

Crop diversification in Hambantota District: opportunities and challenges

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Agriculture plays an important and vital role of the rural people who is contained about 70 percent of the total population in Sri Lanka. Majority of farmers in Hambantota district where located in the down south of Sri Lanka, as well as in of the Dry Zone of the country have been cultivating paddy as a major cultivation for both seasons, i.e. *Yala* and *Maha*. Most of the farmers have been able to achieved better production and productivity from paddy cultivation through the use of input package (Green revolution) and continuous farming experience etc. but not in farm profits due to macro and micro level unfavorable economic factors. Some innovative farmers have been practicing crop diversification to avoid or minimizing the unfavorable circumstance. Crop diversification is a concept, which is opposite to crop specialization. It is defined as the strategy of shifting from less profitable to more profitable crops, changing of variety and cropping system, increasing exports and competitiveness in both domestic and international.

Gibbs and Martin Index was applied to select the most diversified area in Hambantota district for the present study. Accordingly, Polgahawelana village at Tissamaharama Divisional Secretariats was selected for the present study. Sample of the study revealed that many farmers in the area have been adopting other field crops such as vegetables, fruits and cereals as well as banana and papaya as a diversification measures.

The study found that there are many challenges for functioning efficient and sustainable crop diversification such as institutional constraints, enemy pest and fungus, perish ability of some products, price fluctuating, lack of safe transport facilities and unfavorable market behavior. Therefore it is needed to pay more and careful attention for granting institutional support such as formal credit with considering present tenorial constraints, giving instruction for cultivating high quality and export oriented agro-products, create a link between farmers and agro-based companies by the Government for mitigating the constraints of agricultural sector and maintaining a sustainable crop diversification process.

Key words: Crop diversification, Crop specialization, Sustainable crop, Diversification

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