

Contributory Factors for the Abandonment of Paddy Lands along the Left Bank of Benthara River, Sri Lanka

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Rice is the main cereal produced in the world and it is the staple food of almost all countries in the world. Rice is grown in more than hundred countries, while China and India are the world largest rice producers. In Sri Lanka, paddy is cultivated in both Yala and Maha seasons. Rice production is mostly expanded in dry zone of Sri Lanka, but it is produced in the wet zone too. Paddy land abandonment normally occurs during the period between the Yala and Maha seasons. This is purposely done in order to fertilize the paddy lands. Long term seasonal fallowing happens due to natural, socio – economic, technological and institutional causes, which should be examined more deeply to re-cultivate paddy lands. The research was conducted in the Ambalangoda irrigation area, Galle district in the southern province of Sri Lanka. Dedduwa, Ranthotuwila and Thunduwa paddy lands which lay along Benthara River were selected as the study area. The main objective of the study was to examine the reasons for the abandonment of paddy fields in Benthara area. Other objectives were, to examine the impact of seawater intrusion on the abandonment of paddy fields and examine the socio-economic reasons for the abandonment of paddy lands in Benthara area. Primary data was collected mainly through questionnaires and in-depth interviews to find out the main reasons for abandonment of paddy lands in the area. In addition, six water samples were collected. Three from paddy fields and three from water ways which distribute water to paddy lands. Salinity data of the river were taken as secondary data to analyze the relationship between salinity intrusion and paddy land abandonment of the study area, using the salinity data collected from the research – ‘Natural reasons for Saline water intrusion in Benthara River’ was done by the researchers. The primary data was analyzed by using SPSS and GIS. The results revealed that each of the paddy land has unique reasons for paddy land abandonment with the common factor of saline water intrusion. Sea water intrusion, lack of labour and transport problems are the main constraints faced by Dedduwa, Ranthotuwila and Thunduwa farmers respectively. Implementation of proper irrigation system, attending to transport problems, finding solutions for lack of labour, minimizing drainage and manure problems, ensuring commitment of the officials and stability of occupation are the solutions for minimizing the reasons for abandoning paddy lands in the study area.

Keywords: Salinity, Sea water intrusion, Fallow lands