

## WATER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE VAVUNIYA DISTRICT - PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Water, no doubt is the most scarce resource in the Dry Zone. Its efficient use, therefore, is of vital importance for the irrigation and agricultural planning of Sri Lanka. Yet the planning exercises performed throughout the last 50-year period have been fundamentally confined to engineering models, which have resulted in incurring heavy state expenditure on structures of dams and canals albeit without commensurate returns to the economy. There has been very little interest in educating farmers on the cost and benefit aspects of these structures and their upkeep; cost sharing by the users has been virtually absent in these models. This has led to a serious question of moral hazard. On the other hand, no attempt has been made to evaluate the applicability of indigenous water management practices prevalent in certain parts of Sri Lanka, where farmers share both capital and recurrent costs and still generate adequate income surpluses.

This study attempts to ascertain the practicability of some of the long established and popular practices of water management prevalent in the Vavuniya district with a view to assessing the possibilities of their adoption in other areas. A sample survey, combined with participant observation, was carried out in three selected localities of the district. Some of the findings of the study were as follows:

- a. Water is drawn from private wells solely owned by the peasant farmers and the cost of water channeling is entirely borne by the farmer.
- b. Since the peasants have to bear water costs an understanding and consciousness towards the optimum use of water is automatically created.
- c. To minimize the cost of production peasants made a sustained attempt to prune down water wastage.
- d. Peasant farmers are more concerned about the quantity of water used and therefore more modern and effective water use methods like ridge and furrows were found to be popular among them (unlike e.g. Rajangana).
- e. The cropping pattern is adjusted to suit the different conditions of the varieties and seasons to ensure the optimum use of available water.
- f. To suit the rainfall distribution the peasant tends to follow an implicit cultivation calendar compatible with the rainfall patterns:

These findings on the whole suggested that if the peasant farmers can be made aware of the costs involved in channeling water to the fields and the scarcity and value of water itself, water management can be made a more realistic and beneficial undertaking.

### References

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2. Tilakasiri, S.L. et. al - "Lift irrigation at Ranangana: Some problems of cultural adaptation", Economic review, People's Bank, Colombo, March 1979 pp. 25-28