

MSc Degree in Environmental Science

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY RICE FARMERS
WHO CULTIVATE TRADITIONAL VARIETIES
UNDER THE ORGANIC FARMING METHODS IN SRI LANKA:
A CASE STUDY FROM THE WESTERN PROVINCE

A dissertation submitted

By

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Abstract

Modern farming system has been identified as unsustainable and had come under severe criticism for its harmful effects on humans and the environment. In this context, organic farming method has been proposed as an alternative. Sri Lanka is a nation with a history of thousands of years of sustainable agriculture, spearheaded by rice farming. Sri Lanka also boasts of possessing over one thousand distinctive varieties of rice, which our ancestors had cultivated in various ecological regions in the country. Owing to achievements in paddy cultivation, Sri Lanka was renowned as the "Granary of the East", around the 11th Century A.D. The ancient irrigation systems which are still in use are a testimony to this monumental achievement. Contemporary scientists have identified, that traditional forms of rice farming practiced in Sri Lanka revolved around the principles of organic farming. Thus, it could be argued that rice farmers in ancient Sri Lanka have been specialists in organic farming for centuries. Despite this great history and wisdom, organic rice farming is reduced to 0.83 percent of total rice cultivated today. And these remaining organic rice farmers have come under increased pressure from many fronts and this farming system which sustained populations for thousands of years is under severe threat.

In this context, this study was dedicated to identify and investigate environmental, administrative and social challenges faced by rice farmers who cultivate traditional varieties of rice under the organic system in the Western Province of Sri Lanka. Additionally, the paper also recommends Policies and strategies to protect and develop organic farming of rice in the country.

Gathering data of the research process comprised of secondary and primary research, which was conducted with the aid of one-to-one interviews. Literature survey identified that there was a huge gap in research published on the sector of organic rice cultivation. It also made a revelation that research carried-out presently by the government institutions has been totally biased towards modern farming and all their resources appeared to have been allocated on hybrid varieties and modern farming practices. Secondary research dwells deep in to environmental damage caused by modern farming practices and its consequences on human health. Simultaneously, the crisis of Chronic Kidney Disease in *Raja Rata* and other terminal illnesses, proven to be caused by Glyphosate and other agro-chemicals are discussed. Concurrently, the immense health, nutritional, environmental and economic benefits associated with organic rice farming is examined.

Primary research exposed that the group of farmers interviewed are the last frontier of organic rice farmers in the area of study. They were found to be continuing this form of rice farming under tremendous institutional and social obstacles. Their sheer determination and ideology, which revolves around "doing-good" for their fellow-citizens and the environment, had given them strength to continue with organic farming practices. However, their selfless efforts are unsustainable under the gigantic wheel of modern farming and the increasing role played by capitalism in shaping the destiny of