

**F-34: Feasibility of alternative use of abandoned paddy lands in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka: case studies of Dedduwa and Rantotawila Salt Water Exclusion and Drainage projects**

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The Rantotuwila and Dedduwa Salt Water Exclusion and Drainage (SWED) schemes of the Southern Province Rural Development Project (SPRDP) involve activities that are aimed at rehabilitating and improving the existing salt water exclusion structures and drainage structures as measures of increasing the productivity of paddy. However, due to low open market prices of paddy and high cost of production, paddy farming has become a low-return activity. Many other land-based activities in the study areas, such as sedge cultivation, vegetable cultivation and industries based on kaduru (*Cerbera manghus*) and welatta (*Annona glabra*) appear to bring in higher net farmer incomes and, therefore, paddy cultivation may not be the best use of land to be made cultivable by the SWED projects. This study aims at finding the prospects of alternative industries and paddy cultivation in Rantotuwila and Dedduwa SWED Project areas.

Basic information was collected from key informants during the field visits and 2 case studies were carried out to obtain descriptive information.

The study reveals that sedge cultivation is a profitable alternative to paddy farming in Rantotawila and Dedduwa. This practice has already been adopted by farmers in these areas and the extent under sedge cultivation is on the rise. Economic benefits from masks and handicraft industry based on kaduru are reaped by outsiders. The cork stopper industry based on welatta is another profitable industry which is disappearing with the introduction of plastic substitutes. The interest of youth in agricultural activities is poor in Dedduwa area.

To develop the alternative industries based on sedge, welatta and kaduru, an appropriate package with institutional involvement to solve the tenurial problems, reinforcement of farmer organizations, training to acquire new skills and new market opportunities, is essential in addition to rehabilitation of canals and structures.

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