

(20)

Potential of Smallholder Rubber Farming Based Agro-tourism-A Case Study in Moneragala District in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Globally, tourism is rated as the fastest-growing industry and agro-tourism is an emerging, sustainable and very prospective sub-sector of tourism in the world which is still at the infant stage in Sri Lanka. This study was carried out to assess the possibilities of the Rubber farming based Agro-Tourism (RAT) in the smallholder rubber sector in Moneragala. The study covered 222 rubber smallholdings in eight rubber growing Divisional Secretariat (DS) Divisions and was conducted in 2019 through a questionnaire survey, focus group discussions and field level observations. Stratified random sampling technique was applied for the household survey. Data were analysed through descriptive and Spearman correlation analysis. Rubber Agro-tourism Potential Index (RAPI) was developed to measure the resource availability in rubber smallholdings to optimise the conditions in need for the development of RAT. The 18 potential rubber farming practices which can be offered to a tourist were identified. Based on the RAPI, Badalkumbura DS division was the most potential resourceful area for development of RAT in Moneragala. The younger farmers are more aware of the agro-tourism. Age ($r=-0.7578$), education level ($r=0.6110$) and farming experience ($r=0.7370$) of rubber farmers showed significant relationship with attitude for establishing RAT with 0.05 significant level, while rubber extent and memberships of the societies were not significant. Comparatively, more positive impacts of RAT were highlighted by rubber farmers. Lack of practical exposure to RAT and low level of different language skills were identified as major constraints by the farmers. Findings indicate that smallholder rubber farming based agro-tourism is a potential area to develop in the years to come. This study will enhance the benefits of agro-tourism as a sustainable rural development strategy in Moneragala district.

Keywords: Agro-tourism, Rubber smallholders, Rubber agro-tourism, Potential index