

AWARENESS AND ADOPTION OF ENVIRONMENT-FRIENDLY AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES BY FAIRTRADE-CERTIFIED SMALL-SCALE TEA PRODUCERS IN THE CENTRAL PROVINCE, SRI LANKA

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Fairtrade systems support achieving sustainable development and healthy agroecosystems. However, the limited and indistinguishable effect of Fairtrade on the producers' environment-friendly agricultural practices (EAPs) challenged attaining desired outcomes. This study aimed to investigate the awareness and adoption of EAP by Fairtrade-certified small-scale tea producers (FTPs) in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. A survey was conducted using 100 FTPs and 50 conventional small-scale tea producers (CTPs) selected by stratified random sampling technique. The primary data were collected using a pre-tested structured questionnaire including questions and statements on EAPs, covering five key areas; integrated pest management (IPM), proper handling of pesticides, soil and water management, waste management, and climate change adaptation. Data were analysed using Chi-Square, Mann Whitney-U test, and Spearman correlation techniques in SPSS 20. Findings revealed that FTPs have better awareness and adoption of EAPs than CTPs ($p < 0.01$), yet both groups have unfilled gaps for perfect awareness and adoption of EAPs. Awareness and adoption of IPM and climate change adaptation are relatively lower among FTPs. Awareness of IPM, pesticide handling, and adoption of climate change adaptation and waste management are relatively low among CTPs. Improving awareness demonstrates a higher tendency for better adoption of EAPs ($p < 0.01$) while having better education, more experience, sufficient training, and extension services indicates a higher tendency to improve awareness ($p < 0.05$). This study suggests complying the small-scale tea producers with Fairtrade or similar standards, along with the continuous extension services for capacity development of tea producers for achieving environment-friendly tea production in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Capacity development, Certifications, Compliance, Climate change, Sustainability