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ROLE OF CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY AS THE NODAL POINT IN THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE ON RUBBER

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ABSTRACT

The study covers 110 co-operative societies in 12 districts of Kerala. Fifty two per cent of the members of the societies are rubber growers, while the percentage of rubber growers among the office bearers is 80. This indicates that the rubber growers give the leadership to the societies. The activities of the societies are confined to agricultural development, marketing, banking and industry. The majority of societies are Service Co-operative Banks. Ninety three societies have organised seminars and forty seven societies are involved in the promotion of long term development schemes of the Rubber Board. The societies prefer seminars as the most effective medium of dissemination of scientific knowledge, followed by publications and training programmes.

INTRODUCTION

Rubber is a perennial crop which benefitted much from the scientific research that was carried out during the last fifty years. The catalyst that accelerated the development in rubber plantation industry has been the timely availability of scientific knowledge to the rubber growers which is being continuously updated by the research institutions. Unless there is an uninterrupted flow of scientific knowledge from the laboratory to the rubber grower, the progress of the rubber plantation industry will be impeded. The small rubber growers occupy an important position in the industry by virtue of the number, coverage of area and contribution to production. Because of the high literacy levels of rubber growers, their ability to absorb scientific knowledge on the cultivation and processing of rubber could be updated without much difficulty. The co-operative societies served as an important channel in the flow of scientific knowledge. The present study was initiated to assess the extent of involvement of co-operative societies in the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

Evolution of co-operative movement in rubber plantation industry

The Plantation Enquiry Commission examined the scope for introducing co-operative societies in rubber plantation industry in 1956 and recommended that co-operative supply and banking societies should be established. In 1958 the Government of India adopted the recommendation of the commission. For implementing the recommendation an officer of the co-operative department was taken on deputation by the Rubber Board in 1960. This led to the enrolment of more rubber growers in the existing co-operative societies and forming new ones. A study conducted in 1974 found that 28 per cent of rubber growers were members of 23 co-operative marketing societies in 1971–72 Since 1976 the Rubber Board has been implementing World Bank aided scheme for the

improvement of processing and marketing of rubber. The launching of the scheme further accelerated the growth of co-operative societies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For collecting the data for the study, a draft questionnaire covering all aspects of dissemination of scientific knowledge on rubber was prepared and the same was sent to 240 co-operative societies associated with the activities of the Rubber Board. Completed questionnaires were received from 110 societies. The study was confined to the twelve districts of Kerala State. Except one society, all the societies had rubber growers as members. The societies which replied were mainly service co-operative banks. (Table I).

Table I. *The details of societies surveyed*

Type of Society	Nos.
Service co-operative bank	76
Rubber marketing co-operative society	20
Farmers' co-operative service bank	7
Service co-operative society	2
Regional service co-operative bank	2
Ex-servicemen joint farming service co-operative society	1
Urban service co-operative bank	1
Joint farming co-operative society	1
Total	110

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data thus collected the societies were classified according to the year of starting: Out of the 110 societies, 67 were started 30 years before and 32 societies were started between 21 to 30 years. There were 39 societies with membership exceeding 5000. The largest society had 17700 members. (Table II).

Table II. *The number of members in the societies*

Members	No. of societies
Upto 1000 members	9
1001 to 2000	15
2001 to 3000	13
3001 to 4000	13
4001 to 5000	21
Above 5000	39
Total	110

The study showed that 52 per cent of members of the societies were rubber cultivators, while the percentage of rubber cultivators among the office bearers was 80. Out of 926 office bearers in various societies 748 were rubber growers. This clearly indicated that the rubber growers are giving the leadership to the co-operative movement at least in the sphere of agricultural development in Kerala. (Table III).

Table III. *Distribution of rubber growers as office bearers in societies*

Rubber growers as percentage to total office bearers	No. of societies
Societies without elected office bearers	6
No rubber grower among the office bearers	4
Rubber growers upto 25%	10
Rubber growers between 26 to 50%	3
Rubber growers between 51 to 75%	36
Rubber growers between 76 to 100%	51
Total	110

The activities of the societies were confined to four areas *viz.*, banking, marketing, industry and agricultural development. Eighty nine societies were engaged in banking, 98 in

marketing, 101 in agricultural development and one in industry.

This showed that many of the societies were engaged in more than one activity.

The study revealed greater involvement of co-operative societies in the dissemination of scientific knowledge. (Table IV).

Table IV. *Involvement of co-operative societies in disseminating knowledge*

Activity	No. of societies
Conducting seminars	93
Participation in training	29
Visits to the RRII	18
Tappers' training class	10

The societies organised seminars in various frequencies. About 73 societies organised seminars once, 11 societies twice, 7 societies thrice and two societies thrice. Out of 93 societies 83 societies reported increase in turnover of agricultural inputs after the seminars.

Fifty four societies organised special discussions with the Rubber Board officials to elicit the latest information. Sixty five societies published booklets dealing with scientific rubber cultivation and also gave details of the schemes of the Rubber Board in their annual reports. Thirty one societies displayed in their premises scientific articles published in the dailies on rubber cultivation for the benefit of rubber cultivators.

Agricultural development

One area of activity of the co-operative society is the promotion of scientific cultivation. Accordingly 47 societies were involved in the promotion of long term development schemes of the Rubber Board. There were 104 societies which had facilities for selling inputs to rubber growers. Of these 102 were selling fertilizers, and 90 societies were selling plant protection chemicals. Twenty-two societies maintained their nurseries. Except two societies, all were willing to associate with the Board's activities in spreading scientific knowledge.

As the co-operative society is the nodal point in the dissemination of scientific knowledge, the societies were asked to give their preferences regarding the medium to be adopted for the dissemination. (Table V).

Table V. *Preference of the societies for the medium of dissemination of scientific knowledge*

Medium	Preference						Total No. of societies
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	
Seminars	50	31	21	5	1	2	110
Publications	28	22	26	23	9	2	110
Training Programmes	19	35	16	23	15	2	110
Visist to the RRII	7	9	16	13	32	33	110
Radio	6	10	25	34	26	9	110
TV	1	3	4	15	27	60	110

Table V showed that the first preference of the large number of societies (50 nos.) is for holding seminars, followed by publications and training. Television and Radio have been relegated down in the scale of preferences.

One hundred and two societies represented the different input suppliers. Of these, twenty-two societies represented 6 or more companies, 11 societies 5 companies and 19 societies 4 companies. Thirty societies received some help from the input manufacturers for the dissemination of scientific knowledge. Of these, 25 societies received help for organising seminars.

Other activities of the societies

Fifty one societies deal in rubber and hold licence from the Rubber Board; seven have smoke house, four have processing factories and one has manufacturing facility. Fifty three societies organised camps for soil and leaf analysis. Fifty four societies were involved in renting out plant protection equipments and sixteen societies organised helicopter spraying.

The study clearly showed the involvement of the majority of societies in the dissemination of scientific knowledge relating to rubber and the rubber growers took the leading role in most societies.

From the study the following policy implications can be drawn up:-

1. The societies prefer seminar as the most useful medium and as such, attempts may be made to organise seminars in areas not covered already. In other areas, seminars may be organised on a regular basis.

2. Publications particularly the 'Farm Feature page' in the newspapers have been the other preferred medium of the societies. As such, the regularity of publications may be increased. The scope for enhancing the coverage may also be explored.

3. Co-operative societies also favoured training programmes. The societies may be informed in advance of the training programmes proposed to be held during a year, through a brochure. It would be desirable if the Rubber Board represents in the annual general body meeting of the societies wherein the members can be enlightened on the various development and training programmes of the Board.

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