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Editorial

The agricultural sector in Sri Lanka is faced with numerous challenges, including the high cost of production and profitability, poor value addition, fragmented food supply chains, lower land and crop productivity, land fragmentation and high postharvest losses and food wastage. Further, external factors such as climate and environmental change and the unfolding Covid 19 pandemic is exerting increasing pressure on the already fragile agricultural sector. To address these issues in an inherently complex agricultural system with many interrelated components and stakeholders with diverse interest, it is necessary to adopt a systems approach.

In recent years, many countries spearheaded by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has adopted a holistic and multi-faceted approach known as “food system” to address agricultural issues which focuses well beyond enhancing agricultural productivity. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines a food system as “the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption and disposal of food products that originate from agriculture, forestry or fisheries, and parts of the broader economic, societal and natural environments in which they are embedded”. Although globally, there is a significant interest in the food system discourse, it is a relatively new concept in Sri Lanka. It is a misconception to believe that improving one element of the food supply chain (e.g., intensification of crop production) that it will automatically improve the efficiency of the entire supply chain. This is a mistake often made by policymakers and high-level stakeholders in Sri Lanka. Therefore, it is necessary to view challenges in the agricultural sector from a food system perspective as it would enable them to come up with better solutions. This would be made possible when the interrelationships of various elements of the food system are taken into account from interdisciplinary multiple perspectives and a holistic way avoiding unintended effects from intervention in one part of the system negatively affecting another.

A food-systems approach would bring substantial benefits to create synergy among the diverse set of stakeholders, provide insights and directions for policymakers and make policymakers to realize the need to reform food systems for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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