

Viewpoint: Collapse of Sri Lankan organic-only farming experiment remains warning about putting ideology ahead of science and common sense

Having put an end to a bloody guerrilla war that had been dragging on for three decades, Sri Lanka had achieved the status of an upper-middle income country and seemed destined for stable and lasting growth. This did not happen and the country slipped into the tunnel of an economic crisis which soon became a political and humanitarian crisis. This crisis is the result of a series of competing factors.

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Precisely to limit foreign currency flows, the government has decided to make a forced transition of the entire agricultural sector to organic farming, with the renunciation of advanced technologies and in particular that of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides (insecticides, fungicides and herbicides), produced abroad and for which the government financed farmers. The key event of this policy was the ban on the import and use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides made operational on 27 April 2021 by the Council of Ministers on the proposal of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa,

As a result of the ban, the yields of the main crops have fallen by 30-50%. Among the most affected rice crops, the main food for the Ceylon population, and the main agricultural export products, namely tea (with economic losses estimated at 425 million dollars) and then rubber, coconut and spices (Shah, 2022).

[Editor's Note: This article has been translated from Italian and edited for clarity.]

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