

Agricultural Statistics: The Sri Lankan Experiences of Developing Agricultural Market Information Service for Small Farmers (Commodity Price Reporting System)

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Abstract: Economic liberalization and globalization have seen increased interest in the need for market information which has direct benefits for farmers, traders and policy makers. Market Information Services (MIS) in Sri Lanka were initially started in the 1980's and "Market Intelligence and Food Information System" project was established in 1996 with USAID, UNDP and FAO funding. The "*Food Commodities Bulletin*" (weekly) and "*Food Information Bulletin*" (monthly) are the two major agricultural statistics documents prepared by the project and provide price statistics and information to government, farmers, traders, consumers and so forth. These publications play a vital role for both farmers and traders by improving their bargaining position and reducing transaction cost while supporting consumers purchasing position and providing valuable statistics for policy makers toward safeguarding food security.

Despite these considerable benefits, there are numerous problems and constraints, some of which are administrative and management. This paper will only examine, review and highlight the strengths, weakness, and challenges of the "method" of agricultural prices data collections, processing, transmission, dissemination and utilizations, in association to the agricultural statistics. Qualitative and descriptive analysis is given priority as the presentations technique.

The paper describes problems areas related to duplication of activities, political and other interferences, accuracy and reliability of the data, and timeliness of the publication disseminations. It also attempts to prove insight as to the large percentage of work related to MIS and its primary data gathering exercises which is also problematic. It points out that data and information are not arriving at the farmers' level and communications and presentation techniques have many difficulties.

With donor funding completed, MIS now faces financial crisis because government officials managing MIS have failed to obtain commercial support resulting in questionable sustainability of the system which the author argues researchers, statisticians, analysts and policy makers have the responsibility to correct.