

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT

Declining rubber extent is an issue of national concern to Sri Lanka. This is mainly due to change in land use in traditional rubber growing areas in the wet zone of Sri Lanka. Further, new planting programmes in these areas remain at a very low level due to non-availability of land. The state response towards this issue was expanding rubber into non-traditional areas in Uva and Eastern provinces where land and labour are assumed to be non-limiting factors. Being a new initiative, there is a high degree of uncertainty about the sustainability of the attempt on expanding rubber into non-traditional areas due to inadequacy in knowledge on environmental, socio-economic, technological and institutional aspects. This necessitated a detail study of the above issues. This study was focused on smallholder rubber farmers in the Moneragala district and adjacent parts of Ampara and Badulla districts with the main objective of identifying the issues and perspectives of them to rectify inadequacies in knowledge on environmental, social, economic, technological and institutional aspects which appear in different magnitudes.

This study focused 21 sites representing non-traditional rubber growing areas of Moneragala, Badulla and Ampara districts. Participatory studies were conducted to identify issues, problems and perceptions of smallholder farmers, prioritizing extension needs, testing awareness and adoption of recommended technologies and to identify resources in these areas. A total of 255, 248 and 143 rubber farmers were interviewed during the study in 2007/2008 under the respective categories of potential, immature and mature conditions. Digital information and maps including land use were collected from Survey department and Land use and planning division, Moneragala. Land suitability monitoring was done in 13 sites.

To achieve the targets in rubber cultivation, there will be no threat to natural forests since there is enough land under shrub jungles, chena and grasslands. The study identified the available lands (barren lands, grasslands, shrub lands and under-utilized lands through GIS approach and nearly 6% (34,752 ha) of the identified land can be categorized under most suitable lands.

The farmers considered rubber as a good income source and it was the main reason for selecting rubber. Interest taken by the government, subsidy, popularity of the rubber crop and easy farming operations were considered as positive factors by the farmers in selecting rubber cultivation as a source of income.

The major issues in most of the areas were related to planting material. Due to the high demand on planting material, poor quality planting material have been released to the farmers in certain occasions. Further, delay in subsidy payments, poor knowledge on rubber farming, marketing problems and lack of training facilities were also raised as major issues in some areas. These issues suggest that there is a felt need for awareness raising activities. Among the environmental problems, prolonged droughts were the major issue and hence raising awareness on soil and moisture conservation should be an urgent action.

The study identified a technology transfer plan for the Moneragala district and adjacent parts of Badulla and Ampara districts. Farmers have considered workshops as the best media for dissemination followed by lectures and leaflets. These inputs may be used in effective extension planning for sustainable rubber cultivation in the non-traditional rubber growing areas of Sri Lanka..