

Rural livelihood of smallholder rubber farmers in Eastern Province of Sri Lanka

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Being a war-torn region, Eastern province of Sri Lanka has been targeted for rapid development programmes by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL). With no sufficient lands available for further rubber cultivation in its traditionally grown wet areas to meet the demand, moderately dry areas of the country have also been targeted for rubber cultivation. Lands left after the shifting cultivation in these regions have been focused with collaboration of the peasant community whose livelihood depends largely on seasonal crops grown on these lands. Therefore, it is expected to raise the livelihood of this community by introducing rubber as a permanent income source. Moreover, tree cover of the country is to be increased. In line with all above objectives of the GoSL, rubber was established in limited smallholdings of a selected village coming under the Intermediate zone of Eastern province. Since initial agronomic assessments were in favour of rubber cultivation in this sub set of the region, a rapid livelihood analysis was conducted in the village to assess the impact of this intervention in rural livelihood.

Unlike seasonal crops which were confined to specific periods depending on rainfall pattern, rubber demanded labour throughout the year with an average of 5.5 day per person per month. In absence of other agricultural activities, farmers generally allocated time on rubber cultivation. However, there was a competition between rubber and other crops for labour at the beginning of Maha season (i.e. September to November, if rubber planting done). Expenditure was mainly on subsistence and agriculture related activities and it was generally below Rs. 5,000 per household in most of months. New Year celebration in April required an additional of ca. Rs. 5,000-10,000. Construction activities, mainly the house repairs were carried out during June to September. Due to the dependency on seasonal crops, the income varied largely from month to month. Except for December-January and March-April, the income of the majority from agriculture was limited a value less than Rs. 3,000 per month. Coping mechanisms are also discussed.

Key words: Rubber, dry areas, smallholder, intercropping, livelihood, Eastern Province - Sri Lanka

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