



CHANGING TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL LAND USE IN THE MONARAGALA DISTRICT OF SRI LANKA: IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

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This study emphasizes the agricultural land use changes and their implications for poverty alleviation. Agricultural land use change is a key requirement for improving rural income and making a significant reduction in poverty levels. Over 70% of the world's poor are living in rural areas, with agricultural land use as a major source of subsistence. Thus, improving the productivity of their land use systems is essential for increasing income and food security among them. Understanding the linkages between agricultural land use changes and poverty is essential for designing policies that simultaneously reduce rural poverty and encourage the adaptation of sustainable land management practices in the country. The main objective of this study was to identify the changing trends in agricultural land use and their impact on poverty alleviation in Monaragala District. The study was conducted in Monaragala district and several methods were employed for collection and analysis of data and information. A general investigation of trends in the land use changes and the poverty situation from 1956 to 2012 in Sri Lanka and in depth analysis was undertaken for the selected district. Bio physical and socio economic variables were used to examine the linkages between dependent and independent variables. The agricultural land use changes were assessed using the Geographical Information System, land use maps and satellite images from 1956 to 2012. Households (252) and plot level data were used to identify the land utilization types (LUT) existing in the area during last fifty years period with special attention on implication for poverty alleviation. The study proved that there is a strong relationship between agricultural land use changes and poverty levels during the study period (poverty in chena farmers' 89%, farmer who converted chena into Banana 32% and Vegetable mixed crops 39.4%). Further, the special case studies ascertained that the living standard of the agricultural land users who changed their LUTs became upgraded (Small holder rubber (Marginal tea areas and sugarcane areas in the Intermediate Zone) with the exception that in certain cases where poverty was increased (LUTs of estate managed Banana & Mango) due to land accumulation. Agricultural land use types such as Rubber smallholder with intercrop, Export agricultural crops (pepper, cinnamon), Banana and Vegetable mixed crops could be introduced to the selected areas where similar agro climatic conditions prevail to alleviate rural poverty.

Keywords: *Poverty Alleviation, Agricultural Land Use Changes, Implications*