

WATER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN THE VAVUNIYA DISTRICT — PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Water, no doubt is the most scarce resource in the Dry Zone and management of water to ensure an efficient use is of vital importance in the irrigation and agricultural settlement planning in Sri Lanka. Yet, the planning exercises performed throughout the last 50 year period have been fundamentally confined to the pre-cast engineering models which have resulted in an incurring of heavy state expenditure without a commensurate return. Adequate interest had neither been taken to expose the farmers to the heavy cost elements involved in these models nor to evaluate the applicability of indigenous water management practices prevalent in certain parts of Sri Lanka.

This study attempts to ascertain the practicability of some of the long established and popular practices of water management prevalent in the Vavuniya district and possibilities of their adoption in other areas. A technique of 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 channelling 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 make a careful attempt to prune down the wastage of water.
- (d) Peasant farmers are more concerned about the quantity of water to be used and therefore more modern and effective water use methods like ridge and furrows were found to be popular among them (unlike eg. at 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.

These findings on the whole suggested that if the peasant farmers can be given an understanding of the costs involved in channelling water to the fields and the scarcity and value of water itself, water management can be made a more realistic and beneficial phenomenon.

References:

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