

F-35: Rehabilitation of abandoned paddy lands in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka: a study of the Madampe Salt Water Exclusion and Drainage project

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A large extent of paddy lands has been abandoned in the southern coastal belt of Sri Lanka mainly due to poor drainage and salt water intrusion. Madampe Salt Water Exclusion and Drainage (SWED) project of the Southern Province Rural Development Project (SPRDP) has attempted to rehabilitate the inundated lands and bring them under cultivation. This paper aims to identify the possibilities of utilization of these abandoned lands under the programme.

Basic information was collected through interviews of key informants during several field visits. Secondary data was collected from available literature. Participatory Rural Appraisal techniques (PRA) were employed to find the relative intensities of the constraints.

The study reveals that the main bottlenecks for land improvement are, insufficient maintenance of canals at the initial stages and subsequent poor drainage, land tenure problems, water stress during drought, poor farmer cooperation and poor institutional support. Land tenure problem is the main constraint for the alternative uses of land. However, the willingness of women and youth to participate in agricultural activities in the area is remarkably high.

Dredging the canals to improve drainage alone is not sufficient to improve the land use system without suitable policy interventions aiming at encouraging and motivating farmers. Institutional involvement to solve the tenurial problems and reinforcement of farmer organizations should be the key components in the rehabilitation programme.

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