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PAPER

Her Diary: Time Investment in Multiple Roles by Rural Women in Dry Zone Agriculture

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In South Asia, a working class village woman works 12-16hrs/day (Human Development in South Asia, 2002). This stipulated condition is applicable to Sri Lanka too. Despite unfair treatment and opportunity distribution, involvement of rural women in agriculture is still widespread in Sri Lanka. This paper discusses time investment in multiple roles by rural women in dry zone agriculture.

The study was conducted in the Anuradhpura district, which has the highest percent of economically active females (Census and Statistics, 2010). Multiple roles were identified through 150 women in agriculture from six rural villages in Anuradhpura. Time use diaries of 25 of them were used in identifying multiple roles and respective time devotion. Primary data were obtained through a household survey, in-depth interviews, time use diaries, participatory observations, and discussions, whereas secondary data was through a literature survey.

Results were interpreted using qualitative methods. It was found that respondents were involved in a range of domestic, livelihood and social roles. Time use diaries revealed that, on weekdays 5-16hrs/day, weekends 4-17hrs/day and special holidays 1-15hrs/day women are involved in domestic drudgery. A single day without fulfilling household work could not be found. Even on special holidays, she spent a few hours in the kitchen. On average on holidays/weekends 8-9hrs/day and regular weekdays 6 hrs/day were spent cooking, cleaning and caring. On weekdays she had 1-4hrs/day of leisure, whereas on weekends 1-6hrs/day. Days without proper leisure were also found. The threshold of sleeping 6hrs/day was met frequently, except for occasions of postharvest operations done till late at night. Attached with livelihood activities, on weekdays she worked about 9hrs/day struggling with plants, animals, soil, water and labor. Except for peak cultivation periods, on holidays and weekends majority were away from field work. It was also explicit that on average women spent 15hrs/day on domestic and livelihood drudgery on weekdays. Regular time investment was not found exclusively for social activities, since it was met as the need arises.