

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF PARTICIPATORY TRIALS ON LOW FREQUENCY TAPPING (LFT) IN KERALA

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Demonstration plots were established in the rubber smallholdings in different locations popularizing low frequency tapping (LFT) system by participatory monitoring and evaluation. The main objectives of the study were to analyse the socio-economic profile of the participating smallholdings and to identify the contributory factors/barriers for the adoption/non-adoption of LFT by the growers. The database consisted of a sample survey covering 48 participating rubber small growers and the tappers attached to the holdings. The analysis showed that the average size of demonstration plots (0.89 ha) is higher than the average size of rubber smallholdings in Kerala (0.50 ha) indicating that holding size is one of the factors prompting the adoption of LFT. The dependence on hired labour for tapping is higher and the size of holding (number of trees) emerges as the key factor facilitating the adoption of LFT in the case of holdings dependent on hired labour. The resistance from tappers to LFT was observed only in the smaller holdings mainly due to the loss of tapping days and increase in work load due to higher yield from unit area. The growers overcome the resistance by (i) resorting to self-tapping; (ii) by assuring employment to tappers in other grower's holdings; and (iii) by offering incentives for extra crop production. Availability of family labour is a key factor influencing the adoption of LFT in smaller size groups with less than 1 ha. rubber area. Despite the positive signals emerging from the scheme the scale neutrality of LFT remains suspect in the unique regional context of Kerala with smaller size of the holdings and higher dependence on hired labour. The study highlighted the need for appropriate institutional arrangements to overcome the in-built deficiencies of size and rigidities of the labour market for the effective implementation of LFT from a long-term perspective.

Keywords: Demonstration plots, Family labour, Low frequency tapping (LFT), Socio-economic evaluation, Stimulation

INTRODUCTION

Innovations and diffusion of new technologies are important factors in an economy's quest for sustainable growth. In India's natural rubber (NR) sector, though the introduction of high yielding clones has resulted in steady increase in yield levels and the adoption of advanced harvesting

methods have been thwarted by a host of factors. Given the clone, the tapping system which determines the number of tapping days according to the frequency of tapping and the tapping intensity, is one of the major factors influencing the productivity per unit area (Sivakumaran, 2000). Technological innovations in crop exploitation systems of