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Tea Small Holdings Development Societies provide services such as inputs, extension, training, credit and sales of green leaf for the benefit of their members. However, by the end of 1995, less than half of the total tea smallholders had become members of those societies. The main objective of this study was to appraise the present situation and to identify some of the possible factors affecting success of these societies in order to suggest recommendations for improvements.

Investigations were carried out in a sample of societies in the Kegalle region using the social survey and Participatory Rural Appraisal methods. In the first stage, data on membership, activities undertaken, amount of savings and level of attendance at meetings were collected from 32 societies. Based on these variables a performance index to measure the success was developed. Using this index the societies were categorized into two. Five societies from each category were randomly selected in the second stage.

There was a wide variation among the societies in terms of the level of success. The socio-economic factors of the office bearers and situational variables did not show a significant relationship at 0.05 probability level with the success achieved. The productivity of the tea plots of the members, welfare activities, time of establishment and attitudes of members were found to be associated with success.

Inability to provide the expected benefits, dependency attitudes and ignorance of responsibility of the office bearers were found as factors that prevented the active involvement of members. The findings of this study could be advantageously used by the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority to improve these societies.