

Flexibility and Resilience of Rice Value Chain: A Case of Urban Food Supplies in Sri Lanka during Covid-19 Pandemic

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Covid 19, a fatal virus, has challenged the livelihood of people around the world and has created a tough time not only for poor countries but also for powerful nations. Agricultural value chains, feeding the people, flows through the diverse landscapes have lost their connection due to lockdowns, curfews, restricted movements, import and export bans, and the closure of ports and airports. We attempted to explore the flexibility, resilience and risk of the rice value chain in urban food supplies during the Covid 19 pandemic. The study sample encompassed 110 rice value chain actors including farmers, collectors, millers, wholesalers and retailers who are supplying rice to the Colombo and Gampaha districts. A structured questionnaire was the main data collection tool and in-depth interviews with key players were instrumental in collecting qualitative data on value chain risks, flexibilities and resilience during the pandemic. Intermediaries, especially the collectors, millers and wholesalers were placed more attention on delivery and logistic costs compared to farm gate prices. The main risks of the rice value chain identified were the logistic issues along with barriers on connection with upstream of the value chain, fragile distribution networks, limited market access, the risk of competition due to alternative suppliers, and health regulations. The risks were managed through flexible arrangements made by the value chain actors; direct sourcing, collaborative efforts, cross-functional engagement and mobile markets and through digital networks like e-commerce and mobile commerce interventions. Due to the increase in demand for rice supply chains during the Covid 19 pandemic, the retail sector was given more prominence for resilience as the value chain lost its connection with the customers. Home deliveries, online orders through mobile phones, credit facilities were introduced to meet this situation.

Keywords: Flexibilities, Risks, Rice value chain, Resilience