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# ELECTRICITY AND COLOMBO'S WORKING CLASS POOR

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## Introduction

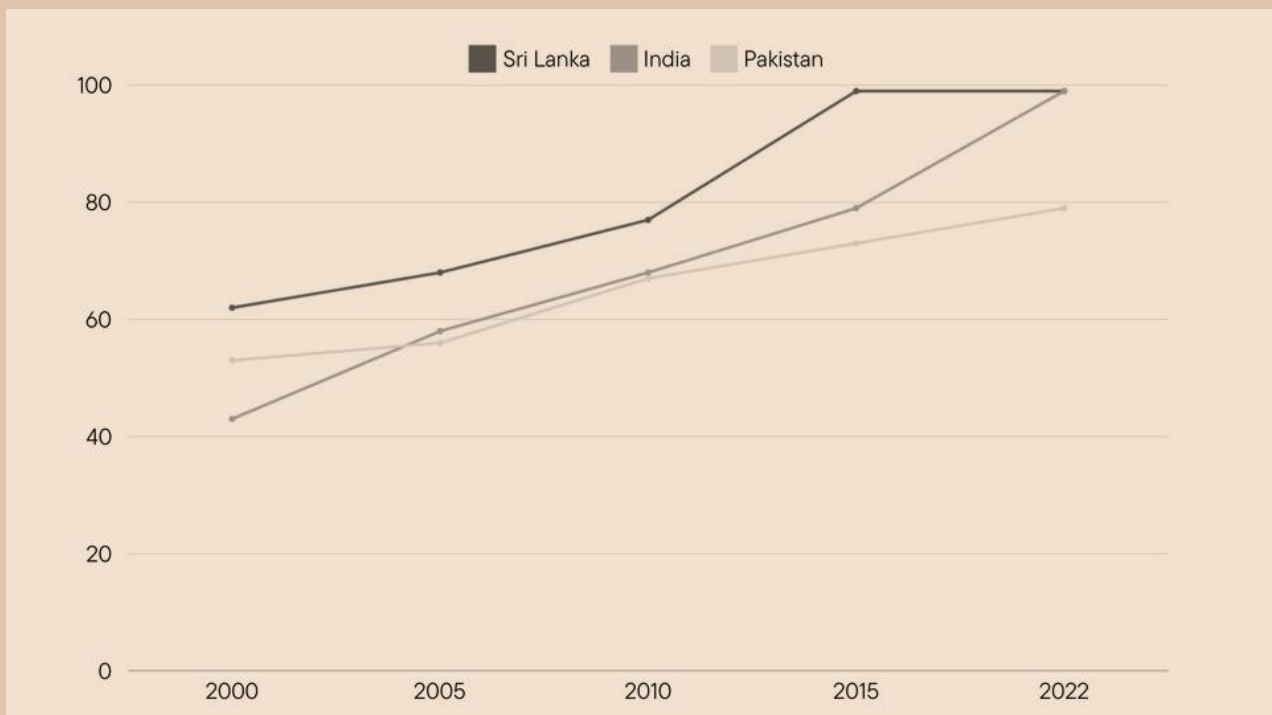
Sri Lanka's energy landscape has been in a state of flux due to the economic crisis and subsequent shortages of foreign exchange reserves. Apart from power outages, households have also had to adjust to consecutive electricity tariff increases, starting from August 2022. Cost-reflective energy pricing was a key component of IMF reforms. The effects of these hikes have been felt disproportionately by the working class poor, particularly in the context of fuel shortages and inflation.

High electricity bills have reduced the quality of life of households, increased the gendered burden on women and trapped the working class poor in cycles of debt and disconnection. Electricity consumption is necessary to ensure a good quality of life and is intrinsically connected to health, education, safety and income. Based on findings from over 3 years of fieldwork in low-income settlements in Colombo, this research brief explores key trends in electricity consumption of the working class poor, examining the impact of tariff increases as well as coping strategies adopted by households.

## Sri Lanka's electricity success story

The story of Sri Lanka's working class poor and electricity is unique in comparison to regional cities. This is largely due to Sri Lanka's successful grid expansion, achieving 100% electricity supply coverage in 2016, well ahead of its neighbours (ADB, 2023). Moreover, grid expansion and access to electricity lagged in the rural sector rather than urban. In 2002, while 60% of the country had access to electricity, in the Western province access to electricity was 80% (World Bank, 2013).

In other countries, grid connectivity has not ensured that the urban poor are formally connected to the grid. For example in Cape Town, South Africa, 60% of informal households do not have electricity access (Runsten et al., 2018), while in India studies have estimated that 72% of slum households have electricity access (Aklin et al., 2015). Barriers to formal electricity access for the urban poor include lack of funds for installing a new connection, absence of formal tenure documents needed for a formal connection, substandard housing that cannot support electricity. In addition, urban poor households may be unwilling to pay for electricity.



**Figure 1: Percentage of population with access to electricity in Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan from 2000- 2022.**

**Source: International Energy Agency Data**

Sri Lanka has managed to circumvent these barriers and ensure formal electricity access for the urban working class poor. This is the result of participatory planning approaches to housing in the 1980s under the Million Houses Programme (MHP) which saw the formation of community development councils (CDCs) for settlements housing low-income communities. In Colombo, CDCs drove upgrading efforts and adopted the practice of community contracting to provide the communities with public toilets, drains, sewage and access roads. They were later able to mobilise to request electricity connections for settlements. As the MHP had regularised tenure and delivered permanent housing, the working class poor had the documentation and housing standards needed to obtain an electricity connection. As of 2013, estimates of electricity access in low-income settlements in Colombo were roughly 85% (UN-Habitat et al., 2013), and in 2023 a survey of all 1315 low income settlements in Colombo found that a majority of houses in 98% of settlements had metered electricity. (Colombo Urban Lab and Sevanatha, 2023).

### **Urban poor households spend more on electricity**

Urban households spend a greater proportion of their expenditure on non-food expenditure (Department of Census and Statistics 2019), including on energy. They tend to have more electrical appliances and consume more electricity, with the average cost per unit of electricity being higher than rural counterparts, due to progressively increasing tariff costs (Karunaratna and Athukorala, 2019). Discussions about the tariff hikes need to account for differences within urban populations, including the diverse experiences and heterogeneous nature of low-income communities in Colombo. Electricity is essential for wellbeing and social mobility in urban contexts. The urban heat island effect may be exacerbated by poor ventilation and crowded housing that the working class poor occupy, necessitating fans. Mobile phones are essential for livelihoods and education, particularly during COVID-19 lockdowns. Washing machines, rice cookers and blenders save time and labour in households with fluctuating incomes.

Multiple households share an electricity connection particularly when grown children have received a divided property. This raises the cost of electricity as cumulative electricity consumption leads to a higher tariff block. Installing another electricity meter can be expensive and burdensome, or unsuitable as per the CEB's own dictates.

### **Impact of COVID-19 lockdowns**

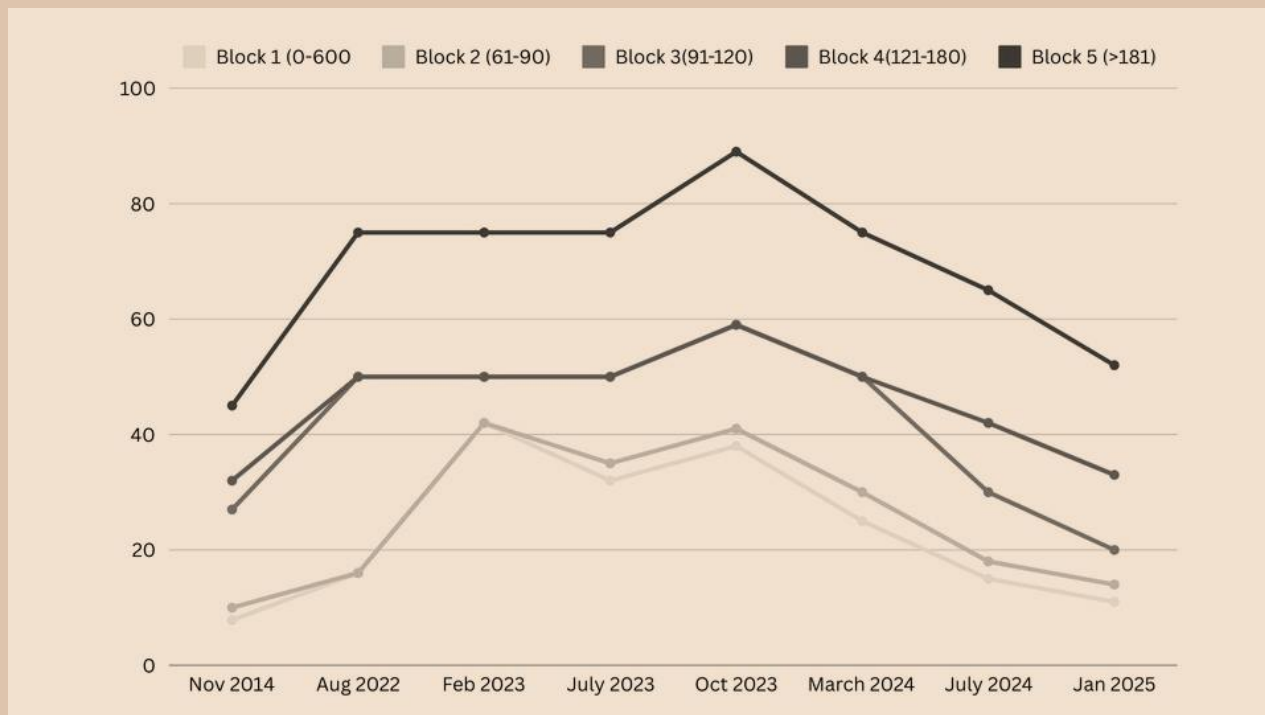
COVID-19 lockdowns had long lasting impacts on low-income communities as the disruption of livelihoods reshaped access to electricity. When daily wage earners in low-income communities were unable to work during lockdowns, coping strategies for the most part were directed at securing food. There were also more people at home during the day everyday, and new activities like online schooling which meant an overall increase in electricity usage. While the government approved a six-month grace period for domestic consumers in isolated areas in January 2021, electricity arrears were not forgiven (Ada Derana 2021). Our research shows that low-income households accumulated massive arrears in electricity bills, some even as high as LKR 70,000-100,000 rupees.

### **Electricity and Economic Crisis**

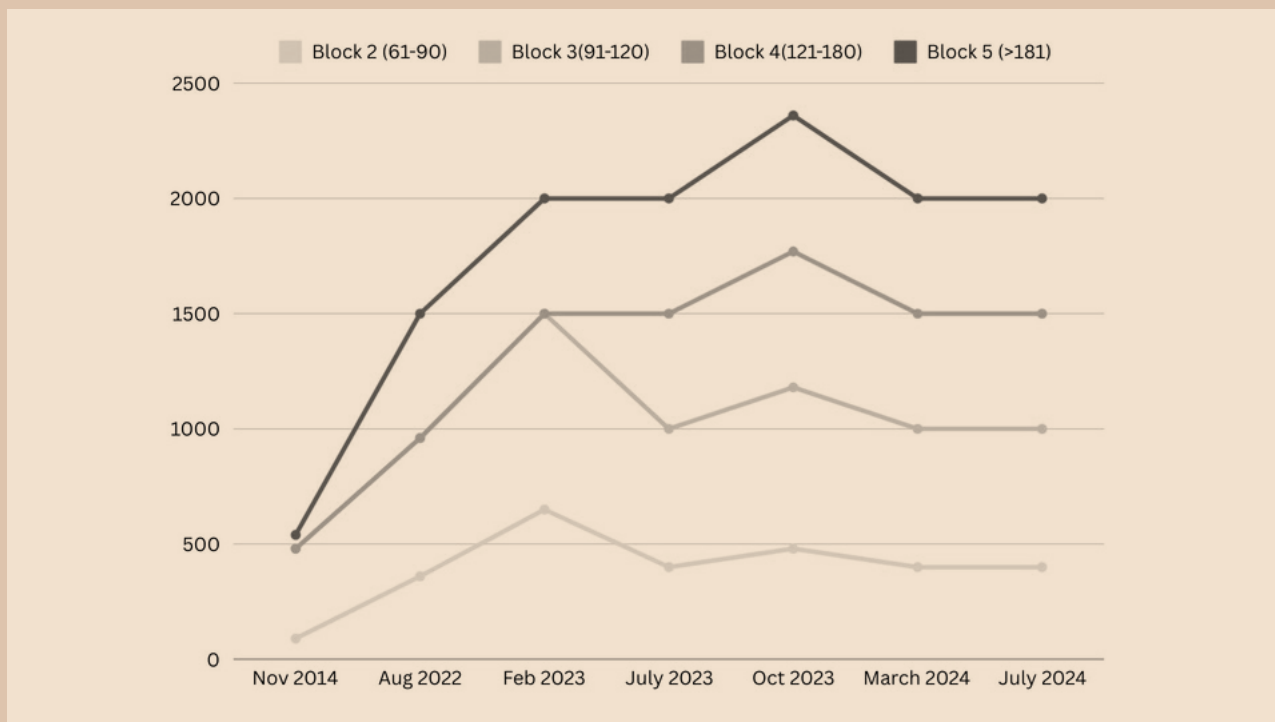
In 2022 August the Public Utilities Commission of Sri Lanka (PUCSL) greenlighted a tariff hike that averaged 75% in all categories. Cost-reflective price policies for electricity and fuel were conditions for reaching staff-level agreements with the IMF and a steep tariff hike of 66% was taken in February 2023 to obtain an IMF bailout of USD 2.9 billion (International Monetary Fund 2022). While electricity bills were exempt from Value Added Tax (VAT), Sri Lanka imposed a 2.5% Social Security Contribution Levy on electricity bills in October 2022. Subsequent tariff revisions have increased and decreased prices (see below tables) but as February 2024, Sri Lanka recorded the highest tariff rates for electricity in South Asia (Verité Research, 2024).

#### **Box 1: Pakistan's electricity tariffs and the IMF**

Energy sector reform has a key condition for IMF agreements with other countries as well. A USD 3 billion agreement between the International Monetary Fund and Pakistan, approved in July 2022, mandated the government remove energy and fuel subsidies and move to a market-based exchange rate (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Between July 2023- August 2024 electricity tariffs were increased 14 times, fuelling protests across Pakistan as many saw their electricity bill surpassing even monthly rent costs (Mangi, 2024). A USD 7 billion loan from the IMF was secured in July 2024 was followed by further tariff hikes, with electricity prices increasing by 155% since 2021. Pakistan's electricity bills are also subject to multiple taxes and as of January 2025, the IMF rejected a proposal to reduce a Goods and Sales Tax of 18% on electricity bills (Ansari, 2025).



**Figure 2: Increases in the unit cost of electricity by tariff bracket. November 2014 to January 2025, Sri Lanka.**



**Figure 3: Increases in the fixed cost of electricity by tariff bracket. November 2014- July 2024, Sri Lanka**

### **Impact on households**

In 2019, households in low income settlements in Colombo spent an average of 5% of their income on electricity, but as of April 2024 this had increased to 10% (Colombo Urban Lab, 2024). On average, the monthly bill in surveyed households was LKR 6261.

This is significant because spending 10% of income on energy is considered the threshold of energy poverty. A majority reported that utility bills were their primary expense. Households have coped with subsequent tariff increases through a range of maladaptive strategies over the last 3 years.

### **Reducing electricity consumption**

*“ We had to limit the use of electric appliances as much as possible. Before we used to switch on a ceiling fan but since it consumed a lot of electricity we removed it. Likewise, unless we have something that may get spoilt, we keep the refrigerator switched off” (December 2024)*

In the context of rapidly increasing bills, households sought to reduce consumption, exercising vigilance around electricity use to the point of deprivation. In many cases these attempts to curb consumption had little effect on reducing bills, particularly as the fixed cost of electricity had also increased alongside unit cost (see Figure 2).

Rising electricity tariffs also occurred at a time of an ongoing energy crisis characterised by shortages of LPG cylinders and kerosene. Many households had switched to cooking on electric rice cookers which were the only affordable and available cooking source. As such, the tariff increases had severe implications for nutrition, with families reducing the number of meals and curries they cooked as another source of energy became unaffordable. This also prompted households to switch to firewood, even in inappropriate contexts such as high-rise apartments. Households also reported that they no longer cooked energy intensive foods such as legumes and jackfruit.

Fridges were identified as an energy intensive appliance and many families unplugged their fridges. As urban low-income households have high rates of diabetes, some households used fridges to store insulin for a family member. In these instances, households had no choice but to continue to use the fridge or keep it switched on for part of the day to keep the insulin cool. (Colombo Urban Lab 2023a). Similarly, some elderly patients with heart disease also relied on electricity to heat water for bathing.

### **CASE STUDY**

*Seela\* lives with her mother and two children in Wanathamulla. Gas explosions prompted her to switch to cooking on the gas cooker, but due to rising electricity prices she began using the firewood stove. Around August 2022, she unplugged her fridge and washing machine to save electricity. Because her mother does most of the cooking, she is able to save time and wash clothes by hand.*

*As of 2023, she switched from cooking on her rice cooker to using a gas stove again, but has returned to using either the fridge or washing machine. She admits that the ceiling fan is switched on for most of the day and that she allows her two children to watch television. She points out that there is nothing else to occupy them – she doesn't feel safe sending them to play outside.*

### **Burden on women**

The burden of implementing these measures fell on women, juggling the complex and varied needs of their families with an income that at best is stable, but more often shrinking. Households abandoned time saving electrical devices such as grinders, rice cookers and washing machines, increasing the workload of women both in terms of physical labour and hours spent on housework. It is worth noting that urban women in Sri Lanka are the most time-poor demographic in Sri Lanka (Ranatunga and Dunusinghe, 2021).

Working women in particular rely on time-saving appliances - unplugging fridges and washing machines results in daily journeys to buy perishables and hours spent washing clothes by hand. High cost of living, gas prices increasing in tandem with electricity tariffs, have forced women to abandon rice cookers and cook on firewood stoves which is not only more time-consuming and arduous but also has long term health implications (UNDP, 2025). Increasing tariffs have increased the workload and workday of women and girls, stripping them of time that could be used for livelihood, education or leisure.



**Figure 4. Seela used the rice cooker to make curries in April 2022**

Moreover, women tend to compromise their own needs and comforts when limiting electricity consumption, often forgoing the fan when they are home alone and doing housework, despite building typology and the urban heat island effect exposing them to higher temperatures.

Conserving energy is also not just a matter of turning off lights, but rather consists of strategies based on a personalised balancing act of livelihood, income, safety, and comfort, and they all invoke a cost in terms of time and energy. The mental burden of calculating this balance everyday and rationalising what energy devices are needed for what duration, also falls disproportionately on women, as does moral judgement for 'wasting electricity.'

There is also a limited extent to which households can curb their electricity consumption. This may be due to old electrical devices that are less energy efficient than newer counterparts, or that extended families share a home and meter increasing the total units.

In other instances, cutting back on consumption is impossible when informal livelihoods are often dependent on domestic electricity connections. It is not uncommon for vendors to set up shops within their houses or in some cases run their domestic connections to a nearby stall for lighting. When households run retail shops from their houses, a fridge proves invaluable because of the high-demand for cool drinks. One respondent noted that if they didn't stock cool drinks, people would go to another shop and they would lose all their business. When the home is also a place of livelihood - be it through tailoring or selling ground spice mixes, electricity consumption cannot be reduced.

### **Reducing other expenses**

*“We'll even wait without eating and somehow pay the monthly electricity bill on time”  
(December 2024)*

Even following a tariff reduction in March 2024, a survey of 25 households in Panchikawatte in December 2024 found that for two thirds, utility bills were the main monthly expense, and for a third electricity bills alone were reported the highest expense. Particularly in the context where utility bills start to become one of the highest monthly expenses, households have no choice but to reduce expenditure in other categories. This has implications for nutrition as households drop expensive but nutrient-dense food such as meat, fish, eggs and fruit from their diets. They also reduced money spent on transport, tuition, school books, clothes and entertainment. Households may reduce large infrequent purchases such as gas cylinders, using firewood to cook instead.

In addition, households relocated into high-rise apartments run by the Urban Development Authority (UDA) are rendered even more vulnerable, as UDA officials often disconnect the water if electricity bills or monthly rent payments are not made, forcing them to borrow to pay bills (Colombo Urban Lab 2023b).

### **Borrowing to pay bills**

*“Many suggested I put a wire and connect to one of the neighbour's houses. But that isn't fair. It would only increase their bill and we wouldn't be sure how much to pay.”  
(November 2023)*

Another strategy is to borrow money to pay electricity bills and arrears that have accumulated. In a survey in April 2024, we found that payment of electricity arrears or bills was one of the main reasons for borrowing money. These are borrowed from the informal credit market on high interest ranging from 10% - 15%, even for an amount as low as LKR 5000. A survey of 25 households in December 2024 found that 9 households had been disconnected in the last 3 years with arrears at the point of disconnection ranging from LKR 7000-52,000 (see table.) Table 1 shows that arrears can accumulate in households that rely on a fixed monthly salary, as well as self-employment or daily wages.

All except one household borrowed money to reconnect, highlighting not only the vulnerability of households to shocks, but also the predominance of maladaptive coping mechanisms as a response. In addition, this is just one example of a constellation of shocks that necessitate borrowing as can be seen from responses to the question of borrowing in the previous month. Two households also indicate that they had to borrow money to pay their electricity bill, along with other consumption activities. Such measures only trap households in the cycle of debt, as can be seen from the final respondent, who has borrowed money to pay off money to save gold jewellery pawned earlier to pay his electricity bill. Given that arrears also accrue interest as the original bill goes unpaid, the cost in terms of interest on bills and loans is astronomical in proportion to the electricity consumed.

More commonly, households who were disconnected connect to a neighbouring meter, and pay a monthly fee for this ‘flying connection.’ Others who fear reprisal and are unwilling to get into debt simply choose to live with disconnection. While this extreme strategy does ensure that households do not get into debt, the arrears itself is a form of debt which grows. In addition, costs of lighting are not free. One respondent who was disconnected because she had arrears of LKR 9000, spent LKR 120 on candles everyday. At more than LKR2700 per month just for lighting, it was significantly higher than the bill she would have received for electricity consumption for lighting.

### **CASE STUDY:**

*Ayesha\* lives in Keselwatta with her husband and two children. In June 2023, her electricity was disconnected because she had LKR 21,000 in arrears. Unable to pay off their arrears, Ayesha and her family would spend each night at her sister's house in Wellampitiya, leaving at 5am to return home for school and employment. After her children finish school and tuition in the evening, she would travel back to her sister's house. This continued for four months till Ayesha and her husband were able to save up and pay off their arrears. The reconnection cost and interest on arrears meant that they had to pay LKR 30,000.*

**Table 1: Data from households disconnected in the last 3 years, December 2024.**

Yellow fields indicate households receiving Aswesuma or government benefits.

Household size	Source of income	Household income	Average electricity bill	Arrears when disconnected	Method of payment	Has anyone borrowed money in the last month?
4	Husband does religious readings in the mosque.	My husband earns 20,000. In addition, if there is an urgent need for money, the two children will support. Because of this, the total monthly income of the family cannot be stated with certainty.	800	15000	Borrowed money from a friend	Yes, to send my son abroad we had to borrow money. We borrowed 150,000 from Feature Lanka and have to pay Rs 4,500 weekly to this institution. I don't know the exact interest amount payable.
2	Works at an auto parts store.	Rs 40,000 monthly	1200	17000	Borrowed money from Samurdhi bank	About 3-4 months ago we borrowed 10,000 from the Samurdhi Bank to pay the electricity bill. To pay this amount back we have to give 1,200 per annum for 10 months.
5	Repairs broken electrical appliances.	I can't say an amount with certainty. Husband's income is unstable. If there is work only he will get paid. I do not work regularly in houses, but on the days they give me work I will take it up. Although the two children earn LKR 60,000, the portion they give to the household is very little. About LKR 50,000 is needed monthly for household expenses	3000	15000	Borrowed money at 10% interest rate	Yes. For my child's school needs and to buy medicine for husband's illness we borrowed 20,000 at 10% interest. Other than this about 10 months ago to pay the electricity bill and the household consumption bills we borrowed 30,000 for which 2,000 needs to be paid in 16 weeks .
5	Clothes sales person.	Rs 2,000 daily.	3000	7000	Borrowed from a friend	Yes, to pay for our water, electricity and our household consumption needs we borrowed 15,000 at an interest rate of 10%. We borrowed from a neighbouring house.



**Table 1: Data from households disconnected in the last 3 years, December 2024.**

Yellow fields indicate households receiving Aswesuma or government benefits.

Household size	Source of income	Household income	Average electricity bill	Arrears when disconnected	Method of payment	Has anyone borrowed money in the last month?
4	Electrical appliance repair person	Rs 60,000 monthly	2800	14000	Borrowed money on interest	We usually don't borrow with interest because of money spent on leasing and the children's needs there's no cash left for debt repayment.
4	Repairs broken vehicles (works on the side of the road because he does not have a proper place of work)	There is no fixed stable amount, you'll receive an income based on the work you get.	2000	12000	Borrowed money on 10% interest	Not in the last month but 3 months prior we borrowed 60,000 at a 10% interest from a neighbour to pay our key money.
4	Works in a bottle and glass recycling shop as a labourer.	Rs 1,000 daily	300	7000	Borrowed money from Samurdhi bank	Although we haven't taken a loan within the last month, 4 months ago we borrowed 10,000 from the Samurdhi Bank. This was to reinstate our electricity connection after it was cut off for not paying the electricity bill on time.
6	Repairs vehicle lights (husband and son own the store)	There's no exact fixed income. Income changes based on how much work is received. Approximately an income of Rs 2,000-3,000 is received.	3000	52000	Paid off by relatives who work abroad	Yes, 25,000 was obtained from a private institution that provides weekly loans to perform my mother's three-month dhane for charity.
3	Works at the Sugathadasa Indoor Stadium.	Rs 60,000 monthly	3000	10000	Pawned gold jewellery	2 months ago we borrowed Rs 250,000. This was to save the pawned gold goods. A sum of Rs 12,500 per month should be paid to settle the amount.

### ***Aswesuma and electricity use***

When looking at the differences in households receiving Aswesuma and those not (either due to not applying or not being selected despite applying), a higher proportion of the household budget of non-Aswesuma families was allocated towards electricity bills. They also identified that if they received government assistance, they would put it towards electricity bills. Those receiving the cash transfer stated they put it towards their monthly electricity bills. This is despite the fact low electricity consumption is used as one of 22 indicators to select beneficiaries from the programme. Welfare payments will not have a transformative effect on households as they are immediately diverted to meet monthly utility payments (Colombo Urban Lab 2024b).

### ***Electricity consumption is a poor indicator for welfare targeting***

The conflation of low-income with low electricity consumption has been a key assumption characterising the relationship between electricity and Aswesuma. Proposals for using a threshold of 60 kWh or less of electricity as a determinant for eligibility for welfare have been promoted as an easy and cost-effective way to reform Aswesuma (Verité Research 2022). The recommended threshold of 60 kWh a month would reach 50% of the population, expanding those eligible for welfare well beyond the limited scope of Samurdhi. However, it fails to account for the electricity consumption patterns of the urban working class poor, particularly in the context of the economic crisis.

Households in urban areas invariably exceed the 60kWh threshold, due to the nature of urban life and informality, as well as the obvious reason of household size. For example, a family of five would spend 201 units. Even a household consisting of a mother and an adult daughter reported consuming 86 units. These households received at least one cash transfer of Rs. 5,000 as a part of the Government's Covid-19 relief scheme, despite none of them being Samurdhi recipients. Particularly when livelihoods are so contingent on electricity, usage does not accurately capture the lived realities and precarity of the urban working class poor (Perera and Samarakoon 2022).

The assumption that electricity use can communicate information about a distinct family unit is problematic. The cost of installing a new metered connection is Rs. 20,000, which, when coupled with the burden and costs of bureaucracy and obtaining documentation, is a significant barrier to getting a separate meter. Often multiple households share an electricity connection, particularly when grown children have received a divided property. In such instances, limiting consumption is impossible and installing another electricity meter is burdensome and expensive. Using electricity consumption as criteria for welfare access also lays the groundwork for moralising about the lifestyles of the working-class poor and policing what is considered to be 'wasteful or unproductive' usage.

If there is an insistence on allocating subsidies according to lower electricity consumption, then it is necessary to investigate what levels of electricity consumption can guarantee an appropriate standard of living. Households cannot be forced to reduce consumption and sacrifice time, energy and quality of life to qualify for welfare benefits and doing so will only hamper the transformative effect that cash transfers are purported to have.

While there is no single internationally-accepted and adopted definition of modern energy access, efforts to calculate the minimum electricity required for a household assume a household having initial access to sufficient electricity to power a basic bundle of energy services. One example of a projection includes the average household having enough electricity to power four lightbulbs operating at five hours per day, one refrigerator, a fan operating 6 hours per day, a mobile phone charger and a television operating 4 hours per day, which equates to an annual electricity consumption of 1250 kWh per household with standard appliances, and 420 kWh with efficient appliances (International Energy Agency, 2020). At 104kWh a month, this projection is significantly higher than the 60kWh threshold assumed to be adequate for the urban working class poor.

## Policy priorities

Tariff reductions in 2024 provided considerable relief to households, with households spending less of their income on electricity as a percentage. However, it is unclear as to how much of this can be attributed to tariff reductions as households continue to employ aggressive energy conservation measures - in particular abandoning all appliances except lightbulbs and fans, switching off other appliances when the rice cooker is in use and minimising fan usage. Responses in December 2024's survey indicated that households will resort to reducing expenditure and consumption to pay the electricity bill, indicating that it continues to occupy a prominent place in the hierarchy of household budgets. This suggests that households are self-censoring and self-regulating consumption to the point of deprivation - often to avoid debt. As of March 2025, the IMF raised concerns about tariff reductions, reiterating that cost-reflective energy pricing is a key objective for the next review (Newsfirst, 2025). As such, the present dip in prices may only be a temporary respite. In such a context, key areas for policy recommendations and research are outlined below:

### Affordable energy for all

*A policy declaration on what constitutes basic electricity entitlement in a household eg. Lighting, fan, refrigerator, iron etc and an accompanying technical and social survey to establish how much electricity is required to satisfy the basic needs of this entitlement (Siyambalapitiya, 2018).*

Electricity is essential for well-being and citizens should not be punished for consuming electricity that secures their basic needs. The electricity necessary to satisfy these needs should be affordable to all. Many countries have adopted 'Lifeline' tariff structures that provide free or subsidised minimum energy requirements. For example, South Africa has a 'Basic Free Electricity' programme that provides 50kWh per month free of charge to eligible low-income households. Other countries such as Bangladesh and Ghana have 'Lifeline tariffs' that subsidise consumption of roughly 60kWh per household per month. While Sri Lanka's cross-subsidised tariff structure means that those consuming under 60 kWh of electricity are also subsidised, there is a need to formalise the minimum threshold of acceptable consumption.

Such a threshold should distinguish between urban and rural and be at the level of the individual rather than household. Establishing this threshold will be invaluable in determining affordability and evaluating energy poverty among the working class poor. The International Energy Agency identifies an 'essential bundle' and an 'extended bundle' of electricity access (2023). The essential bundle includes four light bulbs for four hours per day, a fan for three hours per day, and a television for two hours per day, which equates to roughly 500 kWh per household per year. This is explicitly for an urban household, with the understanding that the rural household will consume less electricity. The extended bundle implies a refrigerator, four hours for lighting, four hours for TV, and six hours for a fan, which equates to roughly 1250 kWh per household per year. Similarly, the World Bank has a multi-tiered system of energy access and some countries such as Zambia and Rwanda have chosen to define energy access according to a particular tier. Notably these standards are often used in contexts where a significant population has no access to electricity. Given that it has been nearly 10 years since Sri Lanka achieved full electrification, a purposely low threshold makes little sense. A detailed study establishing a basic electricity entitlement would also have to consider what is needed to support livelihood, education and health, as well as provide dignity and comfort.

### Protect vulnerable households from disconnection

The essential nature of electricity for modern life has meant households are often unable to reduce electricity consumption. Coupled with the precarious and fluctuating incomes of daily wage earners, this results in arrears and disconnection. The threat of disconnection can trap vulnerable households into cycles of debt, or push households permanently off the grid.

*Adopt a transparent disconnection policy that outlines clear thresholds, timelines and exemptions for disconnection for non-payment of electricity bills for all categories of consumers*

*Moratorium on disconnecting electricity for vulnerable households including those with dependents, patients of chronic diseases and single parent families.*

*Mechanisms for low-income households to apply for forgiveness of arrears and to restructure payments of electricity arrears in sustainable increments.*

Collecting data and sharing data on disconnections and arrears is the first step towards safeguarding vulnerable families and understanding affordability. For example, New Zealand's electricity regulator obtains data from electricity companies regarding disconnections, including number of accounts that have been sent disconnection warning notices, total debt from customers disconnected for non-payment, and number of accounts disconnected for non-payment for a period more than 24 hours. This data is freely available on the regulator website. Australia has a clear minimum disconnection threshold set by its energy regulator, and energy distributing companies set out timelines and thresholds in guideline documents. Each state has an Ombudsman for electricity and water, with resources on disconnection and high bills.

Many countries also have periods during which it is illegal to disconnect vulnerable consumers from the grid, particularly during winter. For patients with health conditions that require electricity for device use or prescription refrigeration, public utilities offer protection from disconnection with physician certification, with policies varying by state. In Connecticut, utilities are prohibited from disconnecting service to those with a life-threatening illness as certified by a physician with the definition of "life-threatening" left to the physician's judgment. One study found that these exemptions were usually granted to patients with asthma, diabetes, end-stage kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and congestive heart failure. In the UK, energy companies have signed onto the 'Energy UK Vulnerability Commitment'. Suppliers must provide households with a payment plan before disconnections during the winter if they have old or vulnerable persons residing, and in some cases are forbidden from disconnecting certain households at any time of year eg. household has someone who is disabled or a child under 6 years. There are also voucher schemes to help low-income or vulnerable households pay their electricity bills. While safeguarding measures in the global north are focused on protecting households from the extreme cold, such recommendations could be tailored to a Sri Lankan context, considering moratoriums for disconnection during times of extreme heat and exams, as well as classifying households with persons who are aged, experiencing chronic disease, disabled or on welfare as vulnerable.

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