

TRENDS IN EXTENSION METHODS FOR SMALLHOLDERS*

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of extension work is to teach the people living in rural communities, how to raise their standard of living by their own efforts and using wherever possible their own resources. Under this definition the extension worker has to arouse the interest of the people to overcome their problems themselves. But the Advisory Services Department of the RRI was organised solely to transfer technical information from the research workers to the producer. However the changing structure of the NR industry has brought about changes in the methods used. This article therefore discusses the future trends in extension methods, specially for smallholders.

Structure of the Advisory Department

The Advisory Services Department of the RRI Sri Lanka has 71 Rubber Extension Officers (R.E.O.) looking after the 71 ranges, into which the whole rubber growing area of Sri Lanka has been blocked out. They are supervised by ten Divisional Rubber Extension Officers (D.R.E.O.) who in turn are supervised by three Regional Advisory Officers (R.A.O.). The technical and administrative requirements of the Department are controlled by the Head and Deputy of the Department. The R.E.O. advise all plantations up to 50 acres in extent. On this basis each R.E.O. has to look after an average of 2195 holdings, consisting of 3722 acres, while the Divisional Rubber Extension Officers in addition to supervising the work of the R.E.O. have to visit holdings from 50 acres to 100 acres. Thus each D.R.E.O. has to look after an average of 203 units consisting of 4281 acres. The R.A.O. visit estates from 100 to 500 acres in extent, so that they have to look after an average of 221 estates comprising of 405 85 acres (Table 1). The estates larger than 500 acres are visited on request by the R.A.O. as well as the Research Officers.

TABLE 1. COMPOSITION OF THE ADVISORY SERVICES DEPARTMENT AND THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ADVICE

Category of holding	Size	Acreage	No. of Units	Officer responsible	No. of Officers	Units/ Officer	Acreage/ Officer
Smallholdings	0 - 10 acres	260,538	153,673	Rubber Extension Officer	70	2195	3,722
Small estates i	10 - 50 acres						
Small estates ii	50 - 100 acres	42,810	2,027	Divisional R. E. O.	10	203	4,281
Medium estates	100 - 500 acres	121,757	663	Regional Advisory Officer	3	221	40,585
Large estates*	500 acres	157,895	181				

* Visited only on request by Advisory Officers as well as Research Officers.

Source: Calculated from records of the Rubber Control Department and the Advisory Services Department.

If only advisory work is expected of our officers the number of Officers can be considered as sufficient for the work but if we are expected to plan and carry out projects in the rubber areas in the broader sense of the term Extension, then our staff appears to be insufficient. This point should be considered in greater detail by the Government.

Extension methods adopted

The extension methods adopted by us can be broadly categorised into three main types.

Individual attention
Group Schemes
Mass Schemes

Under *individual attention* and advice one can group the services carried out to individual smallholders:

Advisory visits to individual smallholdings
Advisory letters or circular letters to individual holdings
Demonstration to individuals.

Among *group schemes* one can include the service carried out to a group of smallholders.

Group Meetings and discussions
Training classes for smallholders
Smallholders' conferences
Demonstrations for group of smallholders
Publicity Meetings with Film Shows

In *mass methods* the following could be included as they are not aimed at any individual or group of rubber smallholders but at a mass of people, among them whom could be other types of producers.

Radio Broadcasts
Articles in News Papers
Agricultural exhibitions
Distributions of leaflets
Printing of Bulletins
Posters

Shortcomings in the Extension Methods

We can see that almost all these methods are aimed at the transfer of technology from research worker to the producer. In doing so over the past years we have noticed that in certain spheres of activity we have achieved successful results while in other spheres of activity we have achieved results below expectations. For example in the matter of replanting, our efforts have been fairly successful in that the smallholdings sector has replanted nearly 56.5% of its acreage which is the rate achieved by estates too but in the sphere of improving the quality of the rubber manufactured by smallholders the results achieved are below expectation. This appears to be due to constraints other than technical know-how, which we had not looked into. In the case of replanting in addition to the propaganda carried out by us and help given in contour lining for soil conservation works and planting points and other advice, the Government had started the Rubber Replanting Subsidy Scheme, which gives Rs. 2000/- per acre for replanting and which removed the financial constraints to replanting. Thus the scheme forged ahead. On the contrary where improvement of the quality of smallholder rubber was concerned there were other constraints. One was the lack of utensils, equipment and efficient smoking facilities and the lack of finances to obtain them by themselves. The other constraint was the fact that the manufacture of quality rubber is a skilled job so that improving the skill of the majority of the smallholders was a difficult task.

New trends in Extension Methods

These problems are now being overcome by organising "central processing" of smallholder rubber by means of group processing centres (GPCC), central factories for latex crepe and a central block rubber factory. In central processing the responsibility of providing the utensils, equipment and drying facilities are taken over by the State. The necessary skill for the manufacture of quality rubber is provided by the provision of a skilled rubber maker or a Factory Officer who will manufacture quality rubber on behalf of all the smallholders. In GPCC the State provides a grant and a loan to obtain the facilities and the smallholders themselves manage the centre. Marketing of their rubber became a problem at one stage but this is now being solved by transporting the rubber to Colombo for sale. On one recent month's sale a GPC has sold 98% of its rubber as Grade 1 RSS for which the credit must go to the officers responsible for it.

Thus in this GPC scheme we are not only giving smallholders the technical knowledge necessary to manufacture quality rubber but also helping them to build their smoke houses, to arrange for the sale of their rubber, to work out their accounts and manage their centre. In short, we are helping them to learn to manage their affairs by themselves. This is not an easy task but one which is worth all the trouble our officers have to undergo. The trends in extension methods are therefore to veer away from direct transfer of technology to more complicated methods of extension, where efforts are made to remove other constraints that affect the smallholders.

Training Manpower Requirements

A sphere of activity for careful consideration is the training of manpower requirements of the industry. As the land reform laws restricted private ownership of land to 50 acres the number of units below 50 acres has increased considerably. As regards the estate sector which was mostly owned by sterling and rupee companies, with a bare few by private individuals and the State, the Land Reform Laws vested almost all of this land with the State. There was therefore a change of ownership from the companies to the State on behalf of whom several Government Corporations and Organisations are managing them. With these changes the training of man power required by the NR industry is becoming a very important matter.

Data was obtained from a State Corporation, owning rubber estates, to find out the different categories of technical personnel employed by the NR industry. This has revealed that in large estates there is one Superintendent or an Assistant for every 768 acres under rubber, that there is one Factory Officer or Assistant for every 323 acres under rubber and that there is one Field Officer or Assistant for every 171 acres under rubber (Table 2). In the medium sized estates of 100 - 500

TABLE 2. MANPOWER EMPLOYED IN LARGE RUBBER ESTATES - SRI LANKA

Category	No. of Persons	Acreage	Acreage/ Person	Total requirements
Superintendents or Assistants	20	15,172	768	160
Factory Officers or Assistants	47	15,172	323	375
Field Officers or Assistants	87	15,172	171	706
Tappers	3000*	15,172	5	24,000

* Estimated

Source: State Plantations Corporation

acres there is one Superintendent or Assistant for every 220 acres, a Factory Officer or Assistant for every 407 acres and a Field Officer or Assistant for every 220 acres (Table 3). From these data the total manpower requirements of the industry were

TABLE 3. MANPOWER EMPLOYED IN MEDIUM RUBBER ESTATES - SRI LANKA

Category	No. of Persons	Acreage	Acreage/person	Total requirements
Superintendents or Assistants	11	2,445	220	523
Factory Officers and Assistants	6	2,445	407	287
Field Officers and Assistants	11	2,445	220	523
Tappers*	489	2,445	5	23,000

* Estimated

Source: State Plantation Corporation.

calculated and found to be 683 Superintendents or Assistants, 662 Factory Officers or Assistants, 1229 Field Officers and for smallholdings and small estates 1766 Caretakers who are also Rubber Makers. The employment requirement of tappers works out to nearly 100,000. On the assumption that an officer could work only for an average of 30 years and a tapper for 40 years, the replacement rate per year would be 23 Superintendents or Assistants, 22 Factory Officers or Assistants, 41 Field Officers, 59 Caretakers and about 2500 tappers. A training scheme for them is an urgent necessity now.

The Advisory Services Department is already organising training classes for smallholders on tapping and allied subjects. Over the last 11 years a total of 4647 smallholders have been trained and certificates issued. The average number of trainees obtaining certificates annually is only about 422, which is considered insufficient when we know that there are 149,000 smallholders. Arrangements are being made to enlarge and improve this scheme.

The RRI of Sri Lanka can undertake the task of training higher grades of Officers too, if required.