

# **Impact of the Provincial Council System on the Smallholder Agriculture in Sri Lanka**

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Although Sri Lanka has had nearly two decades of experience in the devolution of power, there is a dearth knowledge about the impact of the devolution on the development of smallholder agriculture. During this period, only a limited number of studies have been conducted on the general aspects of functioning of the Provincial Councils (PCs). Hence, the Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute conducted this study to assess the performance of the Provincial Councils in terms of developing the smallholder agricultural sector.

The study observes that, there are overlapping jurisdictional areas and definitions in constitutional provisions, legislative enactments and in administrative circulars. This situation gives rise to duplication of work, waste and even neglect of some task due to poor accountability for service delivery, lack of co-ordination and overlapping responsibilities. Provinces have adopted the system of democratic decentralization grudgingly. While the pressure for greater autonomy to the provinces has increased, the province is pulling in the opposite direction in retaining or centralizing power at a provincial level to the detriment of a local level. Although agriculture and agrarian services are devolved subjects, the Provincial Councils have a relatively low cadre for implementing the responsibilities. Agricultural extension, other than in interprovincial irrigation schemes is a Provincial Councils subject. However, Provincial Councils have no extension officer at the village level. Adequate linkage mechanisms between research and extension seem to be missing as a result of devolving the responsibility for extension to the provinces. Several issues and problems have emerged in the field of training due to the transfer of the three In Service Centres to the Provincial Councils resulting in under utilizing the capacities of the training centres, unsatisfactory maintenance of the centres. Belated approval of provincial action plans by the Finance Commission makes it difficult for the Provincial Councils to implement their activities.

Further, the research team recommends the following for the improvement of the provincial Council system and its impact on the smallholder agriculture in Sri Lanka. There should be clarity at the conceptual and operational levels regarding the role of each tier in the process of devolution and clear demarcation of functions among the tiers. The Provincial Councils should take immediate action to pass statutes in order to implement the powers meaningfully. With regard to agricultural extension, a village level extension worker should be assigned to the Provincial Department of Agriculture. It is also recommended to re-transfer the In-service Centres to the Centre for optimum utilization of resources. Provincial Councils Development Plan for the ensuing year should be approved by the Finance Commission before 31<sup>st</sup> December. A single Central Ministry for food production, livestock, Mahaweli irrigation and lands is recommended. The technical work performed by the Department of Agrarian Development should be done in close consultation and collaboration with the Provincial Councils.