

# Agriculture

## LOOKING BACK AT COLONIZATION SCHEMES

Colonization or settlement schemes on a peasant framework have become a means for large-scale land development, with a long history in Sri Lanka. Galoya, Walawe and now their prototype the Mahaweli were aimed at re-developing the dry zone, redistributing population, increasing agricultural production and productivity, advancing specifically the economic welfare of the dry zone and that of the country in general. The deficiencies and shortcomings in former schemes like Galoya, Walawe and some smaller schemes which have been constantly studied by various individuals, study groups and committees are too well known to be stated in detail. They included high costs, haphazard selection criteria, unsuitable layout aspects, inadequacy of infrastructure services, inefficient administration and general lack of foresight in formulation.

Where the past colonization schemes have greatly failed is in their social planning aspects. The selection procedures and the settlement patterns adopted have generated a heterogeneous community varying in geo-cultural origin, caste, religion, customs and values.

Thus the present colonization schemes have become unsuccessful as "social units" since they have been planned taking into account primarily land development, redistribution of land and population.

As incompatible social groups have been planted side by side the social cohesion and integration expected from these colonization schemes have not been realized. Taking lessons from these experiences the Mahaweli settlements have been planned with greater emphasis on human resources, taking into account that they are people with a social and an individual past with uncertainty weighing heavily on them.

### The Cluster Concept

With these factors in mind the Mahaweli settlements have evolved a type and pattern of settlement based on the cluster concept to integrate new and old settlements to build up social cohesion and solidarity and to make way for a well integrated community. At a time when new thinking on human settlements is being explored and adopted for implementation a look back at the shortcomings which lead to this trend would facilitate further thinking on the subject so as to avoid repetition of the same mistakes and prevention of new schemes like the Mahaweli falling into the same ruinous path.

Recruitment of settlers is vital, because this indicates clearly the type of settler who will be absorbed into the scheme. In the older colonization schemes selection was based on large

families and landlessness with ideas mainly of easing population pressures and opening out land in the less developed dry zone. Thus capabilities, capacities and interests in agriculture were not taken into account. A writer on the Chandrikawewa scheme speaking on such selection says "selection was without insistence on the uniform basis of choice. In retrospect, however, it seems quite clear that the size and the family have been a criteria of selection. This is understandable in the context of the difficulty of assessing agricultural skills of applicants in the one sitting". (Journal of Historical and Social Studies, Vol. 8, Nos. 1 and 2 1965, page 136).

This had a undesirable effect on agricultural production. A study carried out by the Mahaweli Board on the Huruluwewa Scheme reveals that 76.01% of the settlers were selected because of landlessness. Thus the main interest of these settlers would be to possess land and not solely for the purpose of carrying on a profession.

The area of selection is important since this facilitates the integration of the settlers into the new area. In earlier colonization schemes as Farmer suggests, (Pioneer Peasant Colonization in Ceylon 1958, Oxford University Press, page 156) too many places are given to peasants hailing from the vicinity of the colony. A study conducted by Barnabas on three colonization schemes, in 1968, shows that 47% of those selected have been from the same district as the area in which the Colonization Scheme was started (Table below).

Selections in Three Colonization Schemes

	A B C			% of Total
	Same District ...	36	74	
Neighbouring District	20	24	4	16
Distant District ...	44	2	66	37

If social integration is to take place the relationships with the original villages should be minimal, constant visits to the original village will not develop these relations since ties would be with the original village. Amunugama says in Chandrikawewa commuting between their villages were common, to draw on kinship ties for credit, agricultural help etc. Thus the social relations needed for integration within the scheme became less.

However, the social relations maintained with original villages is not solely dependent on their being in the vicinity. It depends on the qualities of a transient, the feeling of insecurity about the future and the complex of fears and hopes which give them a psychological weakness in venturing out to a new environment, having to mix with new residents totally alien, in

their coming from different geo-cultural areas etc. Another writer on Galoya has shown that even people from distant places like Kandy and Kegalle commute to their original villages every harvest, once in two months and still maintain their connections. These settlers from distant places try to create an identity of their own group by adopting names of their former villages and unite for communal and religious activities like pirith and bana.

Thus areas of selection being near or far depends on the sense of identity and the degree of attachment formed emotionally with their original villages. Both these affect integration to the community as a whole and community participation which is necessary for social solidarity.

### Settlement Pattern

Another aspect which has received focus is the pattern of settlement in the older colonization schemes. The pattern follows a ribbon formation with houses widely scattered and away from the paddy fields. This arrangement hinders the getting together of people at times of emergencies and community activities. It further takes up time to travel from homestead to the field which is called the agro-distance. Thus this scatter-type of settlement impels settlers to become highly individualistic in outlook and agricultural operations. They tend to become isolated while Kaiyya, Aththan and other forms of labour pooling and community participation are not encouraged.

Colonization land policy was also formulated as a solution to the excessive fragmentation following the customary land inheritance rule of land being passed on both males and females. In time the population increase overrides the land available, the pangu (plot) is not physically sub-divided but rotated either in a whole (hattumaru) or each plot in turn (kattimaru) by all the owners. There are many forms of manoeuvring for the shares which can be compared to manipulations of a share market.

In colonization schemes attempts are made to prevent wasteful fragmentation by nominating one successor who will inherit the land. This is granting individual ownership to the peasantry.

But since land in the peasant sector is not only a source of economical upliftment but a status symbol, it increases the respectability of the individual and family and kinship circle.

One repercussion to this is based on the land-man ratio and cutting down of the unit of alienation to a settler. While the earlier colonies like Minneriya and Kagamakutiya had large extents of land per settler family, varying from 5-10 acres a gradual decline is seen in Walawe, its coming down to 3-5 acres and in recent schemes it has come down

to 1½-2 acres. Another aspect of this is the large encroachment seen in older colonization schemes. Socially they form a settler category not authorised to be in the colony and friction occurs between settlers proper and these encroachers. This culminates in the forming of factions, hidden tenancy and large-scale unemployment. The latter are disheartened, unemployed people uprooted from their accustomed way of life and become a mobile workforce to be exploited by the middleman who becomes their patron and creates in them a dependence and obligation.

On the other hand the second generation of the colonization scheme becomes a landless generation with the land being transferred to only one in the family. From this arises family friction and frustration. In a large number of families with the marriage of the eldest son his mother and unmarried sisters become obligated to the daughter-in-law and thrust on the mercy of the daughter-in-law at her marriage. Thus some disgruntled members leave the scheme breaking up the family unit. A study of Huruluwewa scheme by the Mahaweli Board in 1974 showed that the son was the nominee in 41.63% of the settlers.

A reverse of this situation is the hidden form of tenancy which has appeared in colonization schemes. As cultivation involves a certain degree of risk, and due to the inadequacy of institutional means to combat this in colonization schemes, the settler turns to people with some resources at their disposal. This person is normally the opinion leader, decision-maker and the one who gets things done. To obtain these services a part of his field or whole is mortgaged, leased or worked on Ande by the middleman. The owner then becomes sometimes a tenant in his own field.

#### Leadership Patterns

The leadership in colonization schemes too has received criticism because it is an opportunistic leadership preventing socially-conscious leaders been produced. Some of these leaders endowed with social capital like cash, influence in politics, ability to organize things have become patrons of the settlers for obtaining credit for agriculture and consumption, present grievances and views on behalf of them to the officials preventing the settler from being self-reliant, independent and initiative which is needed for development.

Therefore, the leadership conducive to development should be dynamic and able to mobilize the rural sector for community participation. This could be achieved by systematically identifying and selecting leaders and carefully training them so that they would represent the community itself and act as catalyst agents for community development.

The Mahaweli by its cluster concepts relying on proximity, centralized services and infrastructure by proper selection and settling homogenous groups together proposes to eradicate these evils.