

Are Young Women Abandoning Agriculture in Sri Lanka? Livelihood Choices of Rural Women

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Abstract

Livelihood diversification among rural youth reflects potential impacts on agricultural sector of Sri Lanka. Due to the uneven gender distribution of youths in the population, gender-based assessment of livelihood choice & migration decision is an urging requirement. Therefore, this study was designed to assess the household and individual factors affecting rural female youths' choice of livelihood and their choice of migration. A national representative sample of rural youth was isolated from the secondary data compiled under the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) – 2016 by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) and a multinomial logit model under random utility framework was estimated to assess the livelihood diversification. A probit model of migration outcome was estimated to assess the rural youth's choice of migration. Results revealed that being a female youth makes the choice of livelihood less likely to be agriculture instead favours livelihoods apart from agriculture. Education act as an upward driver in choosing urban salaried employment while educated youth tend not to choose agriculture. However, age and education levels of the household heads do not influence the young women's livelihood decisions. Livestock holdings of the household exhibits a direct relationship with the young women's probable livelihood choice to be agriculture. The tendency to migrate reduces with increased access to agricultural land. Female youths are less likely to be migrated however married female youth exhibits significant propensity to be migrated. Majority (49%) of rural young women are students of any kind. High unemployment prevails among young women and 22% of young women were engaged in household activities while only 14% being employed. Thus, the study suggests policy reformations to promote domestic level entrepreneurship for economic empowerment of young rural women.

Keywords: Gender inclusivity, Livelihood choices, Rural youth, Sustainable agriculture, Women empowerment

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