

COLLECTIVISM TO CIRCUMVENT STRUCTURAL BOTTLENECKS IN THE RUBBER SMALLHOLDING SECTOR OF KERALA FOR AMELIORATING TAPPERS SCARCITY AND ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

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The smallholding sector of Kerala which is still the prime contributor to the national rubber production is under severe crisis due to shortage of rubber tappers and declining profitability. The sector has become incapable to attract new entrants for tapping as wage income of tappers is much lower than their counterparts in the rural labour market. In the present scenario, the sector is incapacitated to augment wage income of the tappers for the existence of structural bottlenecks such as smaller size of holdings, less number of trees available for tapping, piece rate wage payment system and prevalence of single grower dependence. To attract more tappers into the sector by increasing the wage income of tappers by circumventing these structural bottlenecks, collective farming following the principles of collectivism is proposed. Collectivism will not only help the tappers to get regular employment, sufficient tapping task and remunerative wage income, it would also have the added advantage of bringing down the cost of production and increasing profitability of natural rubber cultivation as it would facilitate large scale adoption of cost saving technologies like low frequency tapping.

Key words: Collectivism, Farm income, Smallholdings, Structural bottlenecks, Tappers scarcity, Wage rate

INTRODUCTION

The rubber smallholding sector of Kerala which contributes over 78 per cent of the national production of rubber in India (Rubber Board, 2018) is confronted with severe scarcity of labourers (rubber tappers) for crop harvesting. Unremunerative wage earnings of the tappers in the smallholding sector of Kerala as compared to their counterparts in the general agricultural sector was cited as reason for withdrawal of tappers

from the rural market leading to scarcity (Viswanathan *et al.*, 2003; Mohanakumar and Chandy, 2009; George, 2012). Prevalence of single grower dependence, low tapping task due to smaller size of holdings and piece rate based wage payment system were considered as the major structural impediments in increasing the wage income of tappers.

Since the tappers could not earn remunerative wage income due to these structural impediments, many of them have