

Nawakekulam - A Traditional Agricultural Practice of Sri Lanka^ψ

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Abstract

The current emphasis of international rice research is on direct seeding and minimizing water usage. If this were told to an elderly rice farmer in Sri Lanka, he would immediately say that that is “kekulama”. Research conducted by the Ecological Conservation Organization (ECO) with the help of Ruhuna and Peradeniya Universities clearly indicates that the “kekulama” method of cultivation conserves more water compared with the conventional method of rice cultivation. Exposure of the findings of the research to organizations such as the Mahaweli Authority and NGOs concerned with rice cultivation and organic farming has led to the popularization of one of the most important features of “kekulama”, that is, timely cultivation. Elderly farmers in dry zones stress that if timely cultivation is carried out yields are high and pest and disease incidence is low. But the responsible authorities took no initiative to implement timely cultivation. But faced with the evidence of the research findings, many organizations including the Mahaweli Authority commenced the introduction of timely cultivation. A survey done in Huruluwewa and Eppawala conclusively showed the truth of the old sayings. The yield increases are due to

- a) Cold nights during then north-east monsoon season at a critical stage of the rice plant and long days during the south-west monsoon.*
- b) Build up of natural fertility at the end of each monsoon.*
- c) Poor insect build up at the beginning of the season.*

Saving water by the “kekulama” method of cultivation can increase national rice production by over 70% by increasing the yield per acre and the cultivation index and by minimizing the time between the sown and harvested periods and by minimizing pest and disease incidences. This is an excellent example of endogenous development.

^ψ The full text of these papers are currently not available and hence the abstract alone has been presented here.