

Impact of community markets on rural communities in Batticaloa District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Persistent poverty, high number of unemployed female widows and restricted access to quality food due to low income level are main factors which have affected negatively on the wellbeing of the people of Batticaloa district. Community markets (CM) are recognized as a potential tool to improve quality of the rural livelihoods. Bridge market (BM), a type of locally owned and operated community market system, was established as a collaborative approach to uplift the wellbeing of rural communities through women empowerment and nature farming strategies in Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka. However, there is no post analysis of this system done to validate its potential for replication. Hence, this study was conducted to identify the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) and the possibilities for replication of Community Market strategy in other parts of the country. Data collection was done through questionnaires, interviews and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with nature farmers, vendors and consumers. This study revealed that boosted crop production, high transparency in direct communication with farmers, sharing responsibilities between producers and consumers, low input use, minimum environmental degradation, opening of new income sources, women empowerment, ensured food security as strengths of the BM. However, the unavailability of up-country vegetables, lack of marketing promotion programs, lack of research studies to evaluate the sustainability of BM and poor awareness on market structure are identified as the weakness of BM. Nevertheless, rising demand for organic products, favorable government vision on toxic free agriculture are the opportunities while the lack of ensured regulatory mechanism to maintain the standards of both production procedure and consumer satisfaction was identified as a threat. The research concludes that BM, as one of the communities marketing strategies, is an environmentally friendly and socio-economically viable option to address the present issues in agriculture and the rural livelihood of the Batticaloa district. Hence, investing for the replication of the same concept on other potential rural localities would be a worthy investment for uplifting the wellbeing of the rural communities in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: *Community markets, Food security, Nature farming, Rural Communities, SWOT*

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