

Delineating Property Rights of Low Lands in Irrigated Settlements of Sri Lanka

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The doctrine of the property rights school has long been identified that land and property rights as a pre-requisite for economic development. Property rights to be effective must be exclusive, secured and well defined. Providing title to land assured the property rights to land, in which it increases the security in tenure and positively impact on the decision of a farmer on soil quality improving land investment. The non-secured land right due to non-availability of valid legal title to land holdings is a rising issue in the colonization schemes of Sri Lanka. Colonization schemes was a land alienation strategy introduced by the governments during the period of 1930's to 1970's, with a view to protect the peasant sector in the country. This study focuses to compare the perceptions of the property rights in paddy land plots of colonization schemes and to identify the associated difference on two types of tenure arrangements. The perceptions on six types of property rights such as use, income, sell, mortgage and bequeath, gathered through a survey from 935 farmers on 1230 paddy land plots were used as data. Sample was selected from three schemes namely Mahakanadarawa, Kagama-Katiyawa and Rajanganaya from Anuradhapura district. The results reveal that majority of the farmers were on the idea that they are enjoying only the use rights, which is considered as a weak right in the literature, while a few number perceived that they are enjoying the superior rights such as the selling and mortgaging rights. The result indicates that there is a significant difference in the perceptions between the groups who hold state guaranteed Deed (Swarnabhoomi, Jayabhoomi or Rathnebhoomi) to prove the tenure and who does not hold such document. The result suggests that farmers with a state guaranteed deed positively perceived on all six types of property rights while others did not. This is an indicator of the weakness inherent in the current policy. Therefore, measures to improve property rights in colonization schemes are required in order to improve the positive attitudes of farmers on the decision of soil quality improving land investment in order to improve the land productivity.

Key words: Colonization Schemes, Land Tenure, Paddy Lands, Property Rights, Sri Lanka