

A Study on the Consequence Results of Land Policy Reforms in Sri Lanka since Western Colonization

N. C. Wickramaarachchi¹

Land is a unique commodity, which is affected by the forces of demand and supply. Unlike other markets however, ease of entry or exit is closely controlled by local and national government policies. Well functioning land market can therefore be characterized by the level of ease of entry into the system and of carrying out land markets transactions both of which depend on the availability of adequate land information. On the other hand non-performing land markets are plagued with a number of problems easily recognizable and one of the commonly found factor in developing countries is the over centralization of management and administration.

In most developing countries the experience indicates that the lawful acquisition of a plot of land is a long and time-consuming process. The inescapable fact underline any discussion related to use of land is the urban growth in the developing world. By 2025 it is expected that two-thirds of the developing world will reside in urban areas. Conversion of land into urban use with no plan, encroachments of state lands, non-availability of adequate land information is some of the issues that faced by these countries in the development process. Sri Lanka being a developing country with the experience of a colonial era under Portuguese Dutch and the British consists with some results. The land reform movement in Sri Lanka is of universal appeal and long duration. As most of the other Asian countries Sri Lanka also tried a lot in land reforms but only a few have achieved any significant result. During the period of Portuguese and Dutch, a lesser impact being brought to the land law in the country. But with the commencement of the British rule, significant changes were introduced. The British enacted the crown lands Encroachment ordinance in 1840, by which a large, amount of land was presumed to be the property of the crown.

This study attempts to identify the consequence results of the land policy reform being introduced in the country. The data were collected mainly through the secondary sources and further emphasis was given to the discussions with the resource persons. The results indicate that as a consequence result over 80% of the land remains as state property. Privately held lands are found mostly in the densely populated southwestern sector of the country. As a country with an agricultural based economy 46% of the total labor is found in the field of agriculture but per capita arable land available in hectares is 0.52 in '96 / 97'. By the year 2000 it is also found that almost three million hectares or 12.7% of state agricultural land, were being farmed by tenant farmers. Further it is found that almost 69% of state lands are farmed under non-clear tenancy arrangements. Non-availability of mortgage facilities to these lands is a serious problem faced by the farmers in Sri Lanka.

Key Words: - Land policy reforms; Western colonization; Sri Lanka; Developing countries; State lands

¹ Department of Estate Management and Valuation, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Gangodawila, Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. E-mail:nishani@sjp.ac.lk