

SOCIO-ECONOMIC, CULTURAL AND AGRONOMIC LIMITATIONS FOR ADAPTATION OF RUBBER CULTIVATION IN NORTHERN PROVINCE OF SRI LANKA

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The Government of Sri Lanka has taken a decision to expand the rubber cultivation to non-traditional areas with drier climates in the country. With the success of rubber cultivation in the Eastern Province, the Northern Province has now been the next focus in the expansion process. Despite the evidence of having reasonable growth with an average annual girthing rate of 8.6cm and acceptable climatic conditions in this region, rubber cultivation has only been successful in Vavuniya district. Therefore, the present study was conducted in Vavuniya, Mulaithiv and Kilinochchi districts in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka to identify possible socio economic, cultural and agronomic limitations affecting the adoption of rubber cultivation. Further, it was expected to identify farmer perceptions on the promotion of expansion process. All the farmers with successful rubber cultivation in each district were selected along with similar numbers of unsuccessful farmers and farmers who are willing to cultivate rubber. Information was gathered using semi-structured farmer interviews. Factors affecting the success of the rubber cultivation were determined using logistic regression method testing socio economic, socio-cultural and agronomic variables. Language skills, usage of mulch, ethnicity, affiliation to social organizations and availability of water source were identified as factors significantly correlated to the success of rubber cultivation. Based on the results, it could be concluded that success of rubber cultivation in Northern Province of Sri Lanka is mainly dependent on Sinhala language proficiency of farmers and usage of mulch as a soil conservation practice at the early stage of growth of rubber plants. Therefore, proper technology dissemination programs are to be launched considering these factors. Although many farmers failed in rubber cultivation, their perception on cultivating rubber are still optimistic, demanding organizational support for initial establishment. Involvement of government and non-government organizations and social interactions among farmer communities are important in this regard.

Keywords: Rubber, Dry zone, Farmer perception, Cultural factors, Socioeconomic factors, Agronomic factors