

FARMER ORGANIZATIONS IN SRI LANKA: CURRENT ROLES AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of the world's poor is rural inhabitants depending on agriculture for their livelihoods. Raising smallholders' income is, therefore, crucial for poverty reduction. It is widely recognized that increased commercialization among smallholders' leads to higher production, specialization, and higher incomes (Barrett, 2008). One of the significant policies to increase specialization and commercialization is to form and support farmer organizations in developing countries (Bernard and Spielman, 2009; Lele, 1981; Rondot and Collion, 2001). Furthermore, farmer organizations can be recognized as an effective way for government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to reach the rural poor (Bernard and Spielman, 2009; Nyssölä et al., 2014). The agricultural sector is considered as the backbone of any developing economy since it provides one of the basic human needs – foods - along with other socio-economic facts such as employment generation, supply of materials to other sectors, contribution to the Gross Domestic Products (GDP).

Sri Lanka is a developing country with 65,610 square kilometers, consisting of 62,705 sq. kilometers of land and 2905 sq. kilometers of water and a population of 21.67 million as estimated in 2018 (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018). Approximately 70% of people live in rural areas, and their main livelihood can be identified as agriculture and agriculture-related activities. The country also has a long-standing history of an agriculture industry since it was one of the world's foremost agrarian societies during the ancient kingdoms. In Sri Lanka, 31.8% out of the total population engages in agricultural activities. The favorable climate throughout the year, fertile soil, freely available ground and spring water with fairly distributed river network in most parts of the country, and two monsoons which bring rains for the two main cultivation seasons as “Yala” and “Maha” are

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the key ecological factors of this land. Although it is just said agriculture, it is not only composed of plantation or vegetation. In national accounting, the Sri Lankan economy considers agriculture crops, livestock, fisheries, and forestry together. The agriculture sector of Sri Lanka contributes 7.0 percent to GDP (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2018) and 27 percent of employment opportunities to strengthen the Sri Lankan economy.

Agriculture in Sri Lanka shifted its scope and focused on commercialization during the colonial period, and large-scale, export-oriented plantations of tea, rubber, coconut, spices, and sugarcane fueled economic development in general and agricultural development in particular (Wijayarathna, 1997). Commercialization and diversification of agriculture and agro-industries are considered necessary for the country's economic development (CBSL, 2006). Although the service and industrial sectors showed higher growth rates and started contributing higher percentages to the nation's Gross National Product (GNP) after trade liberalization in the late 1970s (Thenuwara, 2003), the Sri Lankan economy is primarily driven by agriculture. Policies that impact agriculture and agro-based industries have widespread consequences as over 70% of the country's population live and work in rural areas (Abeygunawardena, Ariyaratne, & Dharmasiri, 2003).

Government intervention in the market is gradually decreasing under the current open market economy. Likewise, government subsidies are progressively decreasing while the market determines the prices of goods and services. The main objective of the open market economy is maximizing profit. Hence, farmers will inevitably leave the industry if farming is not efficient and commercially oriented.

The agricultural production environment of the country consists of many small-scale farmers. These farmers have to rely on private companies to buy inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, agrochemicals, and equipment for their farming activities and also to sell their agro products. During the harvesting season, farmers undergo numerous difficulties selling their yield due to the abundance of similar products, which creates less demand. Hence, it is difficult for them to fetch a fair value.

At present, numerous companies buy the harvest from farmers at lower prices, and they tend to make various value additions to maximize their profits. Under the market economic environment, anyone can quickly enter the market for business at any time. There are many opportunities in today's economy for small-scale producers to mobilize the supply of small businesses at the ground level, thereby creating new employment opportunities and improving the rural population's living conditions. The organizations that can be identified as people's organizations are farmer organizations, farmer cooperatives that provide different services and manufacturing cooperatives societies, and farmer

companies. These statutory bodies are already carrying out various business models to deliver specialized services to the rural farmers in Sri Lanka within limitations imposed against them.

A large share of the world's poor lives in rural areas, and most of them are small-scale farmers. Therefore, it is vital to increase the income of small-scale farmers to reduce poverty. In developing countries, establishing organizations and cooperatives is one policy that has been promoted to reach this goal in terms of supporting farmers. The basic idea is that farmers' organizations will strengthen the farmers' negotiation or bargaining power in the markets and reduce their transaction costs. This will bring farmers closer to the market, enable them to benefit from comparative advantages, and may even connect them to the international market (Bachke, 2009). It is an accepted concept in the recent development process that farmers should participate actively in agricultural development. Farmer organizations can be considered as a powerful organization that can help to empower farmers.

In the early days, farmer organizations were involved in efficient water management, in addition to the distribution of agricultural inputs, the use of modern farming methods for higher productivity, the development of loans and markets for farmers, and the settlement of disputes among farmers, as the main issues. At present, the farmer organizations in Sri Lanka have established laws and policies on how to organize and implement them; however, it is a matter of whether the responsibility entrusted to them is the same. Thus, this paper addresses the current role of farmer organizations in Sri Lanka and its future challenges, which demands more attention because farmer organizations could be instrumental for rural development in Sri Lanka, an agricultural centric country.

2. FARMER ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR SPECIFIC FEATURES

An organization is an entity comprising multiple people, institutions, or an association with a specific purpose. It can also be defined as a group of people who work together in an organized manner for a shared goal. One of the main reasons for the emergence of an organization is reaping the benefits of working collectively rather than individually. By teaming up as a group, the impact can be more significant than what an individual can achieve.

According to Tuckman (1965), there are four different stages in which a group can be developed or commonly go through forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjusting. Every organization was initiated with a purpose. Within the organization, there will be harmonies of ideas, more support, the similarity of ideas, solves interpersonal problems, and creativity. Some basic characteristics of an organization could be identified as objectivity, team size, interactions/roles, and team.

The organizations can be categorized as formal and informal organizations as per their formation. A formal organization is an organization with a fixed set of rules of intra-organization procedures and structures. The informal organization is the interlocking social structure that governs how people work together in practice. Many small groups belong to informal organizations. The objectives and functions of these informal organizations are similar to formal organizations. However, staffs are not necessarily required. There is a need for small groups of farmers and farmer organizations for agricultural development and rural development. In today's political and economic realities, small farmers' survival can only be guaranteed by their collective organization and bargaining power.

Farmer organizations are an organized member relationship between farmers to meet common needs and solve common problems. Farmer organizations can also be defined as a unity as 25 or more people who make their livelihood in agriculture, intending to meet their economic and social requirements.

According to Nilsson (2001), Farmer organizations are, by definition, a member-owned business, and they usually focus on issues such as marketing, production, or credit (Lele, 1981). Historically, they have a good track record of strengthening the farmer position in the developed world, and recently they have received renewed interest as a tool to increase market participation and welfare among smallholders in developing countries (Bernard and Spielman, 2009; Fischer and Qaim, 2012; Verhofstadt and Maertens, 2014).

However, farmer organizations are expected to play different roles and perform other functions as they are meant to serve different purposes. The diversity in farmer-based organizations is not just in their roles, but their modes of operation may vary in different countries and contexts. This makes it difficult to develop a unique definition for farmer organizations, which is relevant to all conditions. Rwelamira (2015) defined farmer organizations as *"institutions of participatory governance with grassroots structures constituted by smallholder farmers and processors as building blocks, representing their interests, and with a certain level of accountability to them"*. Participation of farmer organizations in market-oriented agriculture can improve rural households' livelihoods through diversified nutrition, employment, and enhanced incomes. As producers and consumers, smallholder farmers are key actors in the agricultural sector in many countries (Rwelamira, 2015). Farmer organizations can both be formed independently by the farmers or supported by either governments or NGOs. However, it is rare for farmer organizations to self-organize, particularly to form formal organizations (Best et al., 2006). Usually, there is a need for support to provide information and technical assistance and facilitate collective actions (Best et al., 2006).

This paper has used the term 'collective action' in the sense of voluntary action taken by a group to achieve common interests (Meinzen-Dick & Di Gregorio, 2004). Collective action can exist in the absence of a farmer organization, which we see as a more formal expression of collective action. Farmer organizations can provide a range of services critical for market access. From the global perspective, there are many success stories of farmer organizations leading to effective farmer participation in value chains (FAO, 2004, p. 24). Having realized the importance of the agricultural sector in the Sri Lanka economy, successive governments initiated policies and strategies for its restructuring and development. A significant strategy adopted was the formation of Farmer Organizations to achieve greater production and productivity (Giragama, Sanker, & Samarakoon, 1999).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholars worldwide have conducted empirical studies to identify the role of farmer organizations, both in developed and developing countries. Although many empirical studies have studied on farmer organizations, only limited studies are available in the Sri Lankan context related to Sri Lankan farmer organizations.

A study by Rashid Perteve (1994), which focused on France, emphasized some fundamental concepts relating to farmers and farmer organizations. It evaluated the importance of farmers' voice and illustrated that the effective farmers' voice is not only the basis of mutual respect and democracy but is also the actual basis for agricultural and rural development (Perteve, 1994).

The study also stressed that the farmers' voice could not be obtained without farmer organizations. Thus, it can be highly recommended that farmers need their representative organizations to engage in any sensible dialogue with the rest of society. This is why the farmers' movements place much importance on farmer organizations, organizations by farmers, and for farmers, who are an important pillar of current society (Perteve, 1994). The study by Maren Elise Bachke reviewed whether the farmer organizations enhance the smallholders' welfare, using the findings from the Mozambican national agricultural survey. The study employed panel data from Mozambique to investigate how membership in farmer organizations impacts small holder's welfare. He found a positive impact of membership on the marketed surplus (25%), the value of agricultural production (18%), and on total income (15%, and more than 20% for those whose primary source of cash income is the agricultural sector).

The empirical studies that focused on the impact of membership in farmer organizations using primary data have taken a higher position in the available literature on the subject (Chagwiza et al., 2016; Fischer and Qaim, 2012; Ma and Abdulai, 2016; Tolno et al., 2015; Verhofstadt and Maertens, 2014). These studies have found a positive income effect of membership in agricultural cooperatives focused on apple production in China (Ma and Abdulai, 2016), dairy production in Selale, Ethiopia (Chagwiza et al., 2016), smallholder banana production in Kenya (Fischer and Qaim, 2012), potato production in Middle Guinea (Tolno et al., 2015), and maize and horticultural production in Rwanda (Verhofstadt and Maertens, 2014). Earlier empirical economic studies have also focused on the impact of a particular activity organized by a farmer organization, but not the membership. Typical market activities studied are organic farming, fair trade, export products, and products sold in supermarkets (Bacon, 2005; Becchetti and Costantino, 2008; Carletto et al., 2011; Moustier et al., 2010). The main findings were that participation in these activities is related to the enhanced economic welfare of a country (Bacon, 2005; Becchetti and Costantino, 2008; Carletto et al., 2011; Moustier et al., 2010).

Despite these positive findings, studies focused on the ability of farmer organizations to link smallholders to markets, in the long run, show mixed results (Jayne et al., 2010; Kelly et al., 2003; Kirsten and Sartorius, 2002; Markelova et al., 2009; Poulton et al., 2010). There is evidence that the functionality of farmer organizations depend upon the product choice, group size, and heterogeneity among the farmers (Markelova et al., 2009), as well as the commitment level of participants and the organization's institutional set up (Vorlaufer et al., 2012). There might be a tradeoff between the inclusiveness of the organization and the economic performance of farmer organizations (Bernard and Spielman, 2009; Lutz and Tadesse 2017).

Sustainability of the farmer organizations might also be challenged by elite capture of the organization where the leadership promotes their own interest over the organization's interest (Penrose Buckley, 2007). Problems related to financing farmer organizations are often a challenge. They include a range of issues from membership fee payment problems among the most resource-poor to money belonging to the organization that might disappear.

Wijayaratna and Uphohoff (2000) have conducted a case study demonstrating the benefit of social capital using the productivity of farmer organizations in Gal Oya, Sri Lanka, presenting the analytical construct of social capital. Thus, this paper examines the current role of farmer organizations in Sri Lanka and its future challenges since only limited literature is available that evaluates the role of farmer organizations and their future challenges in the Sri Lankan context.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Farmer Organizations in Sri Lanka

Farmer Organizations in Sri Lanka have a long history extending up to the reign of kings. Some epigraphs (*Kondawatuwana Sellipiya*, etc.) say that irrigation councils were established during the ancient reign to irrigate irrigation and rehabilitate irrigation. Accordingly, the village societies prepared cultivation schedules. Farmers were punished for violating the norms and rituals related to cultivation. Later, with the western nations' reign, the farmer civilization, mainly based on cooperativeness, came to a halt while paving the path for the self-centered and commercial-oriented mindset. As a result, colonial rulers were forced to enact ordinances for public purposes. In the first instance of that, the Irrigation Ordinance Act No. 9 of 1856 was enacted. This gave the opportunity to re-establish the village councils (*Gam Sabha*) and create irrigation management rules. Under this act, the creation of irrigation management rules and regulations was made by village councils with the government agent's participation, and those rules were enforced by "*Wel Vidane*." With the passing of the Paddy Lands Act (*Kuburu Panatha*) No. 01 of 1958, farmer committees were established to make irrigation rules. The Farmer committees carried out the duties of "*Wel Vidane*" after abolishing that post. The 1968 Amendment delegated more powers to farmer committees for irrigation management in addition to the power of the government agent called *Disapathi*.

The history of farmer organizations establishment in Sri Lanka dates back to the early 1980s. During that period, farmer organizations were formed under various projects covering many rural minor irrigation areas and major irrigation areas to involve farmers in water management. Farmer organizations were legally recognized and registered under the Agrarian Services Commissioner under the Agrarian Services Amendment Act No. 4 of 1991. For the first time in Sri Lanka, a farmer organization component was included in the USAID-funded Gal Oya Water Management Project (1979-1985), implemented jointly by the Irrigation Department and the Agrarian Research and Training Institute (ARTI) with the support of the Cornell University of the USA (Giragama, Sanker, & Samarakoon, 1999). In the Gal Oya irrigation scheme in Southeastern Sri Lanka, a farmer organization system was established in the early 1980s, which significantly improved the efficiency and extension of irrigated rice production (Wijayarathna & Uphoff, 2000). The ARTI-Cornell Team developed and field-tested the concepts and strategies of the farmer organization program. A significant feature was the new strategies evolved with a Sri Lankan flavor. The major concepts emerged were the bottom-up approach to planning and organization, building organizations based on hydrological boundaries, and the use of trained catalysts to facilitate the organization of farmers and promote self-reliance of the farming

community. The principal activities undertaken by farmer organizations included procurement and distribution of agricultural inputs on a cooperative basis, efficient water management, and adoption of innovative cultivation methods for greater productivity, development of credit and marketing skills, and resolution of farmer conflicts.

Young institutional organizers were recruited and trained in Gal Oya during 1981–1984 to act as catalysts for eliciting and assisting farmer organizations. The concepts and strategies followed in the Gal Oya experiment were to serve as the base of the farmer organization program of the Irrigation Management Division (IMD) created in 1984 in the Ministry of Lands and Land Development. The implementation of the Integrated Management of Major Agricultural Settlements (INMAS) provided the field infrastructure for implementing the expanded Farmer Organization programs in all major settlement schemes and later expanded to cover other agricultural settlements and the Mahaweli Development Project.

A landmark in the history of Farmer Organizations was the promulgation of the Agrarian Services Act No. 4 of 1991, which made provision for registering Farmer Organizations with corporate body status and the power to sue and be sued. The USAID-funded Gal-Oya Water Management Project had an overall return, calculated four years post-project between 14% and 24% (Aluwihare and Kikuchi, 1991; Amarasinghe et al., 1998). According to the Deputy Commissioner of Agrarian Services, Anuradhapura, and Matale districts, which held the first Farmer Conventions, there were 1,060 and 686 registered Farmer Organizations, respectively, in June 1996.

4.2 Role and contribution of the farmer organizations in Sri Lanka

Farmer organizations play an essential role in making agricultural development. In particular, farmer organizations can improve smallholders' livelihood by reducing transaction costs in output and input markets (Barrett et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2003; Markelova et al., 2009; Nilsson, 2001; Poulton et al., 2010), strengthening the bargaining power of the farmers concerning buyers (Glover, 1987; Sivramkrishna and Jyotishi, 2008), providing information about and access to technology and thereby increase productivity (Caviglia and Kahn, 2001; Devaux et al., 2009; Ma and Abdulai, 2016), and being their voice in the political landscape (Jayne, Mather, and Mghenyi, 2010; Poulton et al., 2010).

In Sri Lanka, the role of farmer organizations is attested by various statuses. Amendments made to the Agrarian Development Act of 1991 gave legal recognition to farmer organizations, and further to the amendments made to the Irrigation Act of 1994, farmer organizations were endowed with more

responsibility with regard to irrigation management. Agrarian Development Act No. 46 of 2000 also gave more authority to Farmer organizations in Sri Lanka. Following section 23.1 of the Irrigation Act No. 13 of 1994, farmer organizations have been responsible for all matters on irrigation and cultivating lands within its territory and protecting their rights and maintenance of irrigation. Under this act, farmer organizations are entrusted with the task of setting water releasing dates, setting water schedules, determining the quantity of water supplied, distributing water as agreed in the pre-cultivation meetings (*Kanna meeting*), and determining the crops to be cultivated. Protecting the rights of irrigation and land cultivation means protecting the rights of farmers who are cultivating under an irrigation system to get water facilities and its other benefits. Farmer organizations, therefore, are entitled to take necessary actions under the act to protect farmers from the harm caused by disobeying any law.

Under irrigation maintenance, the farmer organizations were responsible for constructing and maintaining channels and spills, etc. The farmer organizations were vested with the power to collect the expenses related under the irrigation act, bestowed upon farmer organizations. Hence, neither the members nor the organization shall face harassment or obstruction towards the development of the same while an act of fault against the same will have to bear similar circumstances, accordance to Act No. 95. The Agrarian Development Act No. 46 of 2000 has increased the power conferred on the farmer organizations and expanded their functions. It mentions several roles of farmer organizations. In accordance with the Agrarian Development Act No. 46 of 2000: Inducing the owner cultivators and occupiers of agricultural lands within its area of authority to cultivate their agricultural lands within the provisions of this Act and by formulating programs for the cultivation of paddy lands during each season.

Formulating annual programs for high land cultivation is one such role of farmer organizations. In addition, collecting data, analyzing and making reports regarding agricultural lands, Agro-machinery, livestock, and aquatic animals in its area of authority and furnishing the same to Agrarian development authority, and report regarding agricultural lands that are not being satisfactorily cultivated, are other duties of farmer organizations.

Another main functionality of a farmer organization is to encourage soil conservation, efficient water usage, the use of compost manure within its area of authority, advising the cultivation of agricultural crops recommended for specific areas, and the breeding of such breeds of livestock and inland fish which are best suited for that area. In addition to these functions, farmer organizations have some more responsibilities quoted by By-laws of Farmer Organizations. Accordingly, farmer organizations' main function is to maintain and implement economic activities to meet the financial needs of the members and obtain

necessary funds from members and non-members to achieve the economic activities mentioned above.

Farmer organizations also have the responsibility to purchase, sell, mortgage, rent, a grant for use under the prescribed agreement, construct, repair, and secure immovable property such as land, buildings, machinery, vehicles, and non-immovable properties required for the organization to achieve the organizations' objectives. Advocate for protecting the farmers of the area, representing farmers, and intervene to accomplish the tasks the farmers cannot accomplish on their own, is another vital function of a farmer organization. The responsibility of implementing the powers vested on farmer organizations by the Agrarian Development Act No. 45 of 2000 and Amended Irrigation Ordinance Act No. 48 of 1968 also act with farmer organizations.

These acts take measures to ensure efficient distribution of water and maintenance of irrigation systems, facilitate the provision of inputs and services to increase the productivity of agro products, collect data and information on agricultural resources and production activities in the area and providing them with relevant agencies, facilitate communication between farmers and between public and private sectors, and assist in planning and implementing agricultural activities in the area with beneficiary participation. Taking actions to provide better prices for agricultural products while allowing competition of the private sector is another essential role of a farmer organization.

Usually, farmer organizations act as a bridge between farmers and government officers. Hence, assisting farmers to carry out the programs implemented by the government to facilitate the agro production process is another function of a farmer organization. It also must take steps to empower farmer communities through awareness and skills development. Thus, the farmer organizations central role is to provide necessary assistance to uplift the living standard of its members by improving agricultural productivity. Hence, farmer organizations must direct the beneficiaries to consume common resources equitably, assist farmers in adopting new technology to improve agricultural productivity and lead farmers to carry out production activities according to market requirements.

Further, it should intervene to ensure better utilization of the resources of the area while conserving the environment, and direct the members to save in correct methods, and assist in introducing easy credit facility programs. Although these farmer organizations are delegated with more authorities from the acts, analyzing the legal role of farmer organizations reveals that the post-production activities such as the storage, processing, and marketing of products are not focused on.

4.3 Issues and Future Challenges

Although many farmer organizations have been established in Sri Lanka, only a few remain in operation. As per the previous study findings, farmer organizations in Sri Lanka set up under major irrigation schemes are working to some extent in water distribution, preparation of agricultural plans, linkages between agencies, and irrigation maintenance. This happens because a majority of Farmer Representatives are present in the Business management committee. However, these committees do not function properly due to the lack of power and authority. For this reason, the officers attending the committee have no decision-making or enforcement powers. This lack of power and authority to the officers is an issue in farmer organizations.

The success of any farmer organization depends on the level of services it provides to its members. Usually, a farmer organization should perform services such as marketing services of providing seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. It also must involve on Marketing of products, Financial services of saving and credit facilities, Technical services including projects and research, Educational Services including business skills, Welfare services such as healthcare and social security services, and Advisory service for policymaking to make government policies and public resources management such as water resource and forests, etc. Farmer organizations in Sri Lanka cannot be considered as successful organizations with these standards.

While some organizations have successfully provided loans, subsidies, and fertilizers, most farmer organizations have not been functioning properly, and the farmers' problems are aggravated. Farmers' voice does not emerge without collective action, and this may act as a significant issue in farmer organizations within the Sri Lankan context.

Farmers' involvement is very limited in solving farmers' problems, planning and implementing farm plans, and monitoring. Government officials, NGOs, and representatives from donor countries often perform these acts, thereby barring the farmers' voice. Therefore, many programs failed to achieve their intended goals. Since farmers' voice is not strong enough due to the weaknesses of farmer organizations, the participation of member farmers involved in decision making, planning, and program implementation is low—this is another problem associated with farmer organizations.

When farm products' prices reduce in countries like India, the government gets directly involved and purchases the products without considering profits or losses. For that, every year, the government allocates funds from the budget. However, in Sri Lanka, these methods are not implemented through farmer organizations. Thus, farmer organizations in Sri Lanka support the implementation of government policies rather than solving the farmers'

problems. Political influence is high in this regard. Even though government organizations formed farmer organizations, politicians dominate them. Hence the involvement of politicians is a severe challenge to farmer organizations.

As discussed above, there are significant problems within the farmer organization, on which the studies of W.M.G.B. Giragama, M.S. Sri Gowri Sanker, and S.M.A. Samarakoon have given greater emphasis on the Anuradhapura and Mathale districts. Rehabilitation of tanks, Inadequate supply of agricultural inputs, Lack of agro-wells, Problems of land titles, Improper agricultural credit systems, Improper marketing facilities, Punishment to violators of FO rules and regulations were the prioritized issues by them. The systematic approach in establishing farmer organizations in Sri Lanka is outdated and not sufficiently revised, and many farmer organizations do not follow the establishment process due to lack of awareness. This is another issue of farmer organizations in Sri Lanka.

Lack of management skills is a problem faced by farmer organizations. Most officers are not trained to bear the risk of business to compete with the private sector, and the lack of coordination among stakeholders is another issue faced by farmer organizations. Even though the establishment of farmer organizations is a grouping of traders, officers, and farmers, these parties are not actively involved in business activities, and there is no proper interaction among these members; this has made it difficult to understand their problems and issues, and in turn, decreases the business capacity.

Most officers who work for farmer organizations are volunteers, and it raises issues in long time survival. Usually, farmer organizations depend on funds, and the development of funds basically depends on the honesty or dishonesty of the officers. This is a challenge for farmer organizations in increasing their funds. Also, farmer organizations consider only pre-production activities and not give much attention to the post-production activities such as storage, processing, and marketing of products. These problems adversely affect the existence of farmer organizations in Sri Lanka.

5. CONCLUSION

Farmer organizations in Sri Lanka are empowering farmers through several specific roles. However, various constraints faced by farmer organizations lead to the failure of their stated objectives. There is still room to improve their capacities and create an enabling environment by reforming broader social institution policies, rules, and practices.

Many government functions have been entrusted to the private sector with the implementation of the open economic system after 1977 in Sri Lanka. Thus, the private sector's participation in agriculture has been reduced due to the increased costs and lower profits within the farmer organizations in the country. This situation has been proved that agricultural development cannot be expected without strengthening farmer organizations. Therefore, the farmer organizations need to be more strengthened to reinforce the Sri Lankan farmers' voice.

The farmer organizations must be fostered by the three skills, organizational skills, management skills, and business skills, to strengthen farmer organizations. Improving organizational skills will help build the right leadership and establish a liaison between officers and members. Developing management skills will enable the organization to make the right decisions, develop plans, implement and improve supervisory skills, and improve business skills. This promotes manufacturing suitable products for the market. Accordingly, the organizations' funding will be increased, and developing these three skills will undoubtedly facilitate sustainable farmer organizations' development.

The significant benefits possibly gained from sustainable farmer organizations reduce the production cost, increase profits, the ability to influence public policy and development programs, and the ability to manage resources and infrastructures, etc. In this open economy era, agriculture must be transformed into Agri-business for achieving success more widely within the organizations. Farmers cannot reap the benefits of the open economy due to the absence of a strong institutional structure. Hence it is essential to establish a robust institutional system at the farm level. In this regard, farmer organizations play a vital role.

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