

Dynamics of Traditional Food Systems of Unique Himbilyakada Village in Matale District, Sri Lanka

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Traditional food systems are formed by environmentally sound, cost-effective traditional knowledge and practices which aid the sustainability of the system. Food systems are defined as a set of dynamic interactions between and within the biophysical and human environments which result in the production, processing, distribution, preparation and consumption of food. For generations communities living in traditional villages in Sri Lanka have relied upon traditional knowledge to achieve self-sustenance for their household food security. The transition of food systems are driven by factors such as changing lifestyles, loss of livelihoods for all those engaged in food production, increasing poverty and urbanization, and sedentary lifestyles with changing dietary patterns. The main objective of this study was to assess the dynamics of traditional food systems in a traditional village in Matale, Sri Lanka. Specific objectives were to explore the traditional food systems and knowledge strategies applied to enhance the food security of the community; to evaluate the present status of the food system and to discuss underlying factors for the dynamism of food systems. The study was based on primary data obtained through a detailed household survey followed by field observations and interviews with key informants of the Himbilyakada village. Results revealed that the food systems in the village have experienced significant changes from the early colonization period to the present. Resulting from transitions in traditional food systems, there is a tendency in the nutrition transition- a result of moving away from the predominance of nutrient-rich traditional food towards market food. However, health and wellness outcomes can be improved if the community and relevant authorities work together to avoid food insecurity due to loss of traditional food systems. Strategies such as initiating programs to increase the affordability and availability of healthy food, raising the awareness of the villages about the nutrient quality and food safety are suggested. Finally, the study suggests integrating traditional sustainable approaches to modern food systems in order to preserve the sustainability of the village food security status in terms of quality as well as quantity.

Keywords: Traditional food systems, Food security, Dynamics, Sustainability