

AGRICULTURAL POLICY AND PLANNING

Agricultural development planning assumes crucial importance in view of the emphasis placed on agriculture in recent years. An agricultural plan is made up of a number of sectoral plans for various individual components of agriculture (e.g. specific crop sectors, the animal husbandry sectors). These sectoral plans have to be broken down into a large number of individual projects for effective implementation.

The strategies chosen will be largely dependent on the objectives of overall development policy. In Sri Lanka, the major objectives of agricultural development policy could be identified as: increased contribution to national income, helping to ease the foreign exchange problem and absorption of the growing labour force in the country. In line with these objectives, the broad strategies adopted are import substitution in food, export expansion, modernisation of peasant farming, land reform, and productivity promotion in traditional export crops.

The guiding document for agricultural planning in recent years has been the Five-Year Plan (1972-76). The major investments planned for agriculture during this period was to be in the multi-purpose irrigation schemes and other reservoir schemes. For, on the extent of land brought under irrigation would depend much of the cultivation, settlement and employment programmes of the future. Therefore under the various irrigation schemes that were planned it was intended to improve irrigation facilities to existing cultivated lands as well as to open out new irrigated lands according to the schedule shown in the table below:

It placed special emphasis on the agricultural sector for several reasons. In addition to being the largest productive sector of the economy, possibilities for import substitution and the potential for short-term employment creation were believed to be high in this sector. The major agencies involved in agricultural planning in Sri Lanka are: the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands, the Ministry of Plantation Industries, the Ministry of Irrigation, Power and Highways and the Ministries of Planning and Employment and Plan Implementation. Each of these has a number of departments and institutes under it to look after different aspects of agricultural development. The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands is entrusted with the development and co-ordination of policies and programmes relating to crops other than export crops and animal husbandry. The Department of Agriculture functioning under the ministry is responsible for research and extension activities. It is served by an islandwide extension network consisting of Agricultural Extension Officers at district-level to village-level extension workers (KVS) at the lowest level. The Rural Institutions and Productivity Laws Division, the Land Commissioner's Department, the Land Reform Commission, the Agricultural Insurance Board, the Fertiliser Corporation and the Agrarian Research & Training Institute are the other important agencies functioning under the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands. The Ministry of Plantation Industries was set up in 1970 to co-ordinate activities relating to the three major crops viz. tea, rubber and coconut and minor export crops. The Department of Irrigation, under the Ministry of Irrigation, Power and Highways is responsible for the provision of better irrigation to already

EXTENT OF LAND TO BE IRRIGATED (ACRES) 1972-76

| | 1972 | 1973 | 1974 | 1975 | 1976 | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------|--------|---------|--------|--------|---------|
| Presently cultivated land ... | 10,836 | 15,224 | 133,850 | 17,284 | 19,750 | 196,944 |
| Newly developed land ... | 25,493 | 31,457 | 42,092 | 52,097 | 52,536 | 203,675 |

cultivated land and irrigation of new land. The Ministry has set up separate boards (the Mahaweli Development Board and the River Valleys Development Board) to undertake developmental work in connection with two large multi-purpose river-basis projects.

The degree of control exercised by the government over agriculture naturally determines the scope for planning and plan implementation. The government can lay down only broad guidelines for development where the private sector controls the bulk of agriculture. Recent agricultural legislation in Sri Lanka has changed this situation substantially. Land Reform legislation implemented in two stages (Land Reform Law No. 1 of 1972 and Land Reform Amendment Law No. 39 of 1975) has brought a sizeable portion of cultivated acreage in the country under national control. Roughly about 1 million acres amounting to about 20-25% of the total cultivated acreage of the country has been vested in the government. This sector mainly consists of large holdings of Tea, Rubber and Coconut. The Land Reform Commission has disposed of this land in three ways; distribution for setting up of family farms, collective farms and 'state farms' run by State Agricultural Corporations such as the State Plantations Corporation, the Janatha Estates Development Board (JANAWASAMA) and the Up-country Co-operative Estates Development Board (USAWASAMA).

Modernising Peasant Agriculture

Planning agencies obviously have lesser control over the other sectors in agriculture, namely, paddy, subsidiary food crops and animal husbandry. This sector is usually characterised by small holdings operated as family farms. The government has attempted to influence developments in this sector to conform to national policy objectives through a number of different programmes such as colonisation and settlement of new lands, agricultural price support and subsidy policies, input subsidies, agricultural credit schemes and extension activity. The keynote of policy in this area has been modernisation of peasant agri-

culture by encouraging the adoption of improved farm practices.

Certain procedures have been evolved since the mid-sixties which attempt to co-ordinate local level production plans into an annual national plan. The annual implementation programmes of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands presents a plan each year for the next crop year (consisting of two agricultural seasons). This indicates targets of acreages and yields for specific crops as well as estimated quantities of inputs required for the programme. The major objectives of this measure are two-fold: secure the participation of the farming community in the task of implementation to build from the village-level upwards a channel of communication between planners and farmers. As these plans were formulated and implemented on a district basis, a certain re-organisation in district administration was effected. Agricultural co-ordinating committees were formed at the district and divisional levels and the Government Agent was made responsible for agricultural development functions. The basic unit for the preparation of the annual production programmes are the Cultivation Committees; these plans are combined into a divisional programme by the network of Agricultural Productivity Committees. The district implementation programme is the combination of these divisional programmes. The ministry also issues a set of indicative targets to serve as guidelines. The final programme is a compromise between these two. Thus, the programme is prepared at four levels, namely the national, district, divisional and village levels. Monitoring of progress is done by conferences of Government Agents, the extension network of the Department of Agriculture and the Ministry of Plan Implementation.

Certain Basic Problems

Although the programme has been in operation for a number of years, certain basic problems remain. First, there is the problem of non-availability of good quality data which is a prerequisite of efficient planning. Second, the Agricultural Productivity Committees and Cultivation Committees differ widely in their efficiency and this hinders uniformity in

planning. Adverse weather conditions have been a major constraint in recent years which led to large disparities between planned magnitudes and actual outcomes. In some cases, it is observed that this situation has made the preparation of the annual plan a 'routine procedure' without much thought about its actual implementation. The perennial problem of co-ordination of the activities of the multiplicity of departments serving the rural sector has also acted as a constraint.

Several recent trends in agricultural planning strategies of the country should be noted. Recent agrarian legislation, especially the Land Reform Law and the Agricultural Productivity Law, has attempted to replace the traditional concept of land ownership by the concept of productive use of the land. The Agricultural Productivity Law has given wide powers to rural organisations to ensure good standards of management on all agricultural lands, thereby emphasising the principle that land must be regarded as a national asset. These developments have paved the way for formulation of agricultural plans in line with social objectives.

Appropriate Organisational Forms

In this context, long-term planning for the agricultural sector is necessary as ad hoc programmes to deal with crisis situations may not lead to rational use of resources in the long-run. It is important that the traditional distinction or duality between the export crop sector and domestic agricultural sector be broken down. The Department of Agriculture has stressed the need for agricultural planning on the basis of different agro-ecological regions and the need for replacing crop-oriented research by research on farming systems for such regions. Research is also needed on appropriate organisational forms for the maximum use of land and water resources of the country; in other words, the relative roles of private family farms, state farms and collective farms would have to be determined. Experience gained in the implementation of the land reform programme will be crucially relevant in this context.