

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PERSUASIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM (PEP) IMPLEMENTED IN KURUNEGALA DISTRICT

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The future of the coconut cultivation in Sri Lanka seems uncertain with various challenges. One significant problem is the lack of knowledge of the growers about the potential land use capacity and income of their coconut lands. The Persuasive Extension Program (PEP) was started by Coconut Research Institute of Sri Lanka (CRISL), to make the growers convinced about their potential capacity. PEP is a six-year participatory program started in 1995 on a pilot scale. In the PEP, a team from the CRISL prepares a comprehensive developmental proposal after a detailed study jointly undertaken with the landowners. This proposal consists of various recommendations related to cultural practices and their cost benefit ratios involved in the development of a particular coconut holding.

The objective of the study was to evaluate the success of the PEP in relation to: the adoption of recommended cultural practices given under the PEP, the attitudes of the growers towards the PEP and, the constraints faced by growers in adopting the recommended cultural practices.

Field investigations were carried out with randomly selected 40 coconut growers who were involved in the PEP in the Kurunegala District. The primary data collection from the growers was done from October 2001 to January 2002 by using an interview schedule, field observations and, informal discussions with Extension and Research Officers of CRISL who were involved in the PEP. The level of adoption of cultural practices was measured by using an adoption index. Farmers' attitudes were measured using an attitude score and frequencies were used to quantify the farmers' constraints.

When the overall adoption was considered, ten per cent of the respondents had adopted none of the recommended cultural practices given under the PEP. The majority of the respondents had adopted the recommended practices to low and moderate levels while; none had high level of adoption. The soil and moisture conservation was found to be the practice adopted at the highest level while animal husbandry was the lowest. Majority (67.5%) had highly favourable attitudes towards the PEP. The major constraints when adopting the recommended cultural practices were financial problems, labour scarcity, instability of the coconut prices, adverse environmental conditions and, unavailability of manpower to manage the holdings.

Based on the findings it could be concluded that although the attitudes of growers about the PEP is highly favourable, the level of adoption of the recommended practices given under the PEP has not increased significantly in the Kurunegala District. Increasing the number of monitoring visits, training programs, field days and demonstration and, the introduction of a subsidy scheme along with the PEP could improve the effectiveness of the PEP.