Determinants Associated with Commoners in Mitigating the Threat to the Livelihood through Protecting the Commons

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Abstract

The conversion of environmentally sensitive lands in hilly areas into extensively utilized farmlands has been a major threat for the sustenance of upper watershed area in Sri Lanka. The upper watershed area, one of the very important commons, covering a one thirteenth of the total land area of the country serves as the focal point of major rivers of which waters are used for hydro-electricity generation and irrigation purposes in the drier parts of the country. Over-exploitation of lands in upper watershed areas through extensive cultivation without practicing appropriate soil conservation measures has become a threat for the livelihood of majority of farmers. Sedimentation, pollution of downstream water bodies and siltation of reservoirs causing environmental and economic problems are the adverse off-site effects of accelerated soil erosion leading to land degradation in upper watershed areas that occurs at an alarming level. Different projects and programs implemented for last few decades, aiming at controlling the soil erosion in upper watershed area have been unable to deliver the envisaged outcomes, mostly due to the poor adoption of such soil conservation measures by farmers. There are, however, success stories in some villages within the same watershed area, related to such soil conservation programs and projects. This research investigated the unique characteristics associated with farmers and their crop production systems in the villages where the adoption rate of soil erosion control measures is significantly higher compared to the other villages in which such projects and programs were failed. Such characteristics or factors were viewed under; personal factors such as age, educational level and farming experience of the farmer, nature of farming, family size, on-farm and off-farm income of the household; institutional factors named land size, land tenure, involvement in farmer-organizational activities and farmers' interaction with agricultural service providers.

Keywords: Sri Lanka, Upper watershed area, Land degradation, Soil conservation measures, Adoption