

ANALYSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF QUALITY SEEDS AMONG UPCOUNTRY VEGETABLE FARMERS IN SRI LANKA

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This study examined the quality of seed accessibility among upcountry vegetable farmers in Sri Lanka. Using the agricultural development and rural livelihoods framework, it examined socioeconomic factors affecting seed access, such as income, markets, institutional support, and sector weaknesses. Data were collected from upcountry farmers, seed importers, retailers, and officials using surveys and interviews using a mixed-methods approach. Using purposive sampling, 97 farmers across six Agriculture Instructor ranges in Nuwara Eliya were surveyed; 96% relied on agriculture as their main income, and 86% had over ten years of experience. Notably, 85% identified seed quality as a significant agricultural issue. Key informant interviews included discussions with seed importers, retailers, and government authorities. The seed accessibility index was based on 18 parameters, including retailer distance, timely distribution, promotions, discounts, and risks of low-quality seeds. Other factors included seed prices, instructor service effectiveness, credit access, variety information, extension service use, and adherence to seed labels. The findings showed that 56.7% of farmers had an accessibility index below 50%, and 90% had an accessibility rate of 53.95% or lower. No farmer achieved an accessibility index of 75% or higher. Structural weaknesses in the seed sector posted significant challenges to accessibility. Some retailers sold expired seeds by tampering with expiration dates, deceiving farmers. Proper storage by importers was undermined by negligent retailers, reducing seed quality and yields. Retailers' overstocking led to seed deterioration, while some importers limited supply, causing shortages and price hikes. The study urges stricter regulations and extension Programmes to strengthen seed supply and farming resilience.

Keywords: Seed accessibility, Seed distribution chain, Seed quality Sri Lanka, Vegetable farmers