the community. We described elsewhere how these expenditures are never taken into account in any analysis of alcohol expenditures.

A second mechanism too was noticed. This was the use of the freedom that alcohol use offers the user, to dictate to others what they should do. Some people whom the rest want to keep down, do not join in the drinking sessions, but they can still be reached with requests for contributions for other things. An example is simply the request of a loan by someone in distress or a contribution to a communal activity or celebration. If people do not contribute to a common cause (even one that has been invented deliberately to collect money from them) they can be openly criticized and attacked in the drinking milieu. Or they can be loudly abused for their miserliness or pride by someone who is 'drunk'. People then learn to conform, which ensures that they are prevented from advancing economically.

This may be why those who have improved in living status whilst still residing in the overcrowded setting have usually done so because they have had extra power or sponsorship. That has probably helped them resist these demands from the local thugs.

The obstruction of any members of the community overtaking the others and forging ahead is facilitated by what we referred to as the 'porosity' of the living circumstances of the urban poor. The lack of individual and family space, where others cannot intrude, ensures that any slight improvement in economic circumstances is instantly noticed. Appropriate action will then definitely be taken by those who notice the improvement.

The question arises as to whether this finding is an artefact, not really a reflection of reality. The reality that we have described is not a pleasant sight, almost a caricature. People are portrayed as envious, jealous, intolerant and interfering. The interference appears to be with the deliberate aim of ensuring that a family that seems even likely to get ahead is actively undermined. In overcrowded urban settings they are able to do this more easily because they have direct access to what happens in each others' homes.

The picture that emerges is one of nastiness and a deliberate communal complicity to keep everybody down to the level of the others. Is this picture false? We have to examine whether bias in reporting or recording is responsible for creating a false impression. And having re-examined our reports from this standpoint, we still feel that the image that we



portrayed is accurate. The image of viciousness that underlies this image is unlikely, we concluded, to be due to significant bias in the perception of those gathering the data or in the rest of us. The tendency is reported by every field assistant deployed in Colombo, and their reporting was independent of each other.

*Conclusion: Those undertaking development work in a 'slum' community, or any other perhaps, must take note of this tendency – that of people working vigorously to keep others from progressing. It is pervasive and significant – and unlikely to be a misinterpretation of the reality that exists.*

*To develop, individuals and families will have to learn how to insulate themselves from the others who wish to drag them back down. One solution is to move away from or escape from this setting. Nearly all our informants said this was the only way to progress in life.*

*A strategy for development agencies to follow is to work primarily for collective improvement. This means that they should spend more energy to engage those least able to envisage an improvement in their lives. These persons will likely be the most active agents in undermining the progress of the community as a whole. Engaging them will require new approaches too, as they will likely be the most difficult to engage.*

*This is clearly a difficult task. A largish community of some size may not be feasible to 'collectively improve', but the strategy of not leaving anybody behind is worth exploring or testing out.*

## Poverty versus low income

The short vignette that we had about the cooperative shop illustrated that some people whose income was clearly less than that of others were still not as 'poor' as them. The low-income earners in the shop were different from the more obviously poor and deprived groups described elsewhere. There were people in the shop whose earnings were much less than that of the poorer families of the overcrowded urban community, for instance, but they appeared to be less abjectly poor. The contrast with people from the three-wheeler stand was even more stark. The three-wheeler drivers, who appeared clearly less well off than the low income earners in the shop, probably earned several times their income.

What are the differences that may account for the low income earners in the shop appearing to be better off than other low income earners of the overcrowded urban setting or three-wheeler stand? This is despite the fact that the low income earners in the shop received a much lower income than those in the three wheeler business.

We are talking here about few people, less than ten. They may be atypical. If they are not, there are several possibilities underlying this evident difference. One possibility is that the few persons concerned were coincidentally from families that were relatively better off. Another is that getting a monthly salary is somehow more protective than a higher average income earned on a daily basis. The monthly salary is fixed and guaranteed, and so allows planning. There were other features too of the low-income earners in the shop. They did not live in overcrowded tenements. And their

role models came from among slightly wealthier persons working in the same shop. They had to conform to standards of the ‘middle classes’. It is probable that they identified with dreams and aspirations of the middle class office mates.

Even the alcohol use and alcohol related behaviour of the middle classes was different. They were not permitted, as much as the others in some of the other settings, to break certain norms of ‘decency’ even when intoxicated. Physical violence or threats were hardly seen. People were less tyrannized by the verbal as well as physical aggression permitted with intoxication in the other setting. Dominance was not based as much on physical strength or threat. It was more based on a ‘office hierarchy’, which works on different rules, and at the top of the hierarchy was a woman.

Central to the less evident poverty in the shop may still be the very much lower consumption of alcohol. Alcohol is a topic of conversation more than it is an aspect of day-to-day behaviour. The heaviest drinker is the least dominant here. Tobacco and other drug use too was visibly less in this setting.

We assume here that the low-income earners of the shop did not have a ‘side income’, for example by stealing from the shop. It is possible that those in the shop were leading less deprived lives because their visible income was supplemented by illegal sources. Our feeling is that this alone is not an adequate explanation. In the three-wheeler stand and among those loitering at Pettah at night we encountered people who were earning much money

illegally or unofficially. But the culture to which they belonged ensured that such earnings were immediately spent on the others –mostly for alcohol.

*Conclusion: Belonging to the middle class or identifying with its norms and aspirations seems to override low income as a determinant of ‘poverty’, and the extent and role of alcohol use, as well as behaviour related to use or intoxication, is very different in these worlds. Both of these findings can be used as a basis for interventions, to test whether they can enhance development work.*

### Potential for change

**W**e found much problematic behaviour related to alcohol use. This calls for responses to address such behaviour. There is evidence from our findings of potential for changing such problem behaviour. We found an enormous range of ‘alcohol-induced’ behaviours in the different settings. Major differences in reported alcohol-induced behaviour across settings indicate that there is scope for change in such behaviours too, by changing *social responses* to such behaviour. There is no fixed set of behaviours that invariably accompany alcohol use or intoxication across settings.

Patrons of a hotel from different social backgrounds consume the same amount of alcohol at a restaurant, but show very different behaviours, sitting side by side. The ‘less sophisticated’ group shows much greater loss of inhibitions than the wealthier and ‘more sophisticated’. Even the ‘less sophisticated’ patrons who get boisterous after consuming alcohol

elsewhere do not become violent or aggressive in this setting. They only become 'slightly disinhibited'. This hotel is at a slightly higher status than their usual settings and they somehow do not display the common tendency they have of becoming abusive after similar amounts of alcohol used in other settings.

Similar changes were reported at Galle Face Green after alcohol use there was prohibited. Some years ago there were frequent and regular fights and brawls, because groups would consume alcohol and then become aggressive for the slightest provocation. After the authorities prohibited the consumption of alcohol on the green, many people still continued to consume alcohol surreptitiously. Although they drank alcohol now too (some of them until they were unsteady on their feet) the brawls and aggression stopped.

*Conclusion: Given the evident 'plasticity' of so-called alcohol-induced behaviour, it should be possible to modify the most troublesome of these behaviours by changing the way people react to such behaviour.*

## Alcohol, poverty and development

### 5.5.1 Ambiguous norms

The norms about alcohol use and intoxication are ambiguous. This goes for both major drinking situations, the illicit alcohol that is consumed daily, more or less secretly, and the alcohol, legal and illicit, that is an important element of special festive occasions. Most villagers generally looked down upon those who spent their money on kasippu and who were considered a nuisance to their fellow villagers. Our impression is that the contempt is connected to the drink itself, and not so much to the intoxication. It is not so much of a shame to be drunk, but it is a shame to drink kasippu. For the kasippu drinkers, the state of drunkenness seems to give them a sense of freedom to express themselves, to show a masculine identity and to escape from what may be felt as the hopelessness and powerlessness of everyday life in the village.

Finding better and more rational ways of expressing the same attitudes may be helpful in preventing this kind of drinking. Another disincentive to such consumption would be the evident social norms that are already there about the foolishness of this kind of consumption. These norms are expressed in rather a moralistic way, a way that for some men may invite rebellion.

Ambiguous norms are not the only finding. There is ambivalence too, especially about how to respond to the kasippu trade. Most villagers say they don't want this trade to continue. But they do not want to go

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against it either. One important reason that the villagers do not go against the kasippu business, is that there are strong economical and political interests involved. We were told that it could be both unpleasant and dangerous to speak directly to the producers and the sellers about the ill effects of their business.

What makes it particularly difficult to confront this problem, is that the business is seen to be protected by the politicians and the police. We were told that when the kasippu sellers fall in trouble they talk to the people in top places and get things sorted out. Several villagers had observed that even though the police raid the kasippu outlets, the business continues. And the accusations against the politicians were rather direct. This makes it hard for the villagers to react.

One element in a prevention strategy would be to put this on the political agenda, and to make it harder for the politicians to continue their support of the illegal alcohol business. There appeared to be no doubt that the availability of the kasippu was considered an important contributor to making the heaviest drinkers continue drinking.

An important and obvious developmental element would be the empowerment of the women. They are victims of domestic violence and of hard times when their husbands spend their income on alcohol. It also seems that the norms discouraging domestic violence are relatively weak. Even when a drunken husband beats his wife to death, the villagers to some extent seem to accept it and to regard it as an accident that could have been expected.

The regular kasippu drinkers are seen as annoying, their drinking leading to domestic violence and to families falling apart. But the massive alcohol and other expenditures at weddings and other special occasions may be even a bigger drain in pure monetary terms. This is an undoubted and unseen hindrance to the economical development of the village, and it is much more accepted. The consequences of a single such expenditure may often last a lifetime. Is it too easy for the villagers to get large loans, that they cannot ever hope to repay, to finance drinking on such occasions? Regulating the market for loans, would make it harder to end up in a situation where alcohol at a wedding is the basis for prolonged indebtedness and continued misery. But the source of many of these loans are informal and it is advantageous for the persons giving loans on high interest to continue the practice. Other means may need to be sought to help communities collectively curtail this self destructive practice.

One reason that big sums of money are spent on alcohol on such occasions, is the operation of strong norms about show off and keeping up with the neighbours. These norms are at the root of much indebtedness and problems. The norms about alcohol as a necessary element in every celebration, is also present as a tacit understanding – and it certainly makes it easier for the kasippu and other alcohol producers and sellers to improve their business.

### 5.5.2 The paradoxical role of alcohol in the development process

The role of alcohol consumption in the development process is rather paradoxical or at least confusing. Governments, non-governmental organizations and the public at large all want 'development' and economic improvement. But to many, or maybe most, conspicuous consumption is the visible and ultimate proof of increased prosperity and modernization. Increased alcohol consumption, both in everyday life and on special occasions, has been made an inseparable part of the modernization process and the image of prosperity. To many young men in the villages, to be modern and to be developed, includes drinking beer and arrack, and showing it off. Alcohol and other drugs easily serve as symbolic arenas in which to conduct and express the search for a modern identity.

There is also good reason to believe that this new and modern drinking pattern does not substitute the current patterns of alcohol consumption but adds to it (Skog 1988). Thus the much cheaper kasippu continues to be easily available everywhere and to be consumed as before as well.

*Conclusion: To reverse the image of alcohol consumption as a sign of economic development, is a necessary and a demanding task for the different actors in the development process. It is relevant to the main trend in development work in recent years - less focus on service delivery, and more weight on capacity building and the strengthening of civil society. Strengthening civil society includes improving its understanding of unseen undercurrents of 'development'.*

#### Notes

1. It is also known in the literature on drinking patterns, that men drink to attain a feeling of personal power, cf. for ex. McClelland et al. (1972)

2. According to Room (2002:145) studies in Sri Lanka have documented that alcohol is an important factor in the maintenance of poverty. He cites a WHO-report: "Many families are unable to escape from poverty because of the alcohol and tobacco use of one or more members. Once influenced by alcohol use, poverty itself may be exacerbated by absenteeism, lack of motivation, ill-health and lack of family unit".

3. Her five dimensions are based on a report for the study "Voices of the poor":