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Contribution of home-gardens to rural economic activities: A conceptual framework and empirical evidence

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There is much evidence on benefits of home-gardens to owners. Yet, information to understand benefits to other strata of economies are lacking. We conceptualized activities of inputs and outputs required by households in home-gardening and mapped the links to higher strata of the economy. The framework developed was applied empirically to a community in Central Sri Lanka. The study was conducted in a transect along the A-10 national highway within Galagedara in the Kandy District, known for the prevalence of Kandyan home-gardens. Visualization of spatial locations of households using Google Earth®, indicated a gradual decline of the density of households when moving away from the highway. Two distinct segments as more urbanized (MU), and less urbanized (LU) were identified with a boundary locating at about 0.5 km distance perpendicular to both sides of the highway. A pilot study was conducted to characterize the two sub segments with 20 randomly selected households during September 2017. 33 And 26 households with home-gardens were randomly selected from MU and LU segments respectively and were subsequently studied. Data on costs of inputs, income from sales, and savings due to home consumption and exchanges with community and employment generation due to presence of home-gardens were collected through structured interviews. Data on species composition were obtained through observations. Monthly net returns from home-gardens were calculated. Values for two segments were compared using t-tests.

The analysis showed that there are 152 and 149 plant species in LU and MU segments respectively. Share of ornamental plants in all plant species in home-gardens in the MU segment is 0.34, while that of LU home-gardens is 0.27. Employment opportunities such as market intermediaries who sell farm inputs and who purchase outputs, and providing labor for activities were identified as three major types of employment generated. Employment opportunities generated by home-gardens in MU segment is higher. Average monthly net returns from a home-garden in the area is LKR 3961. Benefits to local communities include provision of exchangeable products that improve dietary diversity. This aspect should be studied further to get an insight into values that will lead to appreciating the role of home-gardens in the improvement of the economy, as they will cease to exist if home-gardening is not appreciated.

Keywords: household income; line-transects; employment generation; social networks; species diversity

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