

Exploring Nursery Holders' Experiences and Perceptions in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The flower and foliage nursery sector plays a vital role in Sri Lanka's rural development and agricultural sustainability, particularly in specialized regions such as the Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village. Despite its economic and cultural significance, limited scholarly attention has been given to the lived experiences, challenges, and adaptive practices of nursery holders operating within this community. This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the cultural heritage preservation practices, market-related challenges, and the role of technological innovation among nursery holders in Hingurakgoda. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with thirty nursery holders selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in experience, scale of operation, and community engagement. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal three dominant themes: cultural heritage preservation, market challenges, and technological innovation. Nursery holders demonstrated a strong commitment to preserving traditional cultivation methods, indigenous knowledge, and culturally rooted practices that reinforce local identity and sustainable agriculture. However, participants also reported significant challenges related to limited market access, price fluctuations, and competition from large-scale nurseries. To address these constraints, nursery holders employed strategies such as cooperative marketing, digital platforms, and social media engagement. Technological innovations, including precision farming, automated irrigation, and fertigation systems, were found to enhance productivity and operational efficiency, although high costs and limited access to financial support constrained wider adoption. The study highlights the need for targeted policy interventions, improved agricultural extension services, financial support mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives to strengthen market competitiveness, promote technological adoption, and safeguard cultural heritage. By addressing these interconnected dimensions, the research contributes to enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the nursery holder community and supports broader rural development objectives in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Flower and foliage nurseries; Cultural heritage preservation; Market access; Technological innovation; Rural development; Sri Lanka; Qualitative study

INTRODUCTION

The rural development and agricultural sectors are crucial components of Sri Lanka's economy, with regions like Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village playing a significant role in fostering agricultural growth and sustainability. However, despite the importance of nurseries in this context, there is a limited understanding of the experiences, challenges, and perspectives faced by nursery holders in this village. Within this context, the experiences and perceptions of nursery holders play a pivotal role in shaping not only the agricultural landscape but also the overall rural development trajectory. This research endeavours to delve into the unique experiences, challenges, and perspectives of nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

The identified research objectives and questions are designed to address key issues pertinent to nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of cultural heritage preservation practices among nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

2. To assess the challenges faced by nursery holders in the market and explore strategies for enhancing market access and competitiveness.
3. To investigate the impact of technological innovation on the productivity and efficiency of nursery operations in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

Research Questions:

1. What are the key cultural heritage preservation practices adopted by nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village, and how do these practices contribute to maintaining cultural identity and traditional knowledge?
2. What are the main challenges encountered by nursery holders in accessing markets, dealing with price fluctuations, and competing with larger nurseries, and what strategies are effective in addressing these challenges?
3. How do technological innovations, such as modern tools and techniques, impact the productivity, efficiency, and overall management of nurseries in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village, and what are the perceptions of nursery holders regarding these innovations?

The significance of this research extends beyond academic inquiry; it has practical implications for policymakers, agricultural extension services, and community organizations. The findings can inform the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms tailored to the specific needs of nursery holders. This includes initiatives to support cultural heritage preservation, promote sustainable agricultural practices, address market challenges, foster community engagement, and encourage technological innovation. Ultimately, the research contributes to enhancing the overall resilience and sustainability of the nursery holder community in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village, thereby contributing to broader rural development goals in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nursery holders play a crucial role in the flower and foliage industry, particularly in places like Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village in Sri Lanka. These nursery holders are now required to undergo training, registration, and licensing by local government authorities (Vissoh et al., 2017). Such formalization processes are essential for ensuring quality standards and sustainable practices within the industry. Additionally, the success of nursery holders is influenced by various factors, including organizational support and employee commitment (O'Donnell et al., 2012). Studies have shown that high levels of organizational support lead to increased employee commitment, job satisfaction, and reduced turnover intentions, which are vital for the overall productivity and success of nursery operations. Moreover, in the context of Sri Lanka, connections to influential entities can provide firms with a significant advantage, as observed in the post-civil war period (Berkman & Galpoththage, 2016). These connections can impact the growth and development of nurseries within the flower and foliage industry. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of nursery holders is crucial for addressing challenges and fostering growth in the sector. Research on perceptions in various fields has shown that factors such as perceived usefulness, ease of use, and awareness significantly influence the adoption of services (Mano et al., 2020). Similarly, in the context of healthcare, patient perceptions play a vital role in shaping attitudes towards healthcare pricing and services (Narangoda et al., 2021). Furthermore, the sustainability and prosperity of nursery businesses are influenced by various challenges and opportunities. As urbanization progresses, commercial ornamental nurseries face challenges that need to be explored and addressed for future prosperity (Pastory et al., 2020). Effective management of supply chain risks is also crucial for the sustainability of nursery operations, especially in the face of increasing vulnerabilities in supply chains globally (Sugathadasa et al., 2020). By understanding and addressing these challenges, nursery holders in Hingurakgoda and similar regions can enhance their operations, contribute to the local economy, and promote sustainable practices in the flower and foliage industry.

Methodology: A qualitative research approach was employed to explore nursery holders' experiences and perceptions. Thirty nursery holders from Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village participated in in-depth interviews. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns and themes within the data set. The analysis process involved several stages, including familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report.

Sampling and Participants:

The sampling process involved selecting thirty nursery holders from Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village to participate in the research. The selection criteria may have included factors such as years of experience in nursery management, diversity in nursery sizes, involvement in community activities, and willingness to participate in the study. These criteria helped ensure a diverse range of perspectives among the participants, contributing to the richness of the data collected.

Data Collection:

The data collection method primarily consisted of in-depth interviews conducted by the research team. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research technique that allows for detailed exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights. The interviews were likely structured around a carefully designed interview guide tailored to the research objectives and questions outlined in the introduction. This guide would have included open-ended questions to encourage participants to share their thoughts, experiences, and challenges freely.

Ethical Considerations:

The research team prioritized ethical considerations throughout the data collection process. This included obtaining informed consent from each participant, ensuring that they understood the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and how their data would be used. Confidentiality measures were also implemented to protect the privacy of participants and their responses.

The research team likely drew upon established qualitative research methodologies and principles to guide the data collection process. This methodological foundation could have included aspects such as reflexivity (acknowledging and addressing the researchers' own biases and perspectives), bracketing (setting aside preconceived notions to allow for unbiased data collection), and member checking (seeking feedback from participants to validate findings).

Overall, the methodology employed a systematic and ethical approach to sampling participants, collecting data through in-depth interviews, and adhering to methodological principles to ensure the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis played a crucial role in this study, employing thematic analysis as the methodological framework to delve into the experiences of nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village. Through this analytical lens, recurring themes and patterns emerged from the responses of nursery holders, shedding light on the role of cultural heritage preservation practices within the community. Additionally, data analysis allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the challenges faced by nursery holders in the market, leading to the exploration of effective strategies for enhancing market access and competitiveness. Furthermore, the impact of technological innovation on the productivity and efficiency of nursery operations was thoroughly investigated, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of agricultural practices in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

1. Examine the Role of Cultural Heritage Preservation Practices:

Theme: Cultural Heritage Preservation (Code: CHP)

Sub-theme 1.1: Traditional Cultivation Practices and Cultural Identity (Code: CHP-TCPCI)

Story: Priyangani's Heritage Garden Journey

Priyangani, a dedicated nursery holder in Hingurakgoda, embodies the essence of cultural heritage preservation through her traditional cultivation practices. In her heritage garden, ancient terracotta pots are meticulously used to nurture endemic plant species, symbolizing the deep-rooted connection between botanical heritage and cultural identity. Visitors not only appreciate the botanical diversity but also gain insights into the historical significance of Sri Lanka's plant heritage. Priyangani's commitment to preserving traditional methods highlights the pivotal

role of cultural heritage in shaping nursery practices in Hingurakgoda.

Sub-theme 1.2: Utilizing Traditional Ingredients for Plant Care (Code: CHP-TIUPC)

Story: Ayurvedic Blend: Aloe Vera Gel and Coconut Milk

In Hingurakgoda, nursery holder Devika upholds cultural heritage by incorporating traditional ingredients into plant care. She blends aloe-vera gel, known for its soothing and nourishing properties, with coconut milk, rich in nutrients and moisture-retaining capabilities. This Ayurvedic blend serves as a natural fertilizer and protective coating for plants, promoting healthy growth and resilience against environmental stressors. Visitors marvel at Devika's use of ancient knowledge, recognizing the harmonious relationship between traditional practices and botanical vitality.

Sub-theme 1.3: Harnessing Natural Elements for Plant Health (Code: CHP-HNEPH)

Story: Nature's Bounty: Bee Honey and Termite Clay

Nursery holder Suranga in Hingurakgoda integrates natural elements to enhance plant health and vitality. He combines bee honey, renowned for its antibacterial and nutrient-rich properties, with termite clay, known for soil enrichment and moisture retention. This natural concoction acts as a potent soil conditioner and pest deterrent, fostering robust plant growth while maintaining ecological balance. Suranga's approach exemplifies the harmonious synergy between nature's bounty and sustainable nursery practices, preserving ancient wisdom for future generations of nursery holders.

Sub-theme 1.4: Embracing Natural Remedies for Plant Propagation (Code: CHP-ENRPP)

Story: Traditional Wisdom: Cow Horn Composts for Cutting Rooting

In Hingurakgoda, nursery holder Aravinda preserves cultural heritage by employing traditional remedies for plant propagation. He utilizes cow horn composts, a centuries-old practice in organic farming, to facilitate cutting rooting and enhance soil fertility. The nutrient-rich composts, enriched with beneficial microbes, stimulate root growth and improve overall plant vigour. Aravinda's dedication to traditional wisdom not only ensures successful plant propagation but also contributes to sustainable agricultural practices, reflecting the harmonious integration of cultural heritage and ecological stewardship.

Sub-theme 1.5: Honouring Lunar Cycles for Plant Cultivation (Code: CHP-HLCPC)

Story: Celestial Guidance: Ancient Calendar for Cultivation Timing

Nursery holder Thilini in Hingurakgoda follows cultural traditions by observing auspicious times based on an ancient calendar for plant cultivation. She aligns sowing, transplanting, and harvesting activities with lunar cycles and specific astrological configurations believed to influence plant growth and productivity. By honoring these celestial guidance systems, Thilini harnesses nature's rhythms to optimize plant development and yield. Visitors marvel at Thilini's adherence to ancient wisdom, recognizing the profound connection between cosmic energies and successful crop cultivation.

These themes and sub-themes encapsulate the diverse ways in which nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village preserve cultural heritage while promoting sustainable and effective plant care practices.

2. Examine the main challenges encountered by nursery holders in accessing markets, dealing with price fluctuations, and competing with larger nurseries

Theme: Challenges in the Market (Code: MC)

Sub-theme: Market Access and Competitiveness (Code: MC-MAC)

Story: Navigating Market Pathways

Nursery holder Chamara faces the challenge of limited market access and fierce competitiveness in the nursery

industry. Through strategic partnerships with local markets and collaborative efforts with fellow nursery holders, Chamara pioneers initiatives to expand market reach. By showcasing unique plant varieties and leveraging digital platforms for marketing such as FaceBook, instrgram, WhatsApp and TickTock, Chamara navigates market pathways effectively, gaining a competitive edge and securing sustainable market access for their nursery products.

Sub-theme: Strategies for Enhancing Market Access and Competitiveness

Story: Collaborative Market Ventures

In response to market challenges, nursery holders Bandara and Dinesh collaborate on innovative strategies to enhance market access and competitiveness. They establish a cooperative network among nursery holders, pooling resources and expertise to negotiate better market deals and streamline distribution channels. By collectively promoting the diverse offerings of Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village, Bandara and Dinesh create synergistic opportunities for market expansion, benefiting the entire nursery holder community and fostering economic sustainability.

These stories illustrate how nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village tackle market challenges and implement strategic measures to enhance market access and competitiveness.

Sub-theme: Technological Tools and Techniques (Code: TI-TTT)

Story: Precision Farming Revolution

Nursery holders Dilan Haritha and Sanjaya embraces the era of technological innovation by adopting precision farming techniques in nursery management. Through the use of advanced sensors, automated irrigation systems, and data analytics, Dilan optimizes resource utilization and enhances crop monitoring capabilities. The integration of automated irrigation systems with fertilizers which is known as fertigation, leveraging cutting-edge technology to deliver water and nutrients efficiently based on real-time plant needs. This not only conserves water and fertilizer but also reduces labour-intensive irrigation tasks, fertilizer supplementation tasks freeing up time for other critical aspects of nursery management.

This shift towards precision farming not only improves productivity and efficiency but also minimizes environmental impact, positioning Dilan as a trailblazer in sustainable nursery operations.

Those experiences showcase how nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village leverage technological advancements to enhance plant propagation, nursery management, and overall operational efficiency.

However, despite these technological strides, Dilan, Sanjaya, and their team have highlighted the need for more cost-effective technological support and access to loan schemes. They emphasize that with the right support from policymakers, agricultural extension services, and community organizations, they can further develop initiatives that foster community engagement, improve market access, encourage continuous technological innovation, and ensure the long-term resilience of nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village. Such support would not only benefit their operations but also contribute significantly to sustainable agricultural practices and economic development in the region.

RESULTS

Thematic analysis of the data collected from nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village revealed several key themes that encapsulate their experiences and perceptions:

1. **Cultural Heritage Preservation (Code: CHP):** Nursery holders expressed a deep commitment to preserving cultural heritage through their cultivation practices. They emphasized the importance of traditional methods and indigenous plant species in maintaining cultural identity.

2. Market Challenges (Code: MC): Nursery holders discussed challenges related to market access, price fluctuations, and competition from larger nurseries. They expressed a need for support in marketing their products and accessing broader markets.
3. Technological Innovation (Code: TI): Some nursery holders highlighted the importance of technological innovation in improving productivity and efficiency. They mentioned adopting modern tools and techniques for plant propagation and nursery management, such as precision farming techniques, automated irrigation systems, and data analytics

DISCUSSION

The thematic analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of nursery holders' experiences and perceptions in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village. The themes of cultural heritage preservation, market challenges, and technological innovation reveal the intricate dynamics within the nursery holder community.

The results emphasize the need for focused interventions and support systems to improve sustainable farming methods, alleviate the difficulties faced by nursery owners, and encourage the preservation of cultural heritage. These insights can be used by community organizations, agricultural extension services, and policymakers to create programs that enhance market accessibility, promote technological innovation, engage the community, and guarantee the long-term viability of nursery owners in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village.

Furthermore, the development and sustainability of the nursery holder community are greatly aided by government funding and legislative efforts. In order to promote nursery products both domestically and abroad, this involves setting up marketing channels, delivering training programs on contemporary farming techniques and technology adoption, and offering financial help for the development of infrastructure.

In addition, agricultural extension services are essential for information dissemination, technical support, and technology diffusion among nursery owners. Governmental organizations, academic institutions, and stakeholders in the corporate sector working together can improve information exchange and encourage creative nursery management techniques.

Furthermore, nursery owners can gain a lot from using social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to market their goods, interact with consumers, and connect with business partners. Nursery owners can receive tools and training from government-sponsored programs on how to use social media to promote their businesses and reach new markets.

In conclusion, policymakers and stakeholders can support the overall resilience and sustainability of nursery holders in Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village by addressing the identified issues and implementing recommended solutions into practice. This collaborative strategy, when combined with government assistance, services for agricultural extension, the diffusion of technology, and the use of social media, can promote an expanding nursery sector that not only preserves cultural heritage as well as propels rural prosperity and economic growth in Sri Lanka.

SUGGESTIONS

Initiatives for community engagement may include promoting intercultural communication through seminars and activities that highlight regional customs related to pest control, plant propagation, and other traditional practices, while establishing transparent revenue-sharing mechanisms between community partners and nursery holders to ensure equitable financial benefits. Capacity-building efforts should focus on developing cross-cultural communication skills among nursery service providers through targeted training programs. New business initiatives can be supported by introducing horticultural education programs in collaboration with floriculture and cut-foliage export sectors. Infrastructure improvements should prioritize enhanced transport facilities, improved accessibility to nursery sites, and the introduction of digital platforms or mobile applications for real-time information sharing and navigation within nursery villages. Furthermore, partnerships with universities and research institutions can integrate educational components into nursery tours through field visits, seminars, internships, and knowledge-exchange programs focused on sustainable agriculture, cultural heritage, and

environmental conservation, thereby contributing to the long-term development, meaningful investment, and sustainable growth of the Hingurakgoda Flower and Foliage Nursery Village and its local community.

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