

ACCESS AND USE OF INFORMATION BY RUBBER SMALLHOLDERS IN WARAKAPOLA DIVISIONAL SECRETARIAT AREA

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Sri Lankan rubber sector comprises the estate sector and the smallholdings sector, while 77% of total production was from smallholders in 2014. Although smallholdings sector dominates, its average productivity is 65 kg ac⁻¹ month⁻¹ compared to the targeted 140 kg ac⁻¹ month⁻¹. One of the major reasons is inefficiency in access to and use of technical information by farmers. Access to information is a must in increasing yield though little empirical work has been done in this regard. This study was carried out to determine the access to and use of information by rubber smallholders. The multistage random sampling procedure was applied to select 60 respondents from Kegalle District for the survey. Descriptive analysis showed that 75% of rubber smallholders received information mainly from Rubber Development Officers, while only five percent had obtained from the followers. Information need assessment indicated that tapping, post-harvest operations, management practices and information on pest and diseases are the key information demanded by farmers. Analysis of farmers' attitudes showed that 90% of farmers are well aware about the importance of information on yield increase and cost reduction but 75% reported that essential information cannot be obtained quickly. Similarly, 65% of farmers reported that new information is not easily applicable. Lack of facilities and reduction of academic qualification of extension officers contributed to this situation. Regression analysis shows that age and education level of the farmer with access to information have positive relationship with yield. The average yield of the farmers with access to information was 63.8 kg ac⁻¹ month⁻¹ while the corresponding value for the farmers with no access was 51.3 kg ac⁻¹ month⁻¹. The study stresses the need of improving the government extension service by providing facilities such as office equipment, field transport to the extension officers and upgrading academic qualifications to the degree level, as in the past.

Keywords: Information access, Rubber smallholders, Rubber yield, Warakapola divisional secretariat area