

Seasonal Dimensions of Rural – Urban Interaction: A Study of Consumption Linkages in the North Central Dry Zone Villages in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In rural societies a close relationship exists between rural – urban consumption linkages and the cultivation seasons. Rural – Urban linkages are strong during times of prosperity after harvest, but during periods of hardship, seasonal poverty, compels farmers to purchase essential provisions on credit from village entrepreneurs. This is close to the situation prevailing among farm households in the North Central Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. The harvesting period of the main agricultural season in March and April coincides with the New Year festivities. Hence, consumption links with urban centres are stronger during variety of better quality goods at competitive prices, while weekly markets or 'polas' at these centres attract a large number of traders and consumers. During the rest of the year, except for two minor periods with strong rural – urban linkages, the majority of the farmers depend on village traders who supply daily provisions, agricultural inputs and other requirements on credit. The objective of this study is to account for the changes in the consumption linkages; examine the extent to which land ownership, wealth and regular monthly wages earned in urban areas contribute to differences in consumption linkages; assess the role of the village traders and suggest suitable recommendations to strengthen beneficial linkages with urban centres. Primary data for this study is based on fieldwork conducted in three urban centres and nine villages in their hinterlands. There is a close relation between inputs for the agricultural sector and the marketed outputs. As the same time, the farmers are bound to sell their outputs to the person who can deliver the inputs, especially when the inputs are credits.

Keywords: Consumption Linkages, Seasonal Dimension, Urban - Rural Interaction, Marketing inks, Hinterland

I. INTRODUCTION

The functions markets are often not clearly distinguished; at lower levels of development they are often combined to different degrees in trading enterprises. The specific role of a market centre can be defined by an analysis of the functions performed within the overall context of the agricultural and food marketing system and the linkages of the various enterprises and Consumers. Agricultural produce passes through different channels and different types of market centres on its way from producer to consumer (Kaynak, 1986).

In economic terms three types of rural – urban linkages are usually distinguished: consumption linkages, production linkages and financial linkages. This study highlights consumption linkages in terms of expenditures on urban goods and selected social services. The hinterlands have also shown limited marketing linkages in the sale of rural products to the urban centres. Most of the expected linkages such as agricultural inputs, financial and other social service related linkages between the hinterlands and the urban centre do not exist. Some of the poorest areas may have little more than consumption linkages.

Rural – urban linkages are an essential tool for regional development. They can however also be negative, increasing social stratification and landlessness. At present, the land scarcity is a rapidly growing problem in the North Central Province. This is mainly due to population increase, fragmentation of land, low level of marketable surplus, low income of farmers etc. In addition, income inequality, seasonal variation of labour utilization and income, lack of institutional credit regard for agriculture, out flow of resources from the villages also exist (Peiris, 1996). Due to all these factors, farmers frequently become indebted, hence entering a negative spiral that often ends in the loss of land. Access to agricultural land is related to a certain nexus of rural – urban linkages. These linkages are mostly related to input – output flows. This paper focuses on the linkages of three different types of settlements in the NCP.

II. STUDY AREA

The North Central Province is the largest province and it is situated in the Dry Zone of Sri Lanka (16% of the total land area – 10472 km²). It is a predominantly agricultural region based on major irrigation schemes and traditional tanks. North Central Province has a tropical monsoon climate with a highly variable bimodal rainfall pattern. The inter-monsoonal period between October and December provides the most reliable rain for crop production (Maha Season) and irrigation water collection. The