BLOCK (GROUP) DEMONSTRATION PROGRAMME IN SRI LANKA

BY

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In 1983, Block Demonstration Programme for rice Production was initiated in Sri Lanka by the Extension Division of the Department of Agriculture (DOA). This is not a completely new concept to Sri Lankan farming society as this has some features common with "YAYA ADARSANA" and "WALAGAMBAHUWA CONCEPT". This is a group Agricultural extension method coupled with credit and input supply.Block Demonstration (B.D) programme could also be viewed as a system where a number of farmers get together to form a groupand cultivate in unison a contiguous block of land, adopting improved crop production technology and using inputs supplied by

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* Paper presented at the DOA seminar held at Inservice Training Institute, Gannoruwa on the 30th of October 1990.

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different institutions such as Agricultural Extension and Agrarian Services. It was initially operated as a collectively managed credit scheme that eventually became self supporting with the savings of the farmer groups, leading to increased production that enabled the farmers to improve their living standards.

The primary objective of the Block Demonstration Programme is to raise the standard of living of the small farmers through efficient management of their agricultural resources with easy credit facilities arranged to obtain inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and agrochemicals.

Agricultural extension educators could view this programme as a method of extension education where farmers are educated in two major disciplines. Firstly, this had increased the farmer's resource management efficiency and secondly, improved the farmer's technological efficiency, for agricultural production (land, water, labour, capital, input and information are considered as resources for agricultural production) The satisfactory outcome of the initial programme resulted in the expansion of BD

throughout Sri Lanka. Today there are 110 blocks in operation, executed by the DOA in collaboration with the Department of Agrarian Services and Mahaweli Economic Agency, with assistance from the F.A.O. fertilizer project. (List of Block Demonstrations established from 1983 to 1990 is given in appendix 1)

1. Traditionally there are two types of Demonstrations;
   (a) Method demonstrations
   (b) Result demonstrations

   B.D has some special features, and is a demonstration coupled with credit and input supply, This could be categorized as a third type of demonstrations;namely "group demonstration". In this programme, in addition to knowledge transfer (as in method and result demonstrations) a complete technology transfer has taken place.

2. "Group demonstration" concept is technically and socially compatible with peasant agricultural system in Sri Lanka. The technologies such as integrated pest management, water management, integrated

plant nutrient system, timely cultivation, and collective cultivation, cannot be practised by an individual small farmer independently. A collective approach is an essential component in present day agriculture in Sri Lanka.

3. In the Block Demonstration Programme while the farmers technological efficiency and their resource management skills increased, decision making abilities also improved. Farmers' leadership skills were also enhanced. This programme in addition to offering new technology, also prepares the farmers to accept these new technologies. Therefore, B.D programme is an excellent extension method in totality.

4. In the B.D programme, planning is not done in idea tight compartments. All disciplines are integrated and planning is done with the farmers participation.

5. Block Demonstration could also be used as an extension tool.

6. Block demonstration is a long term demonstration. Once the initial cost is

invested, no maintenance cost is required, season after season unlike in other demonstration programmes. The initial cost could be fully recovered after 5-6 seasons when Block Demonstration matures. This could be successfully implemented with financial assistance from local banks. People's participation for organization of "field days" and farmers training classes could be easily obtained through BD Programmes. Expenses for these programmes could be easily met by the funds of the BD.

7. In the adoption process, demonstrations are useful to create awareness and generate interest on the technologies among the farmers. But in the BD programme, farmers have opportunities to undergo all the five steps of adoption process (awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption). This may be the reason why farmers show high adoption rates of new technologies, where they are involved in ogrammes.

8. Since block demonstration cover a large extent (normally 10-15 ha), clear, visible effects of the recommended practices, could

be seen by the clientele. Since a large number of farmers are involved in the demonstrations, positive attitudes are developed towards the recommended practices. Due to these reasons, the effectiveness of demonstration efforts of the BD programme are comparatively high.

9. Today individual methods of extension have to be restricted due to withdrawal of village level extension workers from the extension division. Therefore one has to rely more on group methods of extension and mass communication. Therefore BD as a group method has become a very important tool for extension.

Some facts to prove its success

It has been observed over the past 8 years, that almost all the Block Demonstrations conducted in the provinces have resulted in remarkable increases in rice yield. (Table 1).

As shown in Table 1, it is clearly visible that the recovery rate of loans given to farmers in 1986 is nearly 100% in the BD programme. In comparison the recovery rate of agricultural loans taken from commercial banks was about 60%

in the same year.

There is evidence to show that the farmers in BD programme are comparatively more involved in social activities in the village, than the other farmers. They participate frequently in social activities such as religious ceremonies, "shramadana" and cultural activities. Other government agencies such as Agrarian Services Committee, and marketing agencies also keep their links with the village through these farmer' groups.

There are about 6 matured Block Demonstrations continuing their agricultural operations (Table 111). These farmer groups have donated their initial loan (revolving fund) to other groups and are now self reliant to sustain their agricultural activities.

These facts clearly indicate that extension is highly efficient when it goes with credit and input supply to the small farmers.

Some of the advantages mentioned earlier could be the reason that 2640 farmers of 112 groups in 15 districts are presently enjoying the facilities of the programme. This programme has utilized Rs.3.3 million. Every season the

revolving fund enable achieving an approximate output of about Rs.17.4 million worth of agricultural produce to the nation.

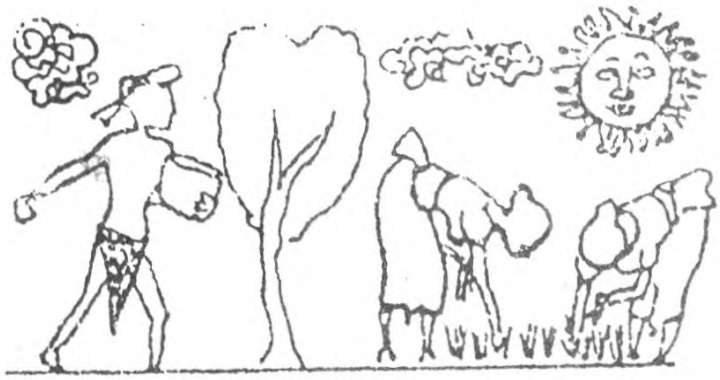

Table 1: Average Rice Yield Increases observed in BD Progress

Province	No.of BDD conducted from 1983-1990			Average Maha rice yield recorded prior to BD		Average Maha rice yield recorded in BD	
	No	Total extent (ha)	Number of farmers (No)	Bu/ Ac	MT/ Ha	Bu/ Ac	MT/ Ha
Western	19	120.95	480	46.5	2.3	78.5	3.9
Sabaragamuwa	12	156.00	275	50.0	2.5	80.0	4.0
Uva	7	55.40	81	50.0	2.5	75.0	3.7
Southern	10	142.50	252	41.0	2.05	82.5	4.1
Central	14	133.26	350	47.0	2.35	70.0	3.5
North West	13	83.95	275	40.0	2.0	85.0	4.25
North Central	11	138.50	257	50.0	2.5	95.0	4.75
North East	22	194.00	370	65.0	3.25	78.0	3.9

Table 2 - Recovery of loans taken by BD farmers in 89/90 Maha Season

Amount invested at the beginning	Amount repaid at the end of the season		Amount in farmer's savings fund	
Rs.	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
1,150,392.20	1,103,923.50	95.96	137047.00	11.8

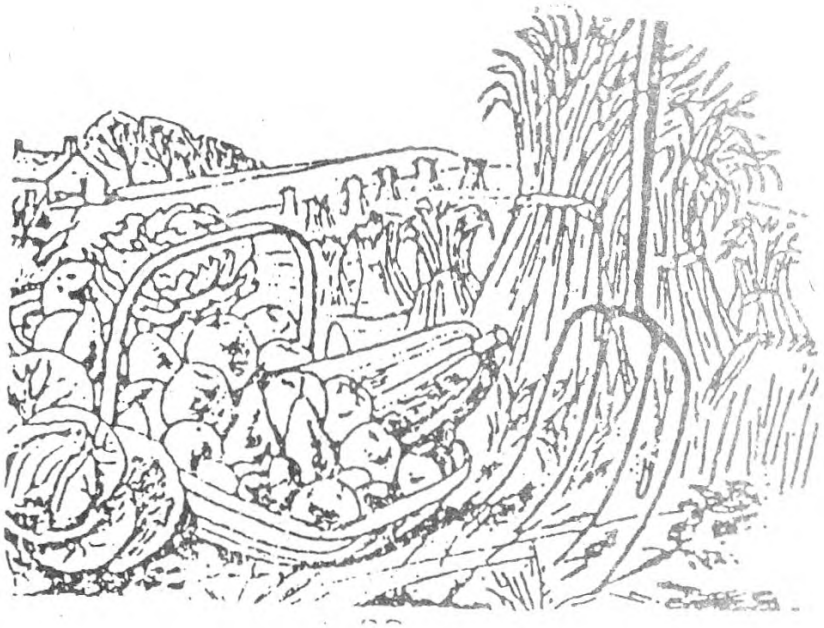

Table 3 - List of Matured Block Demonstrations

District	Name of BD	Season		No. of farmers	Extent ha.	Fund Rs.	Amount banked Rs.
		Started	Matured				
Ampara	Mahanagapura	85 Yala	88/89M	15	6.1	23250	15000.00
Ampara	Dematamal pelessa	84 Yala	86 Yala	16	12.2	23250	10000.00
Gampaha	Bopatte	85/86M	88 Yala	43	8.5	19836	19836.00
Gampaha	Neligama	85 Yala	87 Yala	42	8.0	20263	20263.00
Kilinochchi	Kanthankulam	84/85M	86/87M	12	8.0	25600	25600.00
Matale	Nagahalhena Ukuwela	86 Yala	89 Yala	20	8.0	14375	14234.00