



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2018, Ghent

“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Rural-Urban Linkages- A ‘mirage’ or a ‘myth’: Evidence from Rural markets in Eastern Sri Lanka

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Abstract

In recent years, growing recognition that rural and urban areas have become increasingly interconnected through a constant movement of people, goods, capital, ideas and information. Rural markets in Sri Lanka play the twin roles of facilitating the interaction between retailers, producers and consumers. A rural market study was done in the Ampara and Batticaloa districts of the Eastern Province in Sri Lanka to ascertain the geographical coverage and their links with urban markets. It also attempted to verify von Thunen’s ‘Central Place Theory’ of service centres in a region. Secondary and primary data was used, and a field survey of randomly selected 30 rural markets was conducted. The GIS ARC-Info software was used to ascertain coverage of rural markets. The results indicated that rural markets act as ‘central places’ in both districts, and they covered a relatively moderate geographical area with an average radius of 4.5 kms. Also many of the rural markets had linkages within themselves through traders moving from one market to another market nearby, while only rural markets close to urban areas had links with urban centres. Rural farm products were sparsely moving to urban centres, while products from other district urban markets were being transported to urban centres. This was due to the weak transport facilities in rural areas and poor link roads with urban centres and rural market places. Also most of the rural markets operating periodically have been another causal agent for the lack of strong rural-urban linkages to develop. The study suggests that regional policy should focus on enhancing rural road networks and transport facilities to foster better rural-urban linkages and enhancing rural and urban food security that would help communities to sustain themselves.

Keywords: Central places, geographical coverage, markets, rural-urban linkages, Sri Lanka