

Economic Analysis of Smallholder Rubber Plantations in West Garo Hills District of Meghalaya

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INTRODUCTION

Rubber plantations in India were started by the British. The economic importance of rubber plantation in India hardly needs any emphasis. Rubber plantations supply raw materials for the production of many industrialised goods required for automobiles, aircrafts, railways, textile industries, sports goods, engineering goods and even for building roads. On account of the multifarious uses to which rubber can be put to, the consumption of rubber in the world as well as in India has been increasing steadily. The total rubber plantation area in India is 5.70 lakh ha. India is the third largest producer of natural rubber next only to Thailand and Indonesia contributing about 9 per cent of the global output. India is the fourth largest consumer next to China, USA and Japan. More importantly India's average rubber productivity is 1631 kg. per hectare is the highest among the major natural rubber producing countries. The country has experienced substantial transformation in the production structure with the entry of the native peasantry, eventually leading to proliferation of smallholder systems under various socio-economic, political and institutional contexts. Resultantly, the Indian rubber plantation industry is dominated by small holdings having an average size of less than 0.5 ha. Smallholdings account for nearly 88 per cent of the total area under rubber and the total production of natural rubber in the country.

Rubber Board is responsible for the overall development of the rubber industry in India. Rubber Board is concentrating on enhancing production of natural rubber in non-traditional areas of North Eastern states by offering various incentives, research support, developmental packages and extension which have contributed substantially to create awareness and bringing more areas under rubber cultivation. The cases of North East India seem to be unique in terms of the dynamic responses of smallholder communities towards adoption of rubber farming systems with integration of variety of agro-forestry practices and co-existing rubber-farm livelihood systems in the emerging rubber economies of North Eastern States of India (Viswanathan and Shivakoti, 2005).

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