

Use of state lands allocated to middle class families for cultivation:

A case study of Pitabeddara DS Division in Matara District.

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Introduction

Land Development Ordinance (LDO) can be cited as the basis for policy. The set of rules as to how the alienation of land, is incorporated in the LDO. The present situation of land resource management background is that there is a total land area of 6,552,500 hectares covering a population of about 20 million. When considering the cultivation in the country 35 percent is of agriculture usage, 31 percent is under forest and 34 percent is under tea cultivation, pata grass, pasture and urban uses.

(Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome 1989)

During the period from 1936-66, 1264 thousand acres were released for agricultural purposes. During this period 147 thousand acres of land was alienated for middle class allotments. Then after a certain time period the middle class alienation was dropped by the Government according to the land utilization committee report of 1967. This project was dropped as the expected objectives were not reached by the Government.

(Report of the Land Utilization Committee, August 1967. SP.11)

The allocation of Middle Class (MC) allotments are designated at Land Kachcheries, selected applicants receive the permits for the occupation and they are required to make an annual payment to retain the permit. Once the land is developed the holder is eligible to receive a Grant which is issued after the land has been completely surveyed. The Grant has many characteristics of a property title but the land is still considered as a state land, because the grant holder cannot transfer the title or lease or mortgage the land without the approval of the Land Commissioner.

Problem

The total land allocated under the programme in the country are 13,385 lots covering an extent of 63265 hectares of MC allotments. A study on the use of state lands allotted for cultivation to middle class 180 families in Pitabeddara Division of Matara District of which 51 families were selected randomly as a sample. The Government's vision was to earn foreign exchange exporting tea and rubber from these lands. The Government's vision did not materialize, the productivity was less than the expected results. The question arises to the present situation of land alienated, what factors have contributed to success or failures and how did it effect economically, socially and environmentally.

Objective

The main objective of this research is to find out whether the lands alienated were successfully utilized by the allottees and if not find out reasons for it.

Key Theory and empirical evidence

Sri Lanka has a total land area of 65,610 sq. kilometers of which approximately 82 percent is controlled by the state, the balance being privately owned. (Amarasinghe 2011)

Eighty two percent of the land still belongs to the crown, one of the vibrant and obvious factor in colonized countries is the non availability of a clear cut land policy to have the utilization of land. Literature shows that the crown land mapped out by the Govt. Agent and alienated among middle class for systematic development has not brought the expected development. The decisions made how to farm the land at present continue to affect agricultural practice in future. An appropriate and effective land administration is of crucial importance for sustainable development. Tension between environmental conservation and development have become major issues very often. However the prime motivation of the Government was to distribute the lands among the middle class category with the expectation of a rich productivity.

In Sri Lanka, state is thus the largest land owner of the country. As far as land management is concerned the issues are very sensitive particularly in urban and social areas. The most appropriate is to solve their environmental issues by scientific land use planning which will solve human environmental issues. The population is increasing rapidly and the resources available presently are not sufficient for sustainable living.

Land settlement as a pioneering venture, has given new thoughts and ideas and ideologies to many peoples' thinking. This has a very broad meaning by trying to understand in measuring of the socio economic problems. Land settlements were started during the colonial period in Asian and African countries as well. In Sri Lanka it is not the case these schemes are needed for social amelioration because of the fact people felt of their landlessness due to plantation developments and for redressing the problems of over population and landlessness in a very densely populated sectors of the mid and low country wet zone.

There are two distinct climate zones in Sri Lanka namely the dry zone and the wet zone. The dry zone of Sri Lanka receives an around rainfall of about 75 inches or less. The land area covers by the dry zone is about 60 percent of the total extent. At one time the dry zone was the cynosure which was based on paddy cultivation. There was a gradual deterioration of irrigation works in the country due to foreign invasions. (Nicolls, 1974)

The situation prevailed even during the periods of foreign rule particularly under the Portuguese (1505-1658), Dutch (1658-1796), and early part of administration (1796-1947) (Amarasinghe, 1976.)

Middle class schemes were designed to provide land to landless persons with a sufficient income to develop and manage units of lands from 10-50 acres in extent. This scheme had to be stopped due to pressing demands from landless peasants.

(Administrative Report of the Land Commissioner, 1967-68)

Settlement schemes which were established under LDO were largely served a social welfare rather than an economic function. The main criticisms of these schemes are, capital intensive, physical planning of the schemes have not paid adequate attention on to maximizing the returns to land or irrigation water which were the most costly inputs, settler selection has largely based on landlessness without giving much concern to ability and experience in farming, follow up work on settlements have been inadequate.

(Amarasinghe 1971-1972)

Methodology

Pitabeddara DS Division consists of 40 Grama Sevaka Divisions covering an extent of 141.2 sq.kms. MC allotments are allocated within ten Grama Sevaka Divisions. There are 180 MC allotments in this division. The methodology adopted is inductive reasoning where 51 families were selected at random for the survey as a representative sample generalizing to the entire Divisional Secretariat area. The data collection was done by Questionnaire Method, Interview Method and Observation Method. The analysis of the cultivation of the first and second generation are shown in tabulated forms in separate tables on the basis of the survey data gathered from the field. The cultivations in percentage wise is shown in separate tables for 1st and 2nd generations. The bar charts are prepared and shown to the extents of cultivations done by the 1st and 2nd generations.

Findings

In MC allotments high cost of labour due to poor management is visible. The labour category does not stipulate to the time framework and there is no collective responsibility. Finally it is the lack of correct management. Most of the lands are located in remote areas with poor access roads.

There is a change in global climatic patterns, this effects the socio economic and environmental conditions. Due to change in global environment the industries are effected which bring impact on humans.

When the lands were allocated at the inception there had not been a very big population. According to the information available the allottees themselves were not very energetic and efficient to execute any plantation work, some have taken these lands just for the sake of possessing a large extent of land. From

the literature it appears that they have exploited the valuable timber not knowing that they are harming the ecosystem and the environment .Coming on to the second generation ,there are better facilities such as roads,schools,and health facilities etc.They are managing the properties far better than their forefathers and visible improvements are there.

Conclusions

Tensions between environmental conservation and development have become major issues very often. Broadly the objectives of middle class schemes are to create employment and increase agricultural products at low cost, to maintain economic and social equality between people, to develop cooperative forms of organization, to achieve self reliance and management by themselves and to integrate projects with surrounding communities. By designing development with these ideas, there is a better chance to create sustainable land use.

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