

Changes in women's role in post harvest operations in paddy and its impact on household food security

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The impact of changes in women's roles in post harvest operations of paddy on household food security was studied. The specific objectives of this study were to identify the present role of women in post harvest operations in paddy and changes if any; identify the reasons for such changes, assess the status of food security and also identify the impact of changes in women's roles in post-harvest operations in paddy on household food security.

The study was conducted in two areas, a commercialized paddy producing area from Polonnaruwa and a traditional area from Hanguranketa. Forty respondents were selected randomly from each area. Primary data were collected by using a structured interview schedule. Secondary data were collected from published and unpublished data sources. Data were analyzed using SPSS, MS Excel software packages.

Fourteen activities in paddy post harvest operations were identified. Women's contribution to these activities is double that of males. Women are involved in almost all activities in paddy post harvest operations while, males are involved in some. Both genders have some exclusive activities; paddy parboiling is done by women and threshing by males. The status of household food security was measured using a standard module. Around 80 - 90 percent households were food secure. Food security has been affected by different factors. Changes in women's roles in paddy post harvest activities are not a significant factor affecting the household food security in both study areas. Women's knowledge on food and nutrition had a statistically significant relationship with household food security (Pearson correlation 0.454 $p = 0.003$).

The household food security had declined in small amounts in both areas during the period considered. The participation of women in post harvest operations as well as household food security was found to be different in the two areas due to mechanization and commercialization.

Although the work is much easier and efficient with machinery, yield losses were high. When done manually, a tradition activity of women, the yield losses are low during hulling, milling and winnowing. When machines are used in post harvest operations specially during winnowing, milling and de-hulling, attention should be paid to minimize the losses and food nutritive value of rice. In addition, women's participation in these post harvest activities, including machine operations should be improved.

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