

Editorial

Insights from Japanese Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) for Building Resilient Local Food Systems in Sri Lanka

Food systems are facing numerous challenges, including climate change, population growth, pandemic disruptions, food waste, and resource depletion. Food systems must become more resilient to ensure access to food, while also providing livelihoods for a significant portion of the poorest households that depend on agriculture. A transformation of food systems towards sustainable, resilient, healthy, and socially recognized food systems has become the need of the hour. Global experience has shown that community-supported agriculture (CSA) can play a key role in developing resilient and sustainable local food systems.

CSAs in developing countries have received limited attention in scholarly research, with the majority of available literature originating from countries such as the United States, certain European countries, Japan, and China. Therefore, more studies are necessary to explore the development of community-supported agriculture in developing countries (Sulistyowati et al., 2023). Special attention should be given to understanding how the good practices from these countries can be adopted to enhance community-supported agriculture, particularly in the context of building resilient local food systems.

This brief communication aims to provide insights into the role of communities in building resilient food systems. It highlights the significance of local knowledge, social capital, and community-based initiatives, drawing valuable insights from community-supported agriculture in Japan, considered a pioneer in this agricultural approach. The chisan-chisho and teikei movements are two well-known community-supported agriculture movements in Japan with high relevance for Sri Lanka. Community-supported agriculture in Japan emerged in the late 1960s (Hitchman, 2019), which is known as teikei, meaning cooperation. This was strongly influenced by the consumer movement. Japanese consumers actively supported organic farmers to enable the production of healthy food for themselves (Sulistyowati et al., 2023). Another notable food movement in Japan is the chisan-chisho movement, which advocates for the localization of food consumption and emerged in the late 1990s. Chisan-chisho emerged in response to a crisis in the Japanese food system, particularly the ongoing decline of agriculture and rural communities, as well as incidents of food scandals (Kimura Nishiyama, 2008).

A meaningful parallel emerges between Japan's chisan-chisho and teikei movements and native agricultural systems in Sri Lanka, particularly Kandyan home gardens, organic farming, and farmers' markets. Both in Japan and Sri Lanka, these initiatives share common ground in promoting locally sourced, sustainable agriculture, fostering community connections, and advancing resilient food systems.

The Teikei Movement

The teikei movement is recognized as the Japanese counterpart of community-supported agriculture. Distinguished by a co-partnership model between consumers and producers, teikei involves direct exchanges of organic foods. Originating as a response to the adverse impacts of industrialized agriculture, which include excessive use of inputs and agrochemicals, environmental degradation, and extended supply chains, the core objectives of the movement are centred around enhancing self-reliance, building resilient local food systems, and conserving natural resources.

Teikei's ten principles encompass mutual assistance, sustainable production, accepting produce, mutual concession in price-setting, fostering friendships, self-distribution, democratic management, learning within each group, and maintaining an appropriate group scale. These principles offer deep insights into the numerous benefits that can be achieved through community-supported agriculture. By adopting these principles, teikei not only fosters a direct and mutually beneficial relationship between consumers and farmers but also generates broader advantages for communities. It delivers social, ecological, and economic benefits to communities. The significance of this movement is particularly relevant in the context of Sri Lanka's organic agriculture sector, which has experienced significant setbacks due to inconsistent policy changes. The country's haphazard policy shift, which involved a total ban on agrochemicals in an attempt to eliminate the use of chemical fertilizers and agrochemicals, had serious implications for the country's food security in general and the organic agriculture sector in particular after withdrawing the ban within less than a year of imposing it.

The insights derived from the teikei movement, coupled with an understanding of the principles that have proven successful in fostering resilient and sustainable agriculture, could be valuable for revitalizing Sri Lanka's organic agriculture sector. As efforts are made to rebuild and strengthen this crucial sector, it becomes imperative to integrate it into the local food system to revitalize rural society. The lessons learned from the teikei movement can guide strategic planning, policy formulation, and community engagement initiatives, facilitating a more sustainable, self-reliant, and socially impactful organic agriculture sector in Sri Lanka.

The Chisan-Chisho Movement

The chisan-chisho movement, with the Japanese meaning of "locally produced, locally consumed," has been recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) and the Japan Agricultural Cooperative (JA). Positioned as a strategic tool for achieving national food security and rural revitalization. According to Kimura and Nishiyama (2008), the chisan-chisho movement typically makes several claims about local food. Firstly, the chisan-chisho movement emphasizes the establishment of a direct connection between geographical proximity and food safety and trust. This belief is based on the idea that when consumers interact directly with local farmers, they develop a strong connection that improves the trustworthiness and safety of the food they consume. Secondly, the movement connects local food production to increased self-sufficiency, thereby contributing to local economic growth. The emphasis on supporting local producers not only strengthens the economic fabric but also fosters a sense of community and shared responsibility. The geographical proximity inherent in the chisan-chisho model is tied to environmental sustainability. The reduction in ecological costs associated with transportation and energy use is a crucial aspect, aligning with global efforts to minimize the carbon footprint of food production.

Fourthly, the movement promotes a unique traditional food culture, strengthening communal bonds. By preserving and celebrating local culinary traditions, the chisan-chisho approach becomes a catalyst for cultural sustainability. Lastly, the chisan-chisho movement champions local food as the foundation of a healthier diet, in contrast to conventional, fast, and mass-produced alternatives. This principle aligns with the global trend of prioritizing fresh, locally sourced produce to improve health outcomes and environmental sustainability.

Conclusions

Understanding how the adoption of the chisan-chisho model and its principles guides stakeholder operations is of paramount importance. This insight not only enhances the fabric of local socio-ecological production systems but also establishes crucial connections with local consumers. In the context of Sri Lanka, where the renowned Kandyan home gardens are recognized as socio-ecological production systems, applying lessons from the chisan-chisho movement can further strengthen these systems and extend this sustainable production system by connecting local producers and consumers through farmers' markets. Strengthening local connections between producers and consumers is essential for promoting sustainable agricultural practices and ensuring the resilience of socio-ecological production systems in response to evolving global challenges like climate change.

As we reflect on the transformative potential of community-supported agriculture, it is imperative to recognize the broader implications for Sri Lanka. Beyond mere agricultural practices, the lessons learned from Japan's CSA movements have far-reaching consequences for community well-being, economic growth, and environmental stewardship. Given the potential of our traditional food systems to build resilience, it is high time Sri Lanka learned from other countries, such as Japan's experience with CSA. By embracing the principles of chisan-chishou and teikei, Sri Lanka can promote more sustainable and resilient local food systems, ensuring a brighter and healthier future for its people. However, the implementation of lessons from Japanese CSA into Sri Lanka is not without its challenges. Socioeconomic and cultural factors, along with the need for customized policy interventions, must be taken into consideration. Yet, amidst these challenges, there are opportunities for innovation and adaptation, which can foster a resilient and sustainable future for Sri Lanka's agriculture.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4038/suslj.v19i2.7785>