

SUFFICIENCY IN RICE PRODUCTION IN SRI LANKA: PATTERNS AND TRENDS

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INTRODUCTION

Self-sufficiency in rice production has long been a priority in development planning in Sri Lanka. Although the production of paddy in the island has been increasing in the recent past the realization of this goal is yet to come. In 1977, for instance, approximately 538,000 tonnes of rice had to be imported in order to meet the island's rice requirements. Also, 548,000 tonnes of wheat flour were imported in that year to supplement the cereal needs of the people. It should be noted that imports of rice and wheat accounted for 30.7 percent of the total value of imports in that year.¹

It should also be noted that in Sri Lanka, the process aimed at self-sufficiency in rice production is only one facet of the overall and complex mechanism of development planning. By this it is implied that the predominance of rice sub-sector should not overshadow the significance of the other sectors of the economy. Therefore, in planning the allocation of such resources as land (and water), labour and capital to the rice sub-sector it is of prime importance to have a knowledge of the country's requirements of rice so that any possible miss-allocation of scarce resources can be avoided. An examination of the level and patterns of the sufficiency in rice production in a given period, therefore, may provide an assessment of returns to the investments made during that period on which future planning (especially regional planning) may be organized on a more rational basis.

The term sufficiency in rice production may be interpreted in several ways. First, an estimation of the country's rice requirements can be made on the assumption that wheat—the second cereal food of Sri Lankans—will be given its due place in their diet. If this assumption is used it is implied that although the country is self-sufficient in rice production we need to import wheat to supplement the cereal needs. On the other hand, it can also be assumed that there will be no wheat available for consumption and that portion of cereal needs hitherto supplied by wheat, will have to be supplied with rice in future. In this case, self-sufficiency in rice production can be defined

1. Central Bank of Ceylon—Annual Report of the Monetary Board to the Minister of Finance for the Year 1977. Colombo: Central Bank of Ceylon, 1978.