

## RECENT STUDIES ON THE AGRARIAN SECTOR

This brief note comments on the findings of some recent studies on the agrarian sector. Because of space limitations, more attention has been placed on discussing the limitations of the studies in the hope that improvements will be effected in future research.

1. **The Agrarian Situation Relating to Paddy Cultivation in Five Selected Districts of Sri Lanka, Parts 1 - 6, Agrarian Research & Training Institute.** (Summaries of the first five parts available in Sinhala as one publication).

The agrarian situation survey covered the five districts of Hambantota, Kandy, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Colombo. The areas covered are the environmental and socio-economic factors and their influence on paddy cultivation, tenancy conditions, labour utilization patterns and effectiveness of extension services. The format of the five reports is the same. Distinct regional variations in the environmental and socio-economic set up affecting paddy cultivation are highlighted. Share-cropping is found to be the main form of tenancy. The assumed adverse effects of tenancy on productivity are not consistently established. Water supply and its control is found to be the major factor affecting productivity and improved farm practices such as adoption of high yielding varieties, transplanting and fertilizer application. The services of rural institutions were generally utilised more by large farmers. In common with findings of other surveys, non-institutional sources dominated the supply of credit.

Thus these reports contain a wealth of information which were not previously available. One drawback is that the same research design was used in the case of all five districts. This makes analysis in terms of the three major variables of holding size, tenurial category and water supply less meaningful in some cases. The

'interdisciplinary nature' of the study is at a rather superficial level as the various sections are not well-integrated. Lack of rigour, too many tables at the expense of analysis and wide differences in style of reporting detract from the quality of information supplied. Some summaries are as long as sections in the main text. Later reports show some improvements in this regard. However, one should bear in mind that this was the first major study undertaken by the AR & TI.

2. **Survey of Economic Conditions in the Mahaweli Development Area 1974, Central Bank of Ceylon, 1975.** (Available only in English).

The main objective of the survey was to provide bench-mark data for future evaluation of the impact of the Mahaweli Development Project. The study covered 15 purana villages and 10 colonization tracts which would benefit from the diversion scheme. The report first discusses demographic data which is followed by a discussion of the situation pertaining to employment, unemployment and underemployment. 89% of the work force are in agriculture. Unemployment is low with only 3.3% of the work force unemployed but nearly 33% of the work force was found to be underemployed. The discussion on land resources, land use, labour use and cultivation practices (Part IV) brings out differences between the colonization tracts and the purana villages. Smaller farm units, fragmentation of holdings and low average yields characterise the situation in the purana villages. Chillie is not the mono crop in chenas as commonly thought. Transport facilities were found to be unsatisfactory. Under community development it is pointed out that distinct community leadership is found only in remote villages.

A crucial factor in the research design should have been the in-

formation on variables most likely to be affected by the supply of assured water supply and development plans envisaged by the Mahaweli project. This factor has been given scant attention. For instance, there is no mention of present levels of farm incomes although this is one of the most important variables. The concept of level of living also is multi-dimensional and cannot be summed up in the variable of 'roof and wall conditions of houses'. Ownership of consumer durables and other amenities has received no mention at all, probably the result of using the new approach of 'observation at close range' (p. 84). Concentration on cost of production of paddy, when present land use and cropping patterns and water management procedures should have received more attention, is another example. Comparative evaluation of conditions in the purana villages and the colonization tracts is not put in sharp focus. The section on community development shows lack of depth. The picture that emerges from the whole exercise is not clear. The GPS (Guaranteed Price Scheme) has been given a new definition as the 'Government Paddy Subsidy' (P. XV).

3. **Census of Agriculture - 1973. Small Holding: Preliminary Release No. 1, Department of Census and Statistics.** (Text in Sinhala and English).

Students of Sri Lanka agriculture are eagerly awaiting the results of the Census of Agriculture 1973. The present release, however, is a summary of information obtained in the first stage of the census in which all agricultural small holdings (defined as less than 20 acres) were pre-listed. The information presented relates to operational holdings and their operational status, livestock numbers, and periods of agricultural work done during the year, on a district-wise basis.

The total number of small holdings is 1,646,461 with about 89% less than 5 acres in extent. The average size of a small holding is 2.36 acres which is said to show a decline from previous levels. Data on land use in small holdings indicates that home gardens and paddy are almost equally important in terms of extent (30-31%) while highland accounts for 39% of the total.