

CLIMATE CHANGE PERCEPTION AND ENGAGEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA

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Climate change is a critical global issue, with the agriculture sector particularly vulnerable. In the face of this challenge, the role of undergraduates in higher education, especially those in agricultural fields, is increasingly significant. Their perceptions and engagement levels can be crucial in driving practical climate actions. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the perception of climate change and the engagement of agricultural undergraduates in Sri Lanka. An online self-administered survey was conducted, garnering 522 responses from students across all eight state universities related to agriculture. The data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential analytical techniques. The findings present a diverse spectrum of perceptions and engagements. About 46% of respondents were moderately aware of climate change. A similar percentage (46%) acknowledged the definite occurrence of climate change, evidenced by environmental changes. When identifying the primary drivers, 41% attributed it mainly to human activities such as burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes. Nearly half (48%) perceived agriculture adversely affected by climate change but not a significant contributor. Concerning the level of concern, 35% were very concerned about climate change. According to 42% of respondents, soil degradation, including erosion and nutrient loss, was the most alarming impact on agriculture. Opinions on the effectiveness of individual actions in mitigating climate change impacts were divided, with 44% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. As for involvement in climate initiatives, 26% were occasionally active, while 87% expressed interest in future participation in climate-related activities. In conclusion, while there is a moderate level of awareness and concern among Sri Lankan agricultural undergraduates, there is a significant interest in future engagement, suggesting the need for enhanced educational and participatory initiatives in this sector.

Keywords: Climate change awareness, climate engagement, environmental impact, climate vulnerability