



THE HARVEST OF TRANSFORMATION

*FOOD PRODUCERS' EXPERIENCES IN
ADVANCING SYSTEMIC CHANGE TOWARD
JUSTICE, SOVEREIGNTY, AND PROSPERITY*



The Harvest of Transformation: Food producers' experiences and recommendations in advancing systemic change toward justice, sovereignty, and prosperity

May 2026

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Passed on November 21st 2025

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Leader of the Rathugala Adivasi tribe

Passed on May 6th 2026

We were fortunate that these two individuals participated in the gatherings for this project and report, and to have had long-term connections with them and their communities. They were both leaders committed to the upliftment of their people and the protection of the natural world.

Their wisdom lives on in the collectives they built and in the youth they educated.

Rest in power.

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Definitions of Terms

Agroecology is an approach to food production that centres the wellbeing of the population and the preservation of biodiversity. Agroecology can be variously defined as: a set of agricultural practices that aims to mimic natural processes; an approach to food production and economics that puts people and planet over profit; and a political movement that struggles for food sovereignty as a way of transforming food systems (War on Want, n.d.).

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers and users (Nyéléni, 2007).

UNDROP: United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas.

Peasants and small-scale food producers: Farmers, fisherfolk, landless workers, indigenous peoples, plantation/estate workers, rural women and youth, who produce food using traditional, agroecological, and community-based methods, and whose livelihoods depend on access to land, water, seeds, and natural resources (La Via Campesina, 2018; UN General Assembly, 2018).

Introduction

Food is a basic human right.

To sustain a healthy life with full dignity, all humans must have access to safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in sufficient quantity and quality. Food is culture, memory, ritual, and relationships. Most importantly, food doesn't exist in a vacuum; food is a system: a dense web of connections between the people who grow it, the lands and waters that sustain its growth, the markets and institutions that move it, and the communities that consume it.

To reduce food merely to a commodity is to sever these connections artificially. It is to pretend that a vegetable is just a price, that a seed is just a patent, and that a farmer is just a unit of labour. It is to forget and ignore the broader economic, social, and political systems that shape and influence the food system. Unfortunately, that is precisely where the current market-based capitalist food system has arrived, and the consequences of this pretence are all around us. Globally, 783 million people go hungry while 1.05 billion tonnes of food waste is generated. This amounts to 132 kilograms per capita, nearly one-fifth of all food available to consumers (UNEP, 2024). Soils are depleted, aquifers are drained, and ecologies are fractured.

Food as a System

Every meal is the endpoint of a chain of relationships reaching backward through time. This chain links everything from the farmers who plant and harvest, the fishers who cast their nets and rods, pastoralists who tend their herds, to the land that grows, the water that flows, the insects that pollinate, the microbes in the soil that transform organic matter into nutrients, the traders and transporters who move the harvest, the market structures that set its price, and the political decisions that shape those structures.

In *Stuffed and Starved*, author and food policy expert Raj Patel asks us to trace this chain not as an abstraction but as a concrete political reality. The global food system, he shows, is shaped like an hourglass. At the top are, hundreds of millions of farmers, fishers, and food producers of every kind. At the bottom, billions of consumers eating the food they produce. The hourglass' narrow neck is a handful of transnational corporations – such as Cargill, Monsanto (now Bayer), ADM, Nestlé, Walmart, through whose hands virtually all of it passes. This hourglass is not a neutral logistics arrangement. It is a power structure. Understanding food as a system means understanding power as the system's organising principle.

Production is the foundation of the food system. It is not merely an economic act but a profound social and ecological one. A peasant farmer planting a field of traditional rice is not simply producing a crop. She is reproducing knowledge accumulated over generations about soil types, rainfall patterns, seed varieties, and nutrients. She is, in the language of agroecology, co-producing with nature rather than merely extracting from it. So too is the fisher who reads the currents, knows breeding seasons, and navigates coastal ecosystems shaped by generations of use. So too is the home gardener, the agroforestry farmer, the smallholder keeper of livestock. Each of these producers shows a relationship with the natural world that industrial food systems neither replicate nor value.

Between production and consumption stand the markets, and here the hourglass tightens most cruelly. At the production end, small farmers and fishers alike are allocated a price through the market rather than given the power to determine one. They absorb the costs of production; theirs and others' labour, the raw inputs, and the risk of shifting weather, while the prices they receive are set by buying power concentrated in corporate hands. In most cases these corporate hands are geographically distant to the producer. At the consumption end, the urban poor spend the majority of their incomes on food and are most vulnerable when prices rise. Between the farmer and the

hungry, enormous value is extracted by corporations, retailers, and financial speculators who sit at the narrow neck.

Food production is also an ecological act. It takes place in soils, under skies, beside rivers, within climates, and across oceans. The health of food systems and the health of living ecosystems are not separate concerns. One affects the other and they are deeply intertwined. Yet the current food system treats the environment as a free input and a free dump. As climate change impacts our world, its effects more evident every year, the patterns that producers relied on for their harvests and catches are shifting. This places their livelihoods and our meals at risk.

The Current Food System and Its Failures

The current food system was built through decades of violence. Dispossession, colonial extraction, the enclosure of common lands, and the forced transformation of subsistence farmers into landless wage labourers or export crop producers shifted food production around the needs of capital accumulation, not human nutrition. Ultimately, it is a few corporations that control the majority of global seed sales, agrochemical markets, grain trading, food processing, and food retail. The decisions shaping what billions of people eat are made not by farmers, communities, or democratic governments, but by the shareholders and executives of a small number of transnational corporations.

The market-based system has simultaneously produced mass hunger and mass overconsumption. This is a paradox only possible in a system designed to generate profit rather than ensure nourishment. If food were understood as a right, a social good to be produced and distributed for human well-being, the existence of hunger alongside surplus would be recognised immediately as a political failure, one that demands a political remedy. Under commodity logic, hunger is instead naturalised as the inevitable consequence of poverty, and poverty itself is understood not as a political condition but as a personal one. The market is absolved; the hungry are blamed.

One of the most devastating effects of the current food system is the systematic displacement of small farmers from lands they have cultivated for generations. Across the Global South, structural adjustment programmes imposed by the international financial corporations such as the IMF and World Bank dismantled public agricultural support systems, extension services, marketing boards, credit programmes, and import protections that had allowed small farmers to survive. Millions suddenly found farming unviable and were forced off the land into urban slums; this trend continues and deepens in countries like ours. Alongside this displacement comes the loss of agricultural biodiversity, the varieties of crops and breeds of animals adapted to local conditions over centuries. This loss reduces the resilience of food systems and increases their vulnerability to disease, drought, and climate disruption.

Crisis in Sri Lanka's Agrarian System

Sri Lanka's agrarian economy, long central to rural livelihoods and national food security, now faces interrelated crises across its subsectors. Evidence from focus group discussions conducted across districts, as well as secondary literature, reveals that producers confront systemic challenges linked to policy neglect, market liberalisation, and the erosion of state support mechanisms.

Paddy forms the backbone of Sri Lanka's food production system, yet it suffers from over-dependence on monoculture and chemical fertiliser use, with seeds and medicines mostly imported varieties. This is a reality that was created during the Green Revolution, as multinational companies pushed chemical fertiliser and hybrid seeds globally. Local agricultural authorities enable their use as well. For farmers, this means that input costs increase while soil fertility drops. The Mahaweli irrigation schemes, once envisioned as engines of rural transformation, now face uneven water allocation under the Mahaweli Authority. Farmers note that quality seed paddy plays a crucial role

in improving yields, but limited institutional capacity in seed production constrains this potential (HARTI, 2013; IPS, 2021). The Paddy Marketing Board provides only limited procurement support, often purchasing at delayed intervals or below cost-recovery prices, thereby weakening farmers' bargaining power.

Vegetable cultivation, particularly in the hill country and dry zone, is meanwhile affected by poor post-harvest storage and freezing capabilities, resulting in an estimated 25–40% wastage of total production (FAO, 2020). Farmers bear heavy post-harvest losses due to limited market access, inadequate transport, and the absence of local value-addition facilities. These inefficiencies reflect a structural gap in Sri Lanka's agricultural marketing system, which remains fragmented and dominated by intermediaries rather than farmer cooperatives or producer organisations (IPS, 2019).

Producers of other field crops such as pulses, maize, onions, and chillies face similarly severe constraints in investment, research, and seed production. Limited public investment has hindered technological innovation, while bacterial and fungal infections in seed stocks have reduced germination rates and yields. Most such farmers operate on low margins due to import competition and the absence of organised markets (HARTI, 2015; CBSL Annual Report, 2023).

The fisheries sector faces a multifaceted crisis arising from overfishing, climate change impacts, and geopolitical pressures. Coastal fishers report declining catches due to resource depletion, rising fuel costs, and encroachment by Indian trawlers, particularly in the Northern and Eastern waters (FAO, 2021; NARA, 2022). The expansion of tourism infrastructure in coastal zones has further reduced access to traditional fishing grounds, while small-scale fishers, lacking access to affordable credit or insurance, are increasingly marginalised within the export-oriented fisheries economy.

The plantation economy, dominated by tea, rubber, and coconut, remains heavily dependent on exports, exposing it to global price volatility. Structural issues such as labour exploitation, unequal land ownership, and limited access to credit continue to undermine the welfare of estate workers (Bastian, 2022). Plantation workers, especially women, face stagnant wages and insecure housing, while smallholders struggle to obtain concessional loans from state or commercial banks. The growing concentration of land ownership in plantations further limits opportunities for land redistribution to workers and diversifying rural production.

Sri Lanka's dairy industry is similarly fragmented, with production dispersed among small-scale farmers and the sector heavily dependent on imported powdered milk, accounting for nearly 44% of total milk consumption (CBSL, 2023). Weak linkages between dairy farmers, cooperatives, and private processors have stifled domestic milk collection and processing. Despite policy efforts toward self-sufficiency, inadequacies in cold storage, veterinary support, and financial incentives have prevented the sector from realising its potential (FAO, 2020; IPS, 2022).

Integrated farming systems, including home gardens and agroforestry models, offer ecologically sustainable alternatives that combine food production with biodiversity conservation, yet they too receive limited institutional support. They are also increasingly threatened by urbanisation, land fragmentation, and policy neglect. These systems, which historically contributed to rural food security, now struggle to sustain livelihoods in the absence of targeted extension services or access to concessional credit.

Across all subsectors, a recurring concern is the shortcomings in state support and financial inclusion of producers. Even state-owned banks demand collateral-based lending, excluding smallholders, fishers, and women producers from concessional loans. The Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) development arms of these banks show limited outreach to agricultural producers. Meanwhile, land-grabbing and state land reclassification to forests and protected zones, particularly in the Northern Province, have intensified post-war agrarian insecurity. Official data indicate that while only 32%

of land was designated as forest or wildlife reserves shortly after the war, by 2025 this figure had expanded to 72%, placing large tracts of cultivable land beyond community access (Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2024).

Domestic agriculture still provides approximately 80% of Sri Lanka's food requirement in value terms, underscoring that a major part of food security depends on small-scale food producers (Institute of Policy Studies, 2018). These processes, coupled with weakening market institutions and shrinking credit access, collectively deepen Sri Lanka's agrarian crisis and threaten both food security and food sovereignty.

False Solutions

The agrarian crisis is deep and the prescriptions offered by the international economic establishment have worsened and not resolved it. Programmes with the International Monetary Fund and other international lenders include conditions such as trade liberalisation, subsidy cuts, and reduced government spending, systematically weakening state support for agriculture. Smallholder farmers lose out the most when subsidies are removed and markets are opened prematurely. Cheap food imports then undercut local producers of paddy, onion, potato, and dairy, eroding the foundations of the country's food sovereignty (IMF 2024 Article IV, Sri Lanka).

Global instability has compounded these structural pressures. The Russia–Ukraine war disrupted international supply chains of wheat, maize, and fertiliser, driving up input costs and leaving small producers, who lack the reserves to absorb such shocks, acutely exposed. Meanwhile, trade tensions and shifting tariff regimes emanating from the United States have increased volatility in world markets, with particular consequences for Sri Lanka's tea and rubber exports, reducing foreign exchange earnings and weakening the country's capacity to maintain stable agricultural imports or cushion domestic producers from external shocks. Most recently, the United States and Israel's war on Iran has resulted in Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, a natural channel through which the majority of global oil is transported. The Gulf also remains a source of fertiliser materials for Sri Lanka, the transport of which is also obstructed by the blockade. Rising prices due to the interrupted supply are being felt by farmers as they go into the new cultivation season.

Trade agreements have added further complexity. The recently signed Sri Lanka–Thailand Free Trade Agreement (2024) aims to deepen economic cooperation and may open new export markets for tea and spices, but it also carries significant risks for small-scale food producers. Cheap agricultural imports from Thailand could undercut local vegetable, fruit, and spice growers, while incentivising a shift of land toward export-oriented crops at the expense of food grown for domestic consumption. Existing duty-free arrangements with India, Pakistan, and through the South Asian Free Trade Area similarly reduce price stability for domestic producers, with vegetables, pulses, and small grains often cheaper when imported, squeezing already thin local margins.

Financial instruments, too, reflect misaligned priorities. State-owned banks and their SME development arms tend to favour large-scale producers and export-oriented agribusinesses over the smallholders, fishers, and women producers who lack collateral or scale. This institutional bias deepens inequality in access to credit and sidelines precisely those producers on whom Sri Lanka's food security most depends.

Even responses to the climate crisis have not been immune to false solutions. Frameworks such as 'climate smart agriculture', promoted by international agencies and donors, often prioritise technological fixes, drought resistant GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) varieties, precision agriculture, and carbon offset markets over the structural changes that small producers actually need. Carbon trading schemes, in particular, risk dispossessing farming and fishing communities by placing restrictions on land and coastal use in the name of carbon sequestration. This directs

financial benefits toward corporations and intermediaries rather than the communities bearing the costs of climate change. These market-based climate solutions tend to deepen dependence on external inputs and corporate technology rather than building the ecological resilience that agroecological and traditional farming systems already offer.

Rather than resolving the agrarian crisis, these false solutions, trade liberalisation, fiscal austerity, market-based climate frameworks, and finance skewed toward scale, have collectively entrenched it.

If so, what does our alternative, ideal food system look like?

The answer already exists, not as a blueprint drawn up in a university, but as a living political framework built by hundreds of farmer and peasant organisations across more than seventy countries. It goes by the name of food sovereignty.

The term was coined by La Via Campesina at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, and most fully articulated in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2007: food sovereignty is ‘the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems’. Every phrase carries weight, defining the right of peoples, not markets or corporations, to make decisions about food. This food is healthy and culturally appropriate, nourishing and belonging in the society, not just a calorie count. The food is produced in an ecologically sound way, working with living systems rather than against them. The people have a right to define their own systems, democracy over food, from the ground up.

In practice, this alternative system rests on several interlocking commitments. The first is democratic control: placing decisions in the hands of those who produce and consume food rather than those who profit from it. This means governments must retain the right to protect domestic agriculture from destabilising cheap imports, and communities keep genuine control over their land, water, and seeds. The second is agroecology, farming that builds soil rather than mining it, that maintains biodiversity, cycles nutrients locally, and draws on generations of farmers' knowledge, not a corporate input packages, to know what is best. The third is the active defence of small-scale farming as the backbone of any just and sustainable food system.

This is not utopia. Even in a country like Sri Lanka, ravaged by the Green Revolution since the 1970s, communities across the island already practise various components of food sovereignty. From a seed bank in Buttala, to a traditional rice farmer in Rajanganaya, to the women's groups building farmers' markets, to the thrift, credit, and other cooperatives scattered across the country, the alternative is not imaginary. It is already here, in fragments, waiting to be connected.

This report's main aim is precisely that: to document these existing practices from the various corners of the country, and to show that another food system is not only possible but is already being lived. We must work toward strengthening, growing and sustaining it.

Methodology

This report was compiled through a series of primary interviews held with food producers in districts across the country. Secondary data from previous publications and statistics were used in the introductory chapters to set the historical and political context of the creation of Sri Lanka's existing food system.

- Selection of facilitators

The project team selected eleven commissioners' facilitators to lead the discussion sessions to be held in the various regions. These individuals were selected for their expertise in the food production sectors b studied. They all also have demonstrated experience of working closely with local communities over sustained periods.

Commissioners also have the required technical and field knowledge to assess the effectiveness of the alternatives alongside the participants. Along with a research team asking questions from the participants, there was value added from the commissioners' moderation and interventions.

- Sites and sample

During two discussions in Colombo, the group consisting of the commissioners, researchers and coordinators defined the scope of the primary research that would take place on the field.

The sites for each of the sessions were selected based on the concentration of food production in a particular location and its corresponding specialisation.

Meeting location	Participants' locations	Sectors
Dambulla Town	Anuradhapura, Kurunegala, Polonnaruwa	Paddy, vegetables, inland fisheries, food production
Mannar Town	Mannar	Fisheries, other field crops
Jaffna Town	Jaffna	Fisheries, other field crops
Kandy Town	Kandy, Matale	Other field crops
Hatton	Nuwara Eliya	Vegetables and dairy in estate settings
Deniyaya	Deniyaya	Vegetables and other field crops
Bataatha	Hambantota, Matara, Dickwella, Galle	Paddy, vegetables, other field crops, fisheries
Monaragala	Badulla, Monaragala, Wellawaya	Paddy, other field crops, home gardens
Thannamunai	Batticaloa, Trincomalee	Dairy, fisheries, food production
Oluvil	Ampara	Paddy, dairy, other field crops, food production, fisheries

Participants were selected based on their experiences in practising different forms of alternative food systems. Movement for Land and Agriculture Reforms (MONLAR), National Fisheries Solidarity Movement (NAFSO) and Law and Society Trust (LST) invited collectives and individuals engaged in alternative methods of food production, whom they had connected with through prior work or ongoing community projects. A total of 272 people participated for the discussions. The researchers attempted to hold as many sessions across varying locations as possible, so as not to require any participants to travel extremely long distances to attend. As such, those invited to each location were producers living in the district as well as those living in the closest surrounding districts.

- **Scope**

The purpose of this initiative was to document existing alternative methods being practiced by producers at various stages of the food system. The facilitators and the researchers developed a questionnaire to ensure that all such stages were discussed during the subsequent regional meetings. Beginning with production and ending with consumption, these questions allowed the sessions to cover a uniform range of topics while giving participants adequate flexibility to share their knowledge and experiences.

The list of questions can be found in the annexures of this report.

- **Regional sessions**

Each meeting was held in a central or well-known and easily accessible venue in the district. Participants first answered a series of demographic questions to help the project and research team keep record of attendees. These were tabulated for reporting purposes.

The demographic survey can be found in the annexures of this report.

A member of the organizing team introduced the purpose of the research and its key focus on documenting alternative practices the producers were already undertaking, as well as their aspirations for the future. Following this plenary introduction, the gathering was divided into groups based on what participants identified as their main source of income. This would allow for key food sectors to be discussed as a whole, while allowing for participants to share how they supplemented their livelihood with other activities as well. Up to three discussions took place simultaneously, with a total discussion time of upto two and a half hours. One facilitator was assigned to each group based on their own experience in research and advocacy in a particular sector to facilitate the discussion.

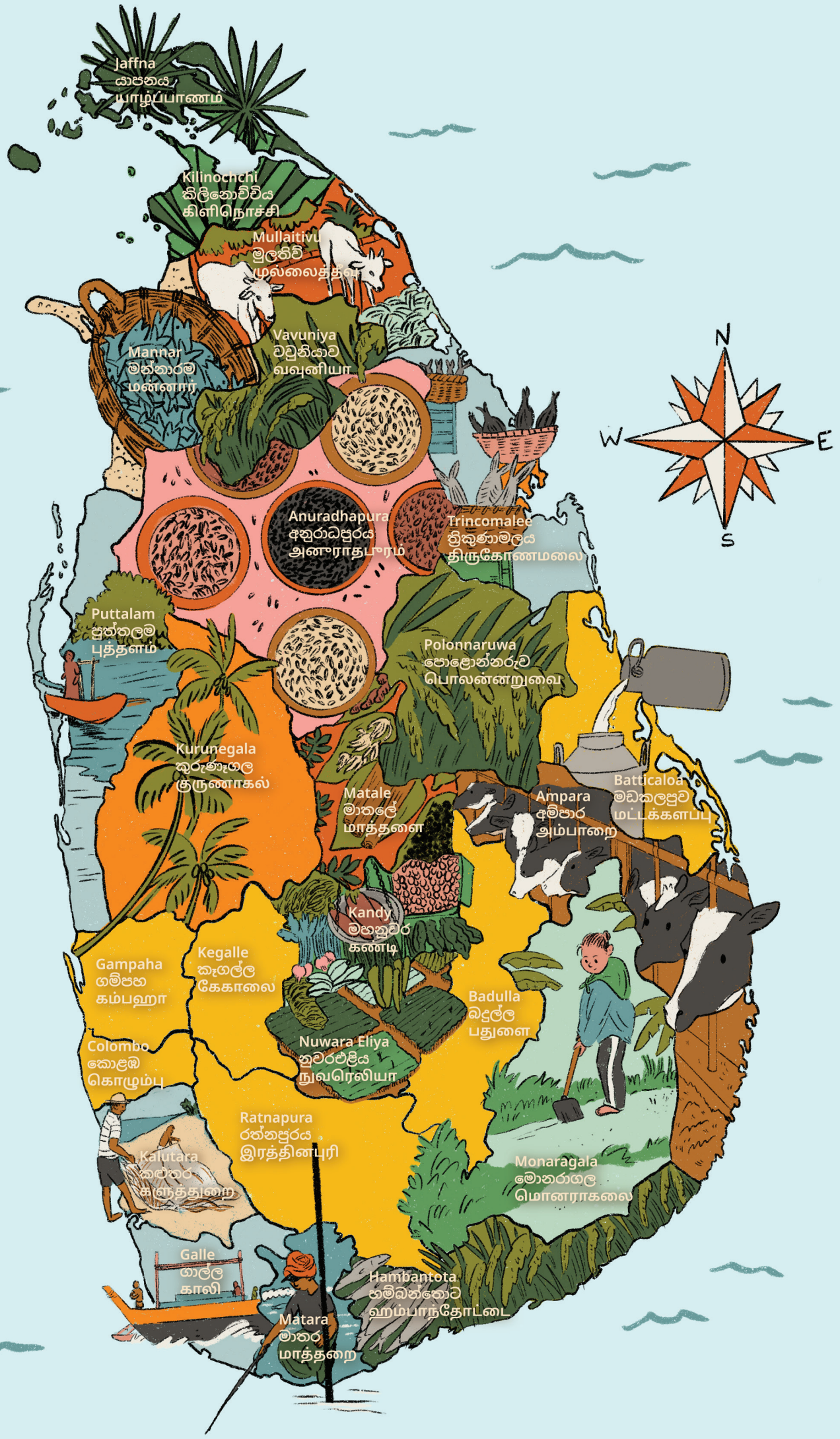
All participants came back to the plenary following the sector-wise group discussions. The commissioner who had facilitated the discussion in each group presented their key takeaways, for validation from the group and for clarification from the rest of the gathering.

- **Data processing**

Researchers and note-takers recruited for the project were assigned to each group, and noted down in detail the discussion and participants' contributions. Following each set of regional sessions, researchers typed out notes that they had written during the sessions, following the question format used by the facilitators.

The lead researcher then input their notes into a matrix that allowed for easy viewing of all the data for a single sector, capturing people's experiences of the various stages of the food system in their respective locations. Further, this helped the process of condensing and streamlining the various participants' responses into key recurring themes, overlaps across locations and unique cases.

The compilation of the report also followed the structure developed for the discussion flow, to ensure that the alternatives the participants practiced were showcased at all stages of the food system in their sector. Each chapter therefore presents their expertise and their recommendations for the food system in their respective sectors.



Jaffna
கிளிநொச்சி
யாழ்ப்பாணம்

Kilinochchi
கிளிநொச்சி
கிளிநொச்சி

Mullaitivu
முல்லைத்தீவு
முல்லைத்தீவு

Mannar
மன்னார்
மன்னார்

Vavuniya
வவுனியா
வவுனியா

Anuradhapura
அனுராதபுரம்
அனுராதபுரம்

Trincomalee
திருகோணமலை
திருகோணமலை

Puttalam
புத்தளம்
புத்தளம்

Polonnaruwa
பொலன்னறுவை
பொலன்னறுவை

Kurunegala
கुरुநகல்
கुरुநகல்

Matale
மாத் தறை
மாத் தறை

Batticaloa
மட்டக்களப்பு
மட்டக்களப்பு

Ampara
அம்பாறை
அம்பாறை

Kandy
கண்டி
கண்டி

Gampaha
கம்பஹா
கம்பஹா

Kegalle
கேகாலை
கேகாலை

Badulla
பதுளை
பதுளை

Colombo
கொழும்பு
கொழும்பு

Nuwara-Eliya
நுவரெலியா
நுவரெலியா

Ratnapura
ரத்தினபுரி
ரத்தினபுரி

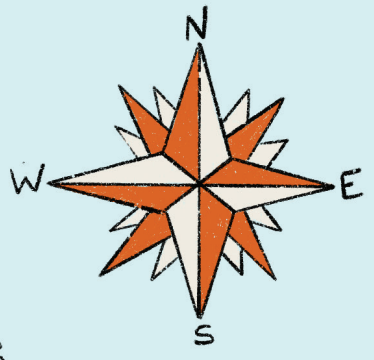
Kalutara
கலத்தறை
கலத்தறை

Monaragala
மொனராகலை
மொனராகலை

Galle
காலி
காலி

Hambantota
ஹம்பாந்தோட்டை
ஹம்பாந்தோட்டை

Matara
மாத் தறை
மாத் தறை



Findings

1. Paddy

Paddy remains central to the landscape and discourse of agriculture in Sri Lanka. Yield data from the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and the Department of Census and Statistics show rice cultivation surging in the period following two landmark events (Watchdog, 2022). Firstly the Mahaweli Development Scheme, reallocating dry zone land to peasants from other parts of the country, for the purpose of rice farming. Secondly, the country's embrace of the Green Revolution, which introduced chemical fertiliser and hybrid paddy varieties, promising increased productivity to feed the whole population. Traditional paddy cultivation practices and local seeds do still remain in use, alongside these changes.

The researchers met 30 paddy farmers in 5 locations - Kandy, Dambulla, Tangalle, Ampara, Monaragala – who among them practiced a combination of these cultivation methods.

At Production:

Many of the participants who practice alternative ways of production produce traditional rice varieties for sale and consumption. Others, while producing hybrid paddy for the market, grew at least one acre of traditional rice for sale within their community and for family use.

My name is Priyambika Wickramagé, and I am from Middeniya. I cultivate Kalu Heenati paddy using agroecological farming methods. In my field, I use biofertilizers such as compost, vermicompost, and fish tonic instead of synthetic chemicals.

But this journey was not easy in the beginning. In our area, farming had become heavily dependent on chemical fertilizers and pesticides for many years. When I decided to move towards agroecological farming, I had to question many of the practices that we had accepted as normal. People around me doubted whether farming without chemicals would work. Even I had fears and uncertainties at times.

Still, I wanted to cultivate in a way that protects our soil, our health, and our future. Slowly, through experience and learning, I began to understand the strength of agroecological methods. I saw how the soil became healthier and how traditional seeds like Kalu Heenati could be cultivated with care and patience.

Across the locations, farmers agreed that producing local rice costs less in the long term, though it requires effort to prepare the soil and ecosystem for the seeds. This was seen as a barrier to entry for the many other farmers looking to pay off debts and earn money to survive. While acknowledging that the cost for additional inputs such as fertiliser, pesticides and machinery would reduce when cultivating local rice, the time taken for local rice to yield productively is time they could not afford to spend in their current circumstances.

In order to carry out organic or agro-ecological farming, many were also producing their own fertiliser at home. Fish and fruit tonics, animal waste, and wild local leaves such as giniseeriya are widely-used methods that keep the costs of production low as well.

A main concern they share is that the farmer is not independent anymore. Earlier they 'knew the earth and its patterns' through traditional knowledge and years of practice of agriculture; they could fashion their cultivation around it. Now, they are at the mercy of frameworks and regulations set by the state and the 'free market'. The rules dictate how much of fertiliser must be used and of which types, when the water is released for cultivation. These conditions do little to support the farmer, instead ensuring the success of merchant vendors and larger economic players.

Traditional cultivation saw that each farmer grew a variety of crops in their land, ensuring food security for the farmer’s family throughout the year. Crops were grown in season, and there was constant harvest throughout the year. The growing of crops is limited in the new settlements that are created by irrigation schemes. Farmers say the documents that permit the creation of the settlement and circulars issued later state that certain crops must be given prominence in cultivation. This is usually rice plus one other variety, usually chillie, b. onion, soya or banana. The scheme and the current economic system demands mass monocropping throughout the year. Therefore farmers can only cultivate these seasonal crops meant for the market. Perennial crops like coconut, mango, jakfruit, that can be used year round and for the farmers’ benefit, are not permitted.

Value addition:

Farmers spend a lot of money for seeds, fertilizer, ploughing, sowing and harvesting. These are often purchased through loans, with costs to be recovered from the harvest. As such, many are looking to sell their produce as soon as possible, usually as raw paddy. Machines to mill the paddy cost money, farmers said, therefore in the current situation it is easier for them to sell their harvest to the large-scale millers. These companies control the rice market, hoarding grain in order to drive prices up. They also have the capital and resources to ensure that a majority of farmers sell paddy to them. During harvesting season, the big mills send vehicles to pick up the cut paddy directly from the field. While the farmer does not have to bear a transport cost, it also increases the big millers’ accumulation.

Some farmers’ associations had purchased a mill and therefore were able to prepare rice and rice flour from the harvested paddy. The association or its farmers could then store the rice and sell it to the market as the price improved. Currently, the Agrarian Services Department provides such machinery at a lower shared cost for associations.

In Mullimotai, in the Nanattan DS Division of Mannar, farmers came together to form the Mullimotai Peasant Producers Collective to strengthen their control over food production and markets. Instead of only selling raw paddy harvests to traders at low prices, the collective began processing their own produce into value-added products.

One of their key initiatives is producing “Saththuma,” a nutritious health mix powder used as a morning meal or snack. Almost all the ingredients are cultivated by the community itself, with only one ingredient sourced externally. Farmers collectively clean, roast, grind, package, and market the product.

Through this process, the community has been able to retain more income locally and reduce dependence on middlemen. The collective has also strengthened solidarity among farmers while creating a community-led model where producers themselves gain greater market power and economic security.

In Ampara, rice farmers provided some of their stock to groups – mostly women-led - making samaposha and other nutritional blends for their production.

Marketing:

Rice is a staple item in the meals of many across the country. The rice that's in highest demand are hybrid varieties grown at scale. The farmers who were producing traditional rice said that they struggled to find a large, sustainable market for the varieties. Traditional rice has a higher nutritional content. In the longer term, farmers believe that consumption of this rice – and other indigenous food crops – could reduce the prevalence of illness. However, these health benefits are not mainstream knowledge. Currently, large agribusinesses produce local rice and sell them at supermarkets for high prices. Expanding knowledge of its benefits could grow the market and make room for smaller-scale producers.

The markets are controlled by big milling companies and the merchant vendors. Sometimes, a single merchant can operate in franchises across all of the main economic centres. Scarcity can be and has been manufactured by these companies. This allows them to sell their stocks at inflated prices, despite having paid farmers a minimal amount for the rice after harvesting. The 'market' therefore benefits these businessmen whereas farmers continue to struggle with debt.

Resources:

Land

The 'anda govi' or tenant farmer system is widely practiced among those who participated in the meetings. Here, a farmer works on a plot of land leased from a larger landowner. The farmer then owes part of the produce to the landowner. The land owner, not the farmer, makes decision on what's grown on the land.

Struggles with land are also captured in the large-scale development projects that have taken place in Sri Lanka, especially rapidly since the end of the war. Often, these hydropower and highway projects are undertaken to develop certain regions, without full assessment of the environmental and livelihood impact for farming in the area.

In the Central Province, farmers cited the Moragahakanda Reservoir project affecting the rainfall patterns and disrupting their cultivation. In the south, the Southern expressway cut through acres of paddy fields and the Mattala airport disrupted elephant corridors leading to increased animal threat in the cultivated fields.

Water

Paddy cultivation is carried out by two general terms in Sri Lanka. Farmers who rely on the rainwater for their cultivation noted how, over the years, the markers of the 'seasons' have changed. The rains now arrive earlier or later than expected, and farmers noted how this has resulted in severe crop damage in the last two seasons.

Farmers whose fields are located within irrigation schemes such as the Mahaweli or Gal Oya projects note a different kind of timing issue. The decision to release the water into the canals is taken by a central panel at the kanna rasweema/season meetings, lead by the Irrigation Ministry and comprising the Mahaweli Development Authority, the Ceylon Electricity Board, Ministry of Wildlife and Ministry of Tourism.

An structure already exists that ensures farmer associations are present at this meeting. However, farmers who participated in interviews noted that in most cases, associations with proximity to political parties, ministries or mill owners often control these meetings. Their 'voice' therefore is not representative of all farmers in a particular locality, much less all farmers in the irrigation scheme.

They also raised that water release prioritises firstly power generation, secondly tourism and only thirdly, agriculture. Farmers feel this arrangement is a threat to their production and by extension to the entire country's ability to access food. While the final decision lies with the Irrigation Department, they propose that there should be more meaningful representation of their voices in this decision-making process.

Machinery

The use of machinery is particularly widespread in cultivation of flat lands. Farmers in the Central Province grow paddy on terraces on the hills, and machines cannot be utilised. The farmers who use machinery note that most of the models are brought from overseas, costing an outflow of money from a possible local production industry. They cite the hand tractor by Sri Lankan inventor Ray Wijewardene as an example of local technology that should be promoted. Creating systems to produce this machine and other relevant equipment necessary for farming would stem the outflow of money from Sri Lanka. In addition, it would mean that the implements could be repaired and replaced in a flexible manner.

Equipment is also often owned by rich merchants or individuals in a locality, who rent these for ploughing or harvesting as the season progresses. This further adds to a farmer's cost of production. Even if the harvest is low and not profitable for them, the price paid for the implement remains the same.

Seeds

Farmers who largely or solely practiced agroecology with traditional seed varieties took individual efforts to save and store seeds with each harvest. In Rajanganaya, a collective has stored around 80 indigenous seed varieties. In Dambulla, a farmer had a collection of 30 varieties. They share these with farmers in their community as well as in other localities, who managed to connect with them and expressed interest in trying local seeds.

Finances

For decades, Sri Lankan farmers have struggled with the lack of equitable financing solutions. Local banks require extensive documentation, guarantors and collateral that most farmers do not have, or cannot produce them quickly when they need urgent loans. This forces them to take loans from companies that provide loans quickly, with minimum documentation but at a high interest. Unfolding climate change has increased the volatility of agriculture, compounding their risk.

In 2020, farmers undertook the most recent struggle against predatory microfinance loans. Farmer associations have always attempted to move away from entities such as microfinance companies by growing their own savings, and providing loans to their members.

They do this in a few different ways. Firstly, by membership subscription fees. The collection over time allows the association to give small loans to its members at a low interest rate, that can be paid after the harvest. Associations in Mahiyangaya, Rajanganaya and Sooriyawewa were among those who carried out this practice. These may not allow for the large-scale loans that companies are able to give, but they are able to support members who need it.

Another is by holding weekly markets of their members' produce, where a shared profit is retained after all members have sold their goods. These societies also found creative ways to support members in ways that transcend a monetary transaction. An association in Polonnaruwa had developed a rotational basket of items, that members contributed to with what they had at home; the full basket would be received by one member each month.

Chandanapokuna, a village in Hingurakgoda, was severely burdened by predatory microcredit loans. In 2018, a group of affected women came together to form the Chandanapokuna Vimukthi Gami Govi Kantha Sanvidanaya (Chandanapokuna Free Rural Peasant Women's Collective) to break free from the debt cycles and build their rural economy. This collective today has 30 active members, with a further 20 who participate regularly. Members contribute a monthly fee of Rs. 100, along with Rs. 1,000 during each harvest season. Through these pooled resources, the group has built a range of alternative economic practices. One is a community credit scheme that offers loans at just 6% annual interest, the lowest rate available anywhere in the area. Another initiative takes place at their monthly meeting, held on the 25th of each month. Every member brings whatever they can, a portion of their harvest, handmade items such as wooden spoons, or everyday staples like milk powder and sugar. These contributions are assembled into a ration pack, which is gifted to one member. The combined value of these packs typically reaches around Rs. 16,000, and every member receives one in turn through a rotating cycle.

Storage/Preservation:

Some farmers in Hingurakgoda said they were able to stock the harvested paddy in their homes, releasing it when they needed money. Others in Monaragala said that they could not store paddy in their homes this way, because they lived in heavily forested areas and elephants would attack the house to eat the paddy.

In all locations, a cooperative storage model was proposed, as it would then also centralise the process of selling the paddy. Mainstreaming the process of cooperative storage – either at the level of a single farmer society or a collective within a locality – would give the farmers more control over their stocks.

Institutions:

The Department of Agriculture and the Agrarian Services Department are the main institutions meant to respond to the needs of farmers. However, interviewed farmers believed that there was a need for capacity building and priority shifting within those offices. The personnel are trained to promote the use of chemical fertilisers and hybrid seeds, with little to no knowledge on using agroecological methods to grow traditional seeds. The participants proposed a wide range of awareness building in this regard, as it would also help grow the market for organic, local food.

There were some locations to which agricultural extension services did not reach. Farmers felt like there was less attention given to their locality, and the Officer did not regularly visit.

The farmers who participated in the sessions cultivated both hybrid and traditional rice varieties. For the former, they purchased hybrid seeds from Department of Agriculture centres and private companies. Many noted that state seed farms were not functioning to the capacity that they should be. Seeds from the state and private companies were most often hybrid varieties, requiring chemical fertiliser to grow properly. In this way, indigenous seeds have been phased out of availability since the Green Revolution. Even if farmers wished to grow traditional rice varieties, they were not able to do so as they are not easily available.

Labour:

Labour takes many forms in the cultivation of paddy. Some farmers said that they had help from their families to work on the fields, having shifted away from hired labour due to the cost incurred. In smaller localities, those who had finished tending to their field would go to work on their neighbour's or an association member's fields, in a system of shared work.

A prevailing trend was that as younger generations moved towards urban areas, the farmer was often left doing all the cultivation work themselves. This raises questions about the future of farmer-led cultivation as young people seek work elsewhere.

As most of these farmers were cultivating their paddy with agro ecological methods, they felt it required less labour and attention than larger-scale chemical-based cultivation. A switch to this method, they felt, could be a way to ‘bring people back to the land’ in a small way. Workers on chemical-forward cultivations tended to get sick because of the water and soil, whereas this method proved to not pose a risk to one’s health.

Consumption:

The farmers who grow rice on a large or medium scale noted that they keep a portion of it for their family’s consumption. In irrigation scheme lands, farmers and their families cultivate vegetables and other food crops on their ‘goda’ land, on which paddy is not grown. Others also grow limited amounts of vegetables and leafy greens in their home gardens. This allows them to ensure a balanced meal for the family solely from the produce of their own land. Any quantity not required for household use is sold for additional income. They spend the largest portion of their money on proteins such as meat and eggs.

In terms of rice consumption, there are farmers who sell the entirety of their harvest to the large-scale miller and purchase rice once it has come back to the shops. Others may have access to smaller community-level or independent mills. In these cases, they keep some of the quantity of rice for their family before sending the rest to the market.

2. Fisheries

Sri Lanka possesses rich aquatic resources that play a critical role in national food security, nutrition, and rural livelihoods. It has a coastline extending approximately 1,785 km and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of about 517,000 km². In addition, Sri Lanka’s inland and brackish water systems cover nearly 420,000 hectares. These diverse aquatic environments support a wide range of fishing practices.

The commission met communities practicing fishing in the sea and lagoons in 5 locations; Tangalle, Jaffna, Mannar, Batticaloa, and Ampara.

Production:

Across all districts, fishing remains a primary livelihood, supplemented by home gardening, small-scale food preparation, livestock rearing, and seasonal wage labour. Communities depend mainly on nearshore and lagoon fishing using multiday boats, one day boats, small FRP vessels, and manual net casting techniques. Small-scale fisheries, following traditional methods, play a crucial role in maintaining local food systems and livelihood practices.

In many areas, fishing is combined with agriculture to cope with seasonal uncertainties.

Species caught include prawns, cuttlefish, crabs, saavalai, sura, thondan, keer, katta, vannu, and various lagoon species. Seasonal rhythms strongly shape production, with fishers emphasizing that a good six month income can sustain households for the year. A reflection from fishermen across the districts was that there had been a disruption to traditional fishing seasons; changing rain and wind patterns changed the familiar timeline of fish availability.

Some communities expressed interest in adopting chemical free and sustainable fishing practices but lack technology and training.

Value Addition:

Value addition is mainly carried out at household level or community level, with women playing a central role. Activities include drying and salting fish (karuvadu/karawala), preparation of pickles, ambulthiyal, jaadi, papiko, and fish pastes. These are used in household consumption and also sold in the market, close to where the fresh fish are sold.

Fish is purchased from these locations but taken away from them to small to medium factories producing tinned fish. The fisher associations feel if these were located closer to them, it would generate jobs and strengthen the economy of the area.

Some areas noted potential for new products such as fish based fertilizer, seasoning cubes, snacks from prawns and cuttlefish, and processed seaweed/sea lotus. However, value addition faces major constraints: lack of training, minimal access to machinery, uneven quality control, and reliance on low grade fish.

Shrimp farms mixing foreign and local varieties create market distortions and unfair competition for small fishers.

Marketing:

In every district, middlemen and private monopolies control fish purchasing and pricing. Fishers often sell their catch immediately due to lack of storage, receiving lower prices. This reflects the situation in the agriculture industries as well.

Middlemen often come directly to the harbour with freezer vans, so the fishermen do not have to spend on transport. However, they buy at very low prices and sell at significantly higher rates, set by private traders. The real profit from the catch does not come back to the fishers.

The quantity of imported fish in the Sri Lankan market, especially sprats, has an effect on local producers, affecting how much they are able to sell and earn.

Some communities recommended community run auctions, regulated price systems, or government facilitated markets. Family networks are used for limited export of dried fish from Jaffna.

The Ambal Fishermen's Cooperative Society in Karainagar, Jaffna, holds a fish auction every morning as boats return from the sea. Rather than allowing middlemen to dictate prices, a practice that has long disadvantaged small-scale fishermen across Sri Lanka, the cooperative enables its members to sell their catch through a transparent, open bidding process. This ensures that each fisherman receives a fair price directly reflective of the day's market, putting the power of pricing back in the hands of those who do the fishing.

A portion of each member's daily income goes into a collective savings fund that has grown steadily over the years. Through this fund, the society is able to offer its members loans at lower interest rates, as well as purchase equipment and other essentials that fishermen need. Members are also invited to contribute one or more fish from their daily catch into a common pool, which the society auctions separately, with the proceeds going directly into the collective savings.

The society represents the livelihoods of nearly 300 fishermen in Karainagar.

Resources:

Machinery and fuel

Rising costs of nets, fuel, repairs, and equipment. Limited access to machinery and ice plants. Over the past few years, there have been several local and international events that have restricted the supply and raised the price of fuel, meaning that boats have not been able to go out as fishers cannot afford these.

Natural resources

There has been widespread destruction of coastal ecosystems, mangroves, and breeding grounds due to the larger global patterns of climate change. In addition, immediate man-made issues such as pollution from plastics and waste threaten coastal landscapes and fishing grounds. Fishers note the decline of certain species (sea cucumbers, lagoon species) as some indicators of these changes.

Land and spaces

The presence of Indian trawlers in the waters of the Northern Province proves a threat to the safety and livelihood of local fishers. These trawlers cause the destruction of local fishing nets for which no compensation is provided. They also reduce what local fishers can catch, as trawlers catch huge quantities of the fish in an area. The need for Cross-border fisheries dialogue mechanisms that involve the community in negotiation platforms was brought up by participants.

Fishing communities are affected by coastal degradation due to tourism projects, sand mining, and development activities. There is a conflict with tourism authorities over land rights, sometimes restricting their access to traditional fishing grounds.

Household resources

These often include savings in gold, small livestock, home gardens, carpentry skills, and remittances from family members overseas.

Storage and Preservation:

Storage is one of the most significant gaps across all districts. There is no practice of storage as fishers or fisher associations have no ice plants or cold storage capacities of their own. The quality of the fish deteriorates without proper cooling, forcing them to sell their catch to whoever is willing to buy it early.

Methods of preservation involved the salting and drying of fish and other seafood items that are then consumed in the home and sold in the markets as well.

Institutions:

Fisheries cooperatives are present but vary greatly in effectiveness. Many are limited to issuing licenses or discussing general matters, offering weak practical support for members

There is a dependence on NGOs for training, awareness, and legal assistance.

Fishers note that there is limited involvement of Fisheries Officers or Inspectors in addressing livelihood issues. There is also no coordination between these officials and local authorities, towards providing of education or technology in the forms of extension services.

In Mannar and Batticaloa, federations or associations control certain marketing systems, but transparency remains limited.

Labour:

Fishing labour is primarily family based. When hired labour is used, profit sharing models such as the *pangu system* are common for example, a Rs. 70,000 earnings are split half to the boat owner and the rest among the crew.

Women's labour is central in drying, sorting, repairing, and mending nets but is undervalued and rarely acknowledged in leadership structures. Cultural norms in several districts restrict women from handling or operating boats.

Consumption:

Fishers consume fresh fish for roughly half the year. During off season periods, households rely on market purchased fish, dried fish, and vegetables grown in home gardens. Rising market prices have reduced affordability for some families. Lack of refrigeration limits household food storage.

3. Other field crops

Vegetables, fruits, grains, spices – after paddy cultivation is accounted for, these vast groups are classified as 'other food crops'. These are grown at various scales, sometimes in a combination of crops, and innovative producers undertake value addition to ensure their produce is ready for the market in many forms.

The commission met communities practicing the cultivation of a range of food crops in Monaragala, Tangalle, Jaffna, Deniyaya, Ampara, Kandy and Hatton.

Production:

Farmers who participated in the commission cultivate a diverse range of crops, including but not limited to cowpea, chili, brinjal, grains, coconuts, bananas, yams, and plantation crops such as pepper and cinnamon. In terms of vegetables, based on their location they grow onions, leeks, carrots, radish, potato and pumpkin. Many farmers undertake plot cultivation, chena cultivation, integrated mixed farming, and agroforestry systems.

Vegetable farmers said they mostly use chemical fertilisers for their crops, and are in the process of trying to reduce dependence on them. They are making a slow switch to producing organic crops. People who have purchased the limited organic quantities they make say the produce is tastier than the chemically-grown varieties. The quantity of organic produce they do grow allows them to use it in their own homes. However, they are not able to produce large quantities of it. If the market were to expand in their current conditions, they would struggle.

Corn forms a large part of cultivation in the Uva region. Similar to the benefits of heirloom rice against hybrid varieties, local corn takes less fertiliser to grow. Some farmers therefore attempt to use this variety.

Integrated mixed farming is a method employed in many regions. Farmers explain the need to be strategic in growing crops that 'match' together, managing the possible illnesses in the plants. Varying crops have different fertiliser requirements so must be carefully balanced. The crop diversity is beneficial to the soil. It also benefits the farmer to grow a range of produce and change what they grow with each season, as they feel demand shifts based on what's in supply.

My name is Devanandan Sathyavadani, and I am from Mullimotai. I am also part of the Mullimotai Peasant Producers Collective.

During the resettlement period, our family received half an acre of land. We divided the land into three parts among the family members, and instead of depending on a single crop, we decided to cultivate many different crops together. Around our home, we grow eggplant, chili, long beans, leafy greens, mango, jackfruit, guava, anoda, banana, jambu, strawberry, and medicinal plants. We also have around 30 coconut trees. Alongside cultivation, we raise chickens, goats, and cattle.

Earlier, many families depended mainly on monocropping, but we learned that multicropping makes us more secure. Even if one crop fails or prices go down, we still have other crops, fruits, or livestock to support us. It also means we do not need to spend much money buying vegetables or food from shops because most of what we need comes from our own land.

The income from gardening, animals, and my husband's work together helps sustain our family. Through multicropping, we have been able to improve both our resilience and our household income while building a healthier and more self-reliant way of life.

Value Addition:

There is an extensive amount of value addition taking place by small-scale growers and producers of non-food crops. They did so at different degrees based on their own or their association's capacity.

Mills had been purchased by some groups that had been able to raise enough money among their members. They now mill rice and grains into flour and sell these in shops or directly to people who prepare local food. Others had been able to purchase this with the help of NGOs, and the machine is used by all members of a society.

Gram and grains are cleaned and processed, some being used to prepare snacks and flour. In addition to use and sale for consumption, coconuts are used for oil, fiber products, and handicrafts. Fruits are dried or fried into chips and sold in shops, others are prepared as chutneys or jams. Corn is given to people who produce thripasha or healthy grain mixes that are targeted for young children. Kitchen waste is used to make natural fertilisers for their cultivation.

Marketing:

Most farmers sell through weekly markets, village shops, and small-scale direct sales. Some use social media for online marketing.

Vegetable farmers earn through sales to local stores and in bulk to economic centres. The volume of vegetables being grown across the country at any given time and their relatively short window of remaining fresh dictates how much farmers can earn on a regular basis. They face issues whereby they are not able to sell their produce – to intermediaries or shops – because there are many growers in a single area.

A large portion of produce is sent to the Dambulla Economic Centre. For growers in the central hill country, Bandarawela is a key location as well. Given the concentration of vegetable farmers in the Nuwara Eliya district, several farmer groups have requested the GA that a centre be set up within the area for their produce.

Intermediaries purchase crops from the farmers at a lower price, often collecting from the location where it is cultivated. Produce is sold in these centres for a mark-up, therefore the full profit of the

vegetable sale is not for the farmer. They feel that the state should have a strong role in purchasing, doing so at a fair price instead of the arbitrary rates set by agents and merchants.

In Maradankadawala, Anuradhapura three producer societies have come together to form the Maradankadalwala peasant producer collectives. The Rahula Mawatha peasant producer society consists of vegetable and rice farmers, the majority of whom now grow traditional heirloom rice varieties and also cultivate organically. The Nawakkulama peasant producer society is composed mainly of dairy producers rearing cattle and goats. Other than dairy products, they prepare organic inputs like jeewamurtha and vermi compost, which are supplied to the other two societies to be used in their lands. The third, the Halmillawa peasant producer society, mainly engages in value-added production; they make spice mixes, pickles, etc. They also manage the collective's retail outlet in Maradankadawala, the Maradankadawala Agroecological Peasant Producers Outlet.

The collective has around 70 to 80 members, the majority of whom are women. Each of the three societies maintains its own internal savings mechanism, alongside a shared savings fund for the collective as a whole.

Resources:

Land

Farmers feel that while in many places of the country, paddy farmers have 'no issues' with their land ownership, it is not the same for corn and other producers.

A significant threat they cite is how large acreage of cultivation land is now being marked off as protected forest, limiting their ability to grow and engage in livelihood activities. These reserves are often marked in areas where people have been growing and nourishing the land for decades. The expansion of protected forest cover encourages people to build homes on land used for cultivation, setting off a cycle that limits where the farmer can produce.

The sale of land for residential construction and development by private individuals was another limiting factor. Farmers said they wished to expand their own cultivation but could not do this because the land had been earmarked for these purposes.

The farmers interviewed in Jaffna explained how militarisation affects their cultivation and livelihood. Soldiers grow crops on traditional civilian lands, that are now inside forces camps. These lands that people used to grow on are now outside their reach, but the forces make a profit by selling these in the local market, often at a lower price than local producers can afford.

Malaiyaha Tamil farmers who live in tea plantations and cultivate close to them addressed the control that estate management has on their produce. Some estates allow vegetable cultivation in selected areas, especially if a family has been growing there across generations. In others, management keeps a close watch on workers and sends staff to cut coconut or banana trees that they try to grow close to line rooms.

Militarisation and estate management control will be discussed in a separate chapter in this report.

Seeds

Hill country farmers find that hybrid seeds – that they have been growing for a long time - are not successful in the local earth. Smaller-scale growers make their own seeds, only buying them every 5 years.

Local seed usage is strong in Monaragala and parts of the North-Central province, where seed conservation groups operate. They grow and preserve traditional varieties, sharing them among networks and other farmers to attempt in their own cultivation, encouraging the switch to agroecological methods as well.

The Vikalpani National Women’s Federation, based in Monaragala district, has spent two decades championing farmers’ rights to seed sovereignty, with a particular focus on women-led seed conservation.

Members of Vikalpani maintain both home-based and community seed banks, operating a cooperative system of seed sharing among themselves. The federation also manages dedicated seed production farmlands that supply their Seed Production and Marketing Society, formally registered under the Department of Agriculture in accordance with the Seed Act No. 22 of 2003. Seeds are sourced from members in and around Monaragala and Buttala.

Together, these efforts ensure the production of quality seeds while actively promoting and preserving local seed varieties for generations to come.

The Rajanganaya Indigenous Seed Conservers’ Primary Agricultural Produce Marketing Society was established with a shared intention to protect the environment and preserve the seeds and lineages native to the Rajanganaya area. The society currently has 60 members who collectively conserve a wide range of varieties, from heirloom rice, potatoes, legumes, and vegetables to diverse banana varieties.

Among its younger members is Rasika, a farmer and educator who has personally conserved 80 heirloom rice varieties native to Sri Lanka. Together with the society, he actively participates in seed exchanges with farmers across the country, helping to keep these varieties alive and in circulation.

Water

The priority given to paddy cultivation is evident in the responses of the farmers. They feel like while most resources are directed towards the ‘main crop’, it is not the same for vegetable production. Outside of the rain season, farmers in Dambulla and Monaragala noted that water from irrigation tanks and canals are first and foremost directed to paddy fields. Rainwater tanks in select places help store water for later use but this is not a uniform practice.

Financial

The farmers interviewed obtained financial resources and support from a range of providers. Some had taken loans from microfinance companies and remained in debt that they were slowly trying to pay back. They said that state and formal banking systems did not lend to high-risk individuals as themselves, or that they required a lot of documentation to obtain a loan. Unable to provide these or needing the money urgently, many turned to microfinance companies.

All farmers participated in savings groups at their community level and had been part of these prior to taking loans as well. These groups took small amounts for membership, monthly savings and offered loans upto Rs. 100,000 depending on their saving capacity. They also provided fixed amounts at the death of a family member and if a member fell sick.

Many of these small groups essentially acted as cooperatives, though many had not registered as cooperatives with hesitation of the paperwork and monitoring it might bring. However, they provided interest rates for loans at as low as 0.5%, while profits from sales of their produce were shared among group members. Non-members are also able to take loans from these groups but at slightly higher interest rates.

Storage/Preservation:

Due to the lack of proper storage facilities, most vegetable crops must be sold quickly. Potential damage from elephants, who can smell rice stored indoors, also forces rice farmers to sell rice immediately without saving some for when there is a higher price for it in the market.

Institutions:

Across the regions, there was limited input from government officers in the relevant departments of agriculture. As farmers hope to grow their knowledge and try methods that are more sustainable, they find that agriculture officials continue to advise them to use the same methods and use chemical fertilisers.

Non-governmental organisations provide support to farmers through agroecology training programs, community credit schemes and legal assistance for those in debt. They also create networks for farmers across provinces to meet each other, share seeds and learn from each other's farming or production practices.

Self-learning has been a key source of knowledge for many of the producers. This is either by watching YouTube videos and trying the methods themselves and/or consulting with other farmer groups. Knowledge sharing and seed sharing amongst farmers working in a locality or through networks enables them to improve their harvests.

Labour:

Labour-sharing systems (attam) exist across all regions, allowing farmers to exchange work instead of hiring. Women play a major role in production, seed conservation, and ecological farming. However, there is a disparity in the wages paid for a day's agricultural labour, with women being paid less than men.

A significant labour challenge, and indeed for the future of food production, is the migration of youth from agriculture. This happens in two forms. Firstly where youth move towards urban areas in search of job opportunities. The second is where youth who choose to remain close to agricultural areas go on to seek work that is not related to cultivation.

Challenges include:

Farmers requested formal recognition of labour-sharing systems and training for youth through NVQ-level courses.

Consumption:

Farmers consume most of their home-grown produce and exchange items within groups. Those who grow a mix of crops are able to meet most of their family nutritional needs from their own cultivation.

Younger generations prefer store-bought foods, which farmers identify as a cultural challenge. Some articulate particularly that campaigns and awareness on the benefits of local produce could generate more wealth for the farmer while restricting the dollar outflow from the local economy.

4. Other household livelihoods related to food production

Introduction:

The preparation of food beyond the initial stages of production is a widespread source of livelihood in Sri Lanka, operating from homes to an industrial level. Individuals and collectives in Dambulla, Batticaloa, Mannar and Ampara are practicing food production beyond farming, including processing, storage, marketing, and community exchange systems.

Production:

Production activities include small-scale processing of rice, sambol, mixtures, pickles, oils, soaps, and livestock keeping. The featured producer cultivates paddy, maintains a home garden, and runs livestock (cows, chickens). Rice processing is done on a small scale using purchased paddy and outsourced milling services.

Most households maintain medium-to-large home gardens with vegetables, fruits, medicinal plants, and leafy greens. Home gardening became essential during COVID-19, then the economic crisis and continues as a steady livelihood and food source. Alongside gardening, many women run small home-based food production.

It should be noted that these producers are also operating at various scales. Some are larger, and able to hire labourers, while others are a family-based operation in a household.

Value Addition:

Producers engage in diverse value-added products and have received certifications or permits for them where required. Much of this production is done by women and happens in parallel to household duties, who wake at 3am to do this work.

Processing: Red and white rice, rice flour, medicinal leaf powders

Food products: Dry fish, sambol, pickles, chips

Healthcare products: Herbal hair oil, soap from natural ingredients

Cooked food: watalappam, cakes, murukku, string hoppers, sesame snacks

The National Fisheries Solidarity Movement works with more than 200 women fishers in districts including Galle, Matara, Jaffna, and Kalutara to promote alternative food system practices based on local food preservation and small-scale production. Using fish catches and products grown in their home gardens, women produce dried fish, pickles, spices, and other preserved food items with longer shelf life and added market value.

This initiative has helped women diversify their sources of income instead of depending only on daily fish sales. It has also reduced their vulnerability to exploitation by intermediaries and fish vendors who often control market prices. By processing and preserving food within their communities, women are able to increase household income, strengthen food security, and build greater control over local food systems. The initiative also promotes traditional knowledge, collective organizing, and community-based economic resilience.

Marketing:

Sales channels employed by these producers are varied. They include local shops in the village, weekly markets, direct orders to customers close to them or some even overseas. Those preparing healthy food such as grain porridge and thriposha-equivalents sometimes sell their products to pharmacies. In addition, many are using online platforms such as Facebook to showcase, make connections and sell their products. Deliveries are made early morning.

Some markets have low customer reach, and the producer must spend a lot of money to transport their goods there and back. While there are no middlemen keeping a percentage, the lack of organised spaces is a challenge for small-scale producers.

Larger home-based producers gain more market access because they are able to provide a lower price to buyers. Small producers are not able to discount in this way therefore their income remains low.

Resources:

Knowledge

Producers rely on community networks, personal experience, and informal knowledge exchanges between other women. NGOs such as NAFSO, Women Rural Development Societies, local societies sometimes arrange training and capacity building for such producers on a rotating basis.

Water

The cultivation of home gardens rely heavily on the availability of rain in the area. If people want to ensure water year around, they would have to install motors and pipes that require electricity to run, an additional expense that adds to their cost burden.

Financial

Microfinance interest rates are extremely high, sometime upto 17% from various companies. Many producers cycle loans to repay previous debts. Muslim women said they avoid loans entirely, in keeping with their religious practices.

Physical

The producers face a challenge in terms of physical resources such as machinery for processing. Where collectives might have the capacity to share the cost of grinders, mixers, dryers or other apparatus, individual producers struggle.

Many of these producers buy raw materials from farmers or fishers to create their products. Fluctuating prices mean they face times where these raw materials are very expensive or not affordable for them.

Storage

Producers store items at household level, limiting the scale they can produce. It also means they are not able to keep their produce and sell at a later date, when they are in need of income. Storing the raw materials and finished products is a challenge.

Institutions:

The small-scale producers who participated in the commission were all connected to local NGOs or community-based organisations who provided training support. Their networks through the WRDS gave them some access to customers and places to sell their produce. However, this access is unequal and compounded by the fact that many people are not aware of programs run by the state or NGOs to receive such support.

Labour:

This type of food production is carried out in varying methods. In some places, people had formed collectives and would produce the food or processed items together. Others, who are running at a slightly larger scale, can afford to hire labourers for the work.

In other instances, individuals and their family members are carrying out the production themselves in their homes. For example, one participant said production is carried out by two household members, creating a heavy workload. Early morning work hours are necessary to balance production and home duties.

Women form a large majority of these home-based food and value-added producers. In doing so, they are shouldering the majority of labour in both home and production activities. There is no consistent access to hired labour or childcare.

Consumption:

Locally produced rice, sambols, pickles, and dairy are consumed by households and sold to neighbors. The participants noted increasing food prices, especially on nutritious food and produce. Therefore households that maintain a home garden rely almost entirely on their own produce. Most families ensure one vegetable curry per meal. Barter exchanges strengthen community food security and ensure that many houses in the village have access to a range of nutritious produce.

Structural Barriers Towards a Just Food System Transformation

The barriers towards building a just food system are many. Throughout our consultations, the commission came across a recurring set of such challenges raised by the people themselves. These are not a complete list of every barrier, but they represent structural barriers that the people deem most oppressive in each particular locality.

Militarisation, colonial-era plantation structures and new agribusiness formations do not simply obstruct communities from producing food. Their own production undermines local growers in the market. It is also targeted for elite or export markets far from the lands they occupy. While communities also intend to sell some of what they grow, their relation to food production is bound up with daily consumption, family sustenance, and community relationships in ways that the corporate and military models are not. Patriarchy and gender heavily inform how decisions are made in terms of land and cultivation, specifically who gets to make those decisions. Women have long played an essential role in food production and traditional knowledge preservation, roles that are ignored in the mainstream understandings of agricultural labour.

Military land occupation and the food system

Large segments of the land in the Northern Province remain under the control of the military. Seventeen years after the end of the war, while some land has been released back to civilian hands, new lands have also been acquired to expand security infrastructure. In Palaly alone, located within the bounds of the Valikamam North division, there are around 3000 acres of land that remain under occupation. The civilian houses that were within this zone were bulldozed. After court cases and protests by the civilian owners, a few roads have been released under strict rules as to when and who can travel on them.

Residents whose homes once stood in this zone lived in close relationship with the land. Naturally-growing perennial trees such as coconut, jak, and mango provided families with food throughout the year. In addition, they grew bananas, small vegetables, and chillies as well. Now, displaced and living in rented houses or with relatives, they do not have access to land in the same way and are unable to cultivate. The sufficiency they were able to have, growing on their own land and producing within a home garden, is lost in displacement.

This loss is compounded by the knowledge that the Army is now cultivating within the lands their families once lived on, growing corn, coconut, banana, okra, chilli, mango, and brinjal, keeping livestock, and operating a yoghurt factory. These goods are released into the local market at prices lower than those that civilian producers can offer, undercutting the very communities that were displaced. Session participants noted that on some occasions, residents of the houses that once stood there can now be found working as labourers on their own land, paid a daily wage by the Army. In an economic situation where work is difficult to come by, people take these jobs that ensure a small income.

These communities have staged many protests demanding that the army leave their lands, and noting the many communal spaces, such as farms and worship sites, that they want to access again. Cases have also been filed in courts for this, yet the occupation remains.

Estate lands, political exclusion and the food system

Farmers and agricultural workers consulted in the central hill country noted how their ability to cultivate is dictated by the management of the estates where they lived. In some estates, families and individuals who have cultivated a particular plot for generations are allowed to continue. Because of the long-term nature of the cultivation, estate management now allows it to carry on. In other estates, swift action is taken the moment workers attempt to grow anything in the small spaces in

front of their line houses. Participants described how they have attempted to grow banana or small coconut trees but as these begin to grow, estate management sends personnel to cut the trees and remove the seedlings.

There is a stark racial disparity with how these limitations are enacted. There are severe restrictions placed on workers attempting to cultivate and begin small businesses. However, outsiders who have no connection to the estate, maybe people from the nearest village or from the city, are allowed to cultivate and construct within the estate as they wish. In these situations, the Malaiyaha Tamil workers are restricted from growing even some chilli plants in front of their houses whereas the village Sinhalese people are allowed to grow tea within the estate land. These stories were presented in sessions held both in Hatton in the central hill country as well as in Deniyaya in the southern hills. A few participants noted that they were permitted to grow small amounts in the areas in front of their houses. They said that growing chillie and manioc in this manner helped them to reduce their monthly household expenditure, saving their limited income for other essentials.

Land and house ownership has been at the core of the Malaiyaha Tamil community's political demands for decades. Despite living and working in the line houses for generations, ownership is systematically denied by estates that want to retain control over their workforce. This denial is not simply a housing matter, it has direct and cascading consequences for the community's full participation in the food system.

In Sri Lanka, access to land title acts as a prerequisite for registration at Agrarian Service Centres run by the government. Without this registration, a farmer cannot receive extension services, market information, training, subsidies, or eligibility for membership in farmer organisations. Irrigation organisations only accept farmers who own land. This means that Malaiyaha Tamil estate workers, many of whom have farmed and nourished their families on this land, are entirely locked out of the formal agricultural support system.

This exclusion reflects the estate economy's historic design. Brought to Sri Lanka under British colonial rule, the Malaiyaha Tamil community was incorporated into the plantation system as a captive labour force. Decades after independence, the structural conditions of that arrangement persist: land is withheld, housing is tied to employment, and the ability to cultivate independently is curtailed. This is not incidental and is an intentional mechanism for maintaining labour control.

The consequences are felt both in food security and in political voice. Exclusion from agrarian organisations and irrigation bodies eliminates the spaces in which farmers can voice concerns, shape policy and build collective bargaining power. Malaiyaha Tamil women, in particular, who play a significant role in food production on and around the estates, find themselves doubly excluded: by gender and by caste-inflected labour hierarchies that classify them as wage workers rather than farmers, even while they perform agricultural labour daily.

The estate system has, in this way, not only prevented Malaiyaha Tamil people from owning the land they live on, it has kept them from being recognised as farmers at all. The result is a community that is deeply embedded in food production but systematically excluded from the rights, resources and institutional recognition that would allow them to shape their own food futures.

Agribusiness and The Corporatisation of the Food System

The Uva province accommodates a range of ecosystems, from cool mountains to dry plains. While tea estates are common in the former, vast areas of the latter have been cleared for commercial agriculture since the 1980's. One of the largest of these is the efforts by state-owned Lanka Sugar Company in Pelwatte and Sevanagala, to grow sugarcane for sugar production.

These plantations produce in two ways. Farmers from the area whose land was incorporated into the plantation acreage work on an outgrower model, selling their harvest back to the factory. People who were brought to the area to cultivate are given a number acres to manage. Sugar cultivation has increased the heat in the area, even leading to droughts, as the plants absorb a large volume of water from the earth. The high quantity of chemicals used to maintain it is such that the soil now requires intensive chemical input for any other cultivation too.

The condition for farmers growing for the factory is that they cannot grow any other crops on their land. From chena cultivation to monocropping of sugar, farmers and families are affected by the lack of crop diversity that would give them a balanced meal to eat, or a range of produce to sell. This dependence on a single commodity crop leaves farming households profoundly exposed to price volatility, climate shocks and factory decisions over which they have no control. As women farmers in consultations observed, during their parents' generation it would have been unheard of for a farming household to face food shortages. Today, farmers growing only one crop can neither feed their households adequately nor reliably sell in the market.

People's protests have halted the further destruction of the Uva environment and farming patterns for the plantation of sugar. There is often pushback that such protests undermine the country's need for foreign currency in the form of investment, a framing that places the burden of national economic policy squarely on communities already bearing its costs, while insulating corporate interest from accountability.

The dynamics in the Uva province are not unique to the sugar sector; they reflect a broader pattern of how agribusiness structures shape and constrain Sri Lanka's food systems. Since the Green Revolution in the 1960s, chemical input use in Sri Lankan agriculture has grown sharply, pushing farmers to abandon sustainable, knowledge-based methods in favour of monocrop systems. Consequences include the degradation and infertility of soils, ecological disruptions, and the spread of diseases such as Chronic Kidney Disease (CKDu) in the dry zone, a condition now widely linked to agrochemical contamination of groundwater.

The corporatisation of seeds has further deepened this dependency. What was once a practice of farmers, particularly women farmers, saving and exchanging local seed varieties has been completely transferred to agribusiness corporations. Farmers now purchase inputs each season from companies rather than drawing on their own ecological and community knowledge. As participants noted, more and more people are relying on companies for seeds, tractor hire, and other supplies, while traditional farming methods are steadily eroded.

The influence of agribusiness extends beyond the field into policy. Macroeconomic priorities favouring industrialisation, urban development, and export-oriented commodity production have steadily undermined local agriculture. The field then is been shaped by commercial interests: farmers receive advice that encourages further monocropping, subsidy structures reward chemical input purchase, and market systems are organised in ways that marginalise small producers while concentrating buying power among large corporations. Government investment in rural agriculture has declined sharply, and private agribusiness has moved in to fill the gap - but on its own terms, deepening dependency rather than building resilience. These barriers are the outcomes of policy deliberately shaped to protect profit at the expense of rights.

Patriarchy and Gender in the Food system

Women play a key role within Sri Lanka's food system. They are responsible for growing crops, managing livestock, preparing food, conserving seeds and transferring traditional knowledge across generations. Women in South Asia is responsible for producing more than 50% of the food grown in the region. Yet despite this central role, the dignity, recognition and access afforded to them within the food system remains profoundly limited. Women are rarely formally recognised as farmers, a designation that, in Sri Lanka, carries with it access to land registration, agrarian support services, credit, markets and institutional representation.

Access to land and land ownership is the foundational barrier. Women farmers globally own only 2% of land, and Sri Lanka is no exception to this pattern. Without land title, women cannot register at Agrarian Service Centres, the gateway to government subsidies, extension services, market information and training. They are ineligible for membership in farmer organisations and cooperatives, eliminating their ability to engage in collective action, negotiate market prices or shape agricultural policy. As consultations found, exclusion from these spaces not only limits material access, it denies women farmers a sense of identity and formal recognition as producers at all.

Rural women and women farmers in particular, work more hours per day than their male counterparts when both productive and reproductive responsibilities are accounted for, yet this labor is underpaid and undervalued. Women's agricultural roles are frequently performed alongside domestic labour and classified as family responsibility rather than an economic activity. As a result, both the women themselves and their communities often do not identify them as farmers, even as they perform the work of farming every day.

Women farmers have historically been the primary custodians of indigenous seed varieties and traditional farming practices, conserving, exchanging, and replicating local seed varieties across generations as both an ecological and a cultural practice. The corporatisation of seeds, driven by agribusiness interest in proprietary varieties, has eroded this role. Women farmers in consultation notes that corporate control of seeds has taken away not only a practical agricultural function but also a source of identity, community standing, and intergenerational knowledge.

In response, many women's farmer groups encountered during the commission's consultations have established community seed banks, collectively managed stores where farmers save, share, and protect local seed varieties within their groups. These initiatives represent not only a practical act of food production but a deliberate assertion of seed sovereignty and community resilience in the face of corporate encroachment. Protecting women's rights to seeds is therefore both a gender justice issue and a food sovereignty one.

Recommendations

It is not possible to envision a complete transformation of the food system in Sri Lanka based on the principles of justice, sustainability, and sovereignty within the current global economic and political order. Driven by the maximization of profits for global capital, the current order has pushed the entire world into multiple crises.

Countries like Sri Lanka can lead by example in complete ematic transformation, starting with our food system. The following set of recommendations can begin the country's path towards that goal.

1. The government of Sri Lanka must recognise the right to food, land, water, seeds and access to commons as **fundamental rights through a new constitution**.
2. Sri Lanka needs an immediate process of reforming our **policy framework on the food system**, including agriculture, fisheries, and trade, based on the principles of food sovereignty and agroecology. The government must appoint a committee to draft these policies in consultation with food producers, consumers, experts, and other stakeholders, with adequate avenues for feedback to ensure all perspectives are incorporated.

In parallel to policy reforms, it should develop an integrated action plan integrating relevant authorities, institutes, and producer organizations, that will ensure a unified vision, program framework, and coordination among different stakeholders to promote food sovereignty and agroecology.

This action plan should ensure proper coordination from the national to the local level and provide direction for research, innovation, and education priorities of the sectors. A dedicated authority must be established to oversee the implementation of the above action plan.

3. As a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP), the Sri Lankan Government should immediately take steps to enact the regulations through necessary legal and systemic reforms to ensure the rights of peasants and other rural producers are being protected. Simultaneously, the Sri Lankan Government should actively enact the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).
4. Develop a **national land-use policy** that prioritises the principles of food sovereignty. A meaningful consultation process with communities and other stakeholders must be followed. The capturing, and ,destruction of natural resources, farmland, grasslands and fishing grounds for development projects, investment projects, large-scale commercial monoculture projects, or sustainable energy projects that destroy food systems, local livelihoods, and ecosystems should be stopped immediately.
5. Priority Should be given for food production, and local livelihoods in the allocation and distribution of irrigation **water**, while also addressing the needs of other relevant sectors such as tourism, power generation, and wildlife conservation. Such measures should not undermine the rights to commons and must promote and protect the ecological balance of the respective localities. Access to water must be guaranteed as a fundamental right through appropriate legislative frameworks, and no legal or policy measures should be implemented that infringe or override this right. Furthermore, the diverse traditional methods of water utilization in local agricultural practices should be recognized and accommodated, while strengthening and safeguarding village irrigation systems that are intrinsically linked to the broader ecosystems of the relevant localities (eg: Ellanga/cascade systems).

6. Recognise farmers as the custodians of **traditional seed varieties**, allowing them to produce, preserve and exchange seeds. The Government should improve the facilities and functions of its existing national seed banks. These should undertake the production, protection and dissemination of indigenous seeds along with the farmers. Restrictions created to allow corporate ownership and control of seeds should be eliminated to ensure full seed sovereignty for the farmers.
7. **Renewable energy** projects should be planned in a way that they do not violate the food sovereignty and destroy ecosystems. Community-based sustainable energy should be encouraged.
8. The government must immediately halt the leasing and **privatization** of state estates, farms, and research centres, through the ‘Public-Private Partnership’ model as advised by international financial institutions and lenders.
9. Prioritise livelihoods and food sovereignty in signing **international and regional free trade agreements**. Steps must be taken to cease the import and export of food based solely on the conditions of such agreements, as these items affect the local farmers' food production processes and violate the people's right to quality food.
10. The government should play a key role in intervening and regulating food markets. Government institutions such as the Paddy Marketing Board and the Ceylon Fisheries Corporation should be strengthened to ensure **proper prices** for produce and affordable costs for producers. The Consumer Affairs Authority must more strictly enforce the Maximum Retail Price (scheme) throughout the year.
11. The government should actively engage in strengthening producer-led, **cooperative-based** processing and marketing systems, with a special focus on women-led producer and marketing groups through resources and capacity building.
12. Create mechanisms to support **community credit** and lending methods that strengthen a community’s agency and decision-making on their local economy. Laws and regulations that affect these savings and financial processes built up by communities must be abolished. The legal framework should prioritise regulating the predatory micro credit and other exploitative lending systems of financial companies, and provide justice for the victims.
13. Enough resources must be allocated to establish collectively-owned processing, preservation, and storage **systems** for agriculture, aquatic, and livestock production. It should also resource community-owned facilities for the same. The related infrastructure development around these facilities should be considered essential to national food sovereignty.
14. The government must ensure that small-scale food producer collectives have access to purchase **technologies and machinery** that are suitable for their livelihoods and at a reasonable price. Cooperative ownership must be or promoted for the relevant machinery or applications. In addition, the government must also facilitate education for producers and communities to gain knowledge to create their own technologies, and the support services necessary to maintain these.
15. Authorities must put in place guidelines on **food marketing and advertising**. It should implement legal measures to counter any misleading information present in advertisements or product labels that pose a risk to consumers’ health. In addition, steps must be taken to promote healthy consumption through a robust consumer education curriculum that prioritises local food options and its benefits.

16. Considering the severe effects of **climate change and disasters** on food security, the government must formulate a comprehensive disaster preparedness, mitigation, and rebuilding plan. The plan should be developed in consultation with local communities and ensure their participation in the implementation. The resilience of the environment, food, and livelihood systems should take priority in national responses to climate change and extreme weather events.
17. Right of all **women** in the food system should be ensured by recognising their contribution to the care economy, removing discriminatory barriers - legal, policy, social, institutional, practical - to access resources and the market, and ensuring women are a part of the decision-making processes around food production.
18. Immediate actions should be taken to meet the **long-term demands** of legal land rights for the Malaiyaha Tamil community and land release from under militarisation for communities in the Northern and Eastern provinces. Mechanisms to meet these demands must also ensure food sovereignty, that culture and livelihoods are preserved, and to provide all the requirements for a dignified life.
19. The government must develop a research and development program with the active **participation of youth** that can be effectively utilized in the transformation of the food system. This initiative will help attract younger generations who are moving away from the agriculture and fisheries sectors and reshape their identity as the future leaders and innovators of food production.

Annexures

1. Interview guidelines for facilitators

Brief explanation by the commissioner - the food system is about producing, value addition, marketing, and consumption of our food (and other agricultural products). The current food system has failed in providing good quality, nutritious food at an affordable cost to the consumers; it has failed in ensuring dignified livelihoods for producers, in many cases, current ways of producing food is destructive to our environmental systems. Within the current system, food producers lack political and social power to claim their rights.

We are discussing the alternatives that the participants are practicing to address these issues of our food system.

At Production:

What do you produce? Cultivation of crops, catching fish, rearing cattle, others - what are the alternative practices you are using to ensure sustainable (environmentally, economically, technically and socially) eg - reduce chemical and other external inputs, reduce environmental destruction, diversify production

Value addition:

Practices you adopt (or propose) in processing and value addition to your products, so you can sell them at a higher price without intermediary exploitation? How do you get the technology and knowledge require for that?

Marketing:

How do you sell? What alternative marketing systems have you develop (individual and collective) to sell your products, reducing exploitation and ensuring sustainable incomes

Resources:

What alternative mechanisms do you use (or propose) to ensure your ownership and access to resources including financial – credit, savings and loans, natural–land, water, seeds, technical–machinery, knowledge

Storage/Preservation:

What techniques or facilities do you use to store food/seeds, methods to preserve food?

Institutions:

What organizations are you part of (associations, cooperatives, authorities), your proposals for collective organizations of food producers to enable their political power (with special focus on women, marginalized groups)

Labour:

Your current alternative practices or proposals on how to organize labour to ensure dignified livelihoods for all and that ensures cost effectiveness of production

Consumption:

In most of the times, food producers do not have good quality food for their consumption (especially in plantations, large scale industrial agriculture farmers etc). What are your proposals to improve the food security / right to food of food producers) ?

Any other proposal to build sustainable, just food system ?

2. Questionnaire for participants

Name: _____

Location/village: _____

Sector: Paddy farming / fisheries / dairy / plantation / vegetables / other food crops / integrated farming

What is your main livelihood?

What do you grow/produce other than this?

Are you linked to any organisation or association? Please name it:

What resources do you own?

Land / machinery

3 Principles of Agroecology

Economic	Political	Environmental	Socio-cultural
Aims to enhance the power of local markets and build on a social and solidarity economy vision.	Encourages stronger participation of food producers/consumers in decision-making.	Enhances integration of various elements of agro-ecosystems (plants, animals,)	Encourages diversity and solidarity among peoples, encourages women and youth empowerment.
Increases resilience through diversification of farm incomes and strengthens community autonomy.	Requires supportive public policies and investments.	Eliminates the use of and dependence on agrochemicals.	Promotes healthy diets and livelihoods.
Promotes fair, short distribution webs, producers, and consumers working together.	Encourages new forms of decentralized, collective, participatory governance of food systems.	Nourishes biodiversity and soils.	Strengthens food producers, local communities, culture, knowledge, and spirituality.
	Aims to put control of seeds, land, and territories in the hands of people.	Supports resilience and adaptation to climate change.	Promotes farmer-to-farmer exchanges for sharing knowledge.

AS LONG AS FOOD IS TREATED AS A COMMODITY RATHER THAN A COMMONS, HUNGER WILL REMAIN NOT A FAILURE OF PRODUCTION, BUT A FEATURE OF THE SYSTEM. FOOD SOVEREIGNTY OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESTRUCTURE OUR FOOD SYSTEM – FROM ONE WHICH IS PROFIT-ORIENTED, TO ONE DESIGNED TO HELP BOTH PEOPLE AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

