

Perceived Livelihood Status of Tea Smallholders Suffered from Extreme Weather in Ratnapura District of Sri Lanka

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Climate change is an ever-increasing threat to mankind. Ratnapura District of Sri Lanka, having the highest number of tea smallholders is coming under the category of “highly vulnerable” for climate change and frequently face extreme weather events which ultimately affect the livelihood of tea smallholders. This study was conducted to assess the livelihood status of tea smallholders who had faced severe drought in 2016 and severe flood in 2017. Using multi-stage sampling, one hundred farmers were selected from worse affected areas in Ratnapura District. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Data analysis was done using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Changes in five major livelihood assets were measured using indices where each asset was given different weightage based on their importance to cope with climate change. Results showed that knowledge of tea smallholders’ on both causes and effects of climate change and adaptation to climate change was at a moderate level. Importantly all five assets of livelihood, which are important to cope with natural disasters, were at a medium level. Further, tea smallholders having lower incomes have suffered more from droughts and floods. Out of five livelihood assets, human, physical, financial and natural assets were significantly ($p < 0.05$) different among locations. However livelihood status did not show significant differences among Divisional Secretariat Divisions. Although there was a substantial economic loss associated with tea plant casualties that occurred due to droughts and floods, it could not show a significant association with the overall livelihood status of tea smallholders in the study area. Since the majority of tea smallholders were having some other sources of income, they were heritors of a moderate livelihood status. To make their lives better than that and make them more resilient, it is important to introduce and invest in climate-smart technologies to cope with the worst changes in the climate.

Keywords: Drought, Flood, Livelihood Assets, Perception, Tea Smallholder