

ROLE OF “SOCIAL NETWORKS” ON THE FORMATION OF “ETHNIC OCCUPATIONAL NICHES”: CASE OF PADDY FARMING SECTOR IN THE AMPARA DISTRICT IN SRI LANKA

Maqwool A.K.M, Udugama J.M.M and Jayasinghe-Mudalige U.K

This study examines empirically whether “*Ethnic Occupational Niches*” (EON), i.e. the concentration and specialization of members of an ethnic group in a particular occupational activity, exists in the paddy farming sector in the Ampara district of Sri Lanka, and in turn, it assesses the role of “*Social Networks*” (SNW), i.e. a linkage amongst the individuals in the society that is built up to strengthen friendships/kinships and/or financial exchange, on the formation of EON. The theoretical framework of the study was characterized by the *Model’s Concentration Index* (to estimate the strength of EON), the *Contact Availability* and the levels of knowledge and attitudes of farmers (to assess the role of SNW on EON). A personal interview supported by a structured questionnaire was carried out during April to June 2010 with 60 paddy farming households, which were selected based on a multi stage sampling technique such that 20 farmers represent each of the three major ethnic groups in the Ampara district [i.e. Muslims (44.7%); Sinhalese (35.8%); Tamil (19.5%)], to collect primary data and the secondary data on the farming communities were obtained from the Agrarian Services Centers. The Binary Logistic Regression analysis techniques were applied to estimate the coefficients of econometric model. The outcome of analysis shows that the formation of EON in Ampara district is positively and significantly ($p = 0.01$) associated with the potential role of SNW as well as the financial availability and scale of operation of the farming system. More specifically, the Tamil ethnic group in Ampara district possess the highest Concentration Index (1.99) suggesting that it is likely to be concentrated in activities related to paddy farming almost twice as other ethnic groups (i.e. Sinhalese and Muslims).

Key Words: Ethnic occupational niche, Paddy farming sector, Social networks

Dept. of Agribusiness Management, Faculty of Agriculture and Plantation Management, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, E-mail: udith@hotmail.com