## Abstract

This study attempts to understand the nature and the causes of food insecurity and the possible policy alternatives in improving food security in the Moneragala district of Sri Lanka. Different measures are used to examine the nature of food security at the household level in this district's rural areas. Most of the measures that used in this study gave only a partial picture of food insecurity. Particularly, self-sufficiency ratio led to misguided conclusion regarding food security of farming households. Engel co-efficient was identified as a best indicator of food security because this not only identifies the sources of food security but also explores alternative policies for improving food security. Thus Engel co-efficient leads to thorough policy analysis of food security. Further this integrated approach emphasizes the importance of food self-reliance rather than food self-sufficiency in improving household level food security. According to the Engel co-efficient, there are three sources of food insecurity: low productivity in home-produced agricultural crops, low income, and high food prices. The study shows how the first two sources have mostly afflicted the food security of poor households. The findings of the research further reveal that marginal farmers and semi-marginal farmers face both chronic and transitory food insecurity. Transitory food insecurity is a short-term phenomenon usually resulting from drought, heavy rain or crop destruction from wild animals. Chronic food insecurity is a long-term phenomenon and is an outcome of income poverty.

An econometric analysis is carried out to investigate the sources of the two proximity causes of food insecurity: income poverty and low productivity in home-produced agricultural crops. The estimated income function indicates that insufficient capital stock, small farm sizes, low levels of education, lack of electricity at the village level, and seasonal unemployment are the indirect sources of the demand side of food insecurity. The estimated production function shows that such supply-side factors as the lack of capital stock, lack of agricultural credit, low levels of education, and small farm sizes contribute to the low productivity of home-produced agricultural crops and therefore to the food insecurity of farming households. An efficiency analysis of the frontier production function indicates that the agricultural sector in Moneragala suffer from a high level of inefficiency due to low levels of education and lack of agricultural credit facilities for these households.

In the light of the empirical models, this study further attempts to identify potential strategies for improving the food security of the Moneragala district. In the short run, it is necessary to provide a safety net for farming households who suffer from transitory food insecurity. In the long run, economic development is necessary in order to eliminate chronic food insecurity at the household level. More specifically, a long run food security strategy entails the stimulation of economic growth, poverty reduction, agricultural commodity price stabilization and the strengthening of rural agrarian institutions at the village level. All of these elements should be included in the major policies of a rural development strategy that leads to improve food security at the household level in rural areas of Moneragala district in Sri Lanka.