

An Assessment of Information Needs of the Tea Leaf Collectors in Kalutara and Matara Districts, Sri Lanka

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The tea industry plays a significant role in the country's economy. There are two types of leaf collectors namely factory line collectors and independent tea leaf collectors. The latter faces many difficulties such as unavailability of correct and up-to-date information at the time of decision making. Hence this study was carried out to explore the information needs of the independent tea leaf collectors concerning five information categories. A survey was conducted in Matara and Kalutara districts, which accounts for the highest leaf collection in 2018 in the low country, using a structured interview schedule. Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling (n=72). Data were analysed using descriptive methods. The mean age of the respondents was at 48 years, while the average monthly income was 37,000 LKR. The average green leaf collection per month was 13,000kg. The most common types of information requirements were weather information (71.83%), technological information related to collecting and transporting leaves (64.78%), price information (81.70%), and subsidies (78.90%). Nearly half the respondents (56.30%) were interested to receive information regarding loan services. Furthermore, the majority (65%) agreed that they are not satisfied with the information dissemination methods used by the tea factories. Many (62%) were not satisfied with information systems available for the tea smallholder community, including the leaf collectors. Access to mobile phones was satisfactory: feature phones (55%) and smartphones (44%). While most (83%) of the respondents agreed that it is easy to use ICT tools to record leaf collection information. The study concludes that the leaf collector community needs up-to-date and effective information systems that can support decision making thus it is necessary to develop suitable information systems to cater to the information needs of the leaf collectors.

Keywords: Tea leaf collector, information, needs, ICTs