

දුරලො

LAND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SINHARAJA
FOOTHILL ZONE OF CEYLON.

by

Mangalage Piyadasa Perera

පාඨක අංකය	67 67
වග අංකය	

Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D. at

LONDON UNIVERSITY.

Queen Mary College

December, 1969.

ABSTRACT

The present study examines the problems and prospects of land development in a part of the perhumid interior of the Wet Zone of Ceylon, lying below the extensive rain forest of the Sinharaja Reserve. The area of study covers some 70 square miles of broken terrain which remained virtually inaccessible until very recent times. It has rarely figured in the island's historical literature and has remained in prolonged isolation, untouched by the main currents of change in the rest of the more densely peopled Wet Zone.

Over 3,000 acres of Crown land, recently taken up for re-settlement of landless peasants and development in commercial crops, most notably tea, constitute the central area of enquiry. Lessons learnt here, in the use and misuse of land in an area quite unlike the more familiar broad expanses of Dry Zone highland, could be of considerable practical value, more especially in the opening up of some 10,000 acres of similar land lying adjacent to the study area.

Several models of land development have been adopted by the Government with a view to promoting social welfare as well as to increasing agricultural production. In actual practice these twin objectives have rarely been

achieved, indeed they sometimes seem to be mutually incompatible. Nevertheless the several experiments tried out by the Government have met with varying degrees of success, and an evaluation of their achievements has been attempted in the present study.

In general, the dominantly eclectic approach to land development in the area augurs well for the future. Yet the many seemingly intractable problems of an excessively humid climate and dissected terrain constituting the upper catchments of two Wet Zone rivers notorious for their disastrous floods, place local development strategy in a much broader perspective. The need for co-ordinated physical training in such critical areas is shown as an indispensable preliminary to whatever type of land development is adopted.

The problems of the physical environment, which are but little understood, are interwoven with those of the cultural setting. The apathy and preference for leisure shown by local inhabitants, the individualism and lack of social cohesion among immigrant colonists, and above all the shortcomings of supervision and control in efficient farm management and resource conservation are some of the more important cultural features stressed.

The most appropriate approach for those engaged in land is to look upon land schemes as economic propositions geared to increased productivity rather than as schemes of

peasant welfare. It is argued that rehabilitation of inefficiently managed tea schemes, under a technically competent organisation, could transform the colonist into an efficient producer, as in the case of the Kenya Development Authority. The peasant engaged in paddy production and home gardening could also be made to increase productivity through new institutional devices and increased farm inputs.

the high rural level

forms the backbone