# LABOUR USE IN PADDY CULTIVATION IN SRI LANKA : EMERGING PATTERNS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RURAL EMPLOYMENT

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Paddy cultivation is the main source of economic sustenance and employment in rural areas of Sri Lanka which accounts for the bulk of the country's labour force. The methods adopted to cultivate this crop in the last 2-3 decades have changed substantially. This is due to many factors, both direct and indirect, including those such as the adoption of high yielding varieties and other modern production techniques, changes in input supply policies, adjustment in the marketing organization, etc. In consequence to these changes in the methods of production, the patterns of farm labour application also have undergone change. An assessment of the nature of these changes in labour input and their qualifications form the central theme to this papers. The assessment is based on time series as well as cross section data covering the more important production situations in the country.

The analysis shows that labour forms the key production input and accounts for nearly half the total production cost. The amount of labour used per acre of paddy and its relative composition under different production circumstances vary substantially depending on a number of factors. Among them, the more important are; the level of mechanization, degree of dependence on machines/animals for draught power, extent of the use of

chemicals for weed control. The study results showed that in the last 2-3 decades, paddy farming, taken as a whole, has not been associated with significant increases in its labour use intensity.

The study results also highlight the existence of a major potential for increasing the labour use intensity in paddy. The study findings suggest that due to a variety of reasons, this potential has not been adequately harnessed in Sri Lanka. This situation in turn has, to a large extent, contributed to the present explosive unemployment problem in many rural areas.