

Spatial Assessment of Climate Change Effects on Crop Suitability and Yield for Tea Plantations in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Global warming is a growing concern in this century. Particularly, it is imperative to identify the effects of climate change in agricultural areas. This study focuses on evaluation of climate change effect on tea (*Camellia sinensis*) as a major plantation crop in Sri Lanka. Geo-referenced maps of spatial and temporal changes in crop suitability and production potentials are generated and compared. Data pertaining to five agro ecological zones (AEZs) under the study area are analyzed for a period of 1980-2007. Crop suitability maps are generated amalgamating yield maps and climatic factors maps by using AHP in multi-criteria analysis under two time-frames of 1980-1992 and 1993-2007. Percent change in crop suitability and crop yield classes are calculated based on five crop suitability and five crop yield classes during two time-frames. Dynamics of climatic parameters and crop yield is recognized using geo-referenced maps. The suitability maps of the two time-frames are compared to identify the changes with tea crop in conjunction with changes in the prevailing climate and yield. Geographic shift of suitability, yield and climate classes are examined. High suitability tea crop cover shifted to 11.29 km from its original centroid. Net gain or loss in crop production is quantified. The highest average annual production loss of tea (219 kg/ha/yr) was recorded in Mid Country Wet Zone (MW) while Low Country Wet Zone (WL) (68 kg/ha/yr) and up country intermediate zone (IU) (162 kg/ha/yr) record loss during 1981-2007 period. Long term annual rainfall significantly decreased in mid country wet zone (WM); whereas, the mean temperature of the study area increased by 1.4 °C.

Introduction

Herath and Ratnayake (2004), after studying 60 rain gauges at tea estates in Central Mountains of Sri Lanka for 30 years, observed decrease in rainfall. Similarly, a significant downward trend of rainfall was noted in Central hills around Nuwara Eliya in Sri Lanka during 1900–2002 (Bandara and Wickramagamage, 2004). Tea crop in Sri Lanka are grown in an area of 0.23 million ha or 4% of the country's land which is shown in Figure 1. Tea crop contributes 10% to the agricultural share to the Sri Lankan GDP, and employs above 0.3 million people. It earns about 15% of the country's export earnings. Tea (*Camellia sinensis*) is the major plantation crop, with 1.2% contribution to GDP (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2008).

Tea ecophysiology in Sri Lanka:

Tea, a rainfed perennial crop of humid regions, grows at altitude between 0 to 2500 m above mean sea level in Sri Lanka. Annual rainfall between 2500–3000 mm year⁻¹ is considered as optimum, 1200 mm year⁻¹ as a minimum (Watson, 1986). The productivity

of tea lands is known to be greatly influenced by rainfall and temperature. Similarly, its quality is significantly affected by the duration and intensity of rainfall (Herath and Ratnayake, 2004). Tea yield is so sensitive to the climate that it could be considered to be an indicator for representing the climate change stress (Anandacoomaraswamy et al., 2000). A 100 mm reduction in monthly rainfall could reduce the productivity by 30-80 kg of made-tea ha⁻¹ (Wijeratne, 2004; Wijeratne et al., 2007). In this study, the effects of climate change on tea crops in Sri Lanka are evaluated.

Methodology

General approach

Based on Agro Ecological Zones (AEZs) secondary data (meteorological data, land use map, AEZs map and crop yield) were gathered from meteorological department, survey department, research institutes and estates. Primary data were collected using research survey. Climate and yield factors for each crop suitability classes were identified. The relative importance of these climate and yield factors were quantified by interviewing experts from tea plantations.

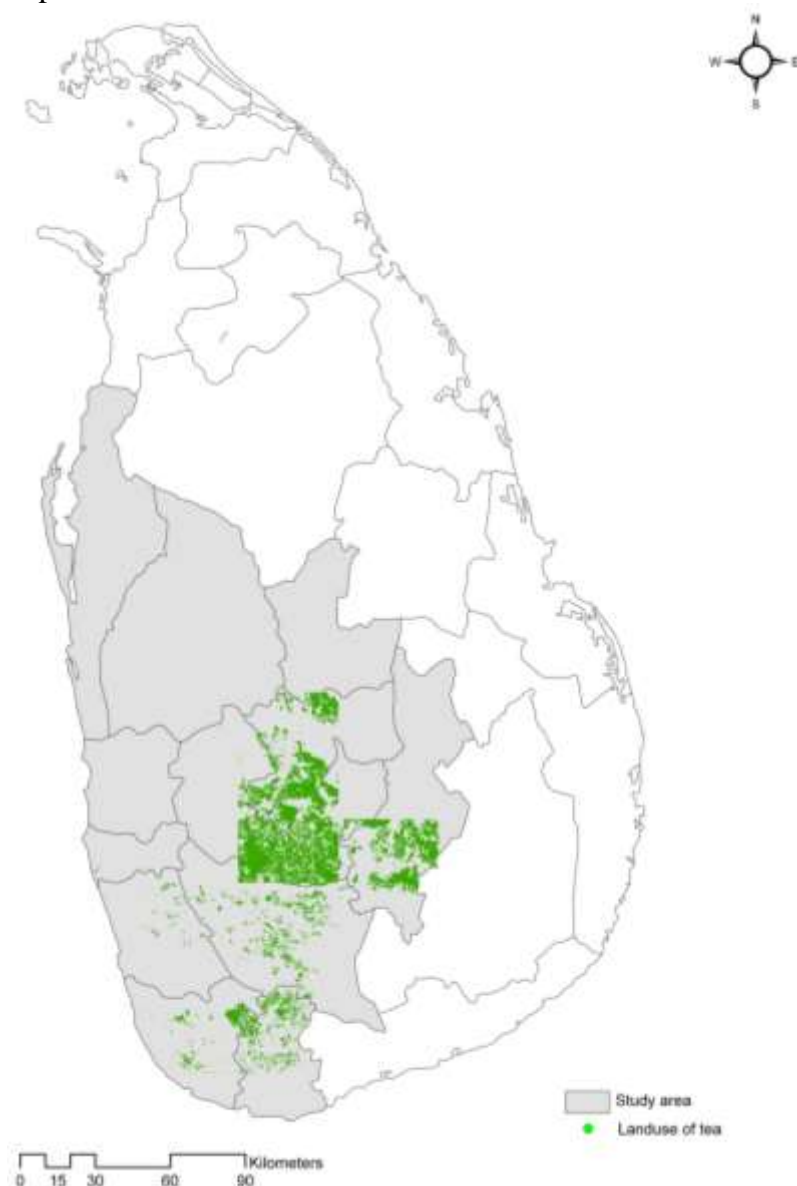


Figure 1: Landuse of tea in Sri Lanka

Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) was then used to determine the suitability level of tea crop accompanied with climatic factors (rainfall, relative humidity, temperature) and crop factors (evapotranspiration, crop yield). AHP, developed by Satty (1980), is a kind of multiple-criteria decision-making approach. The spatial data and their attributes were incorporated in GIS. Spatial maps of climatic parameters, actual yields and land use of tea were generated. These maps were later used for the identification of crop suitability for tea crop under climate change.

Data collection

Annual rainfall, average annual temperature and relative humidity data were collected from identified stations (Table 1) for 28 years (1980-2007).

Table 1: Sample sizes for meteorological observations within the study area

Climate parameters	Total meteorological stations	Sample size	Error level*
Rainfall	96	65	7%
Temperature	25	22	7%
Relative humidity	28	25	7%

* calculated as per Yamane (1967)

Simple random sampling for plantation estates was carried out without replacement. Historical data of annual yield and extent were gathered from the selected tea estates confined in the study area. Location and distribution of these estates and meteorological stations in the study area are shown in Figure 2(a, b) and Table 2.

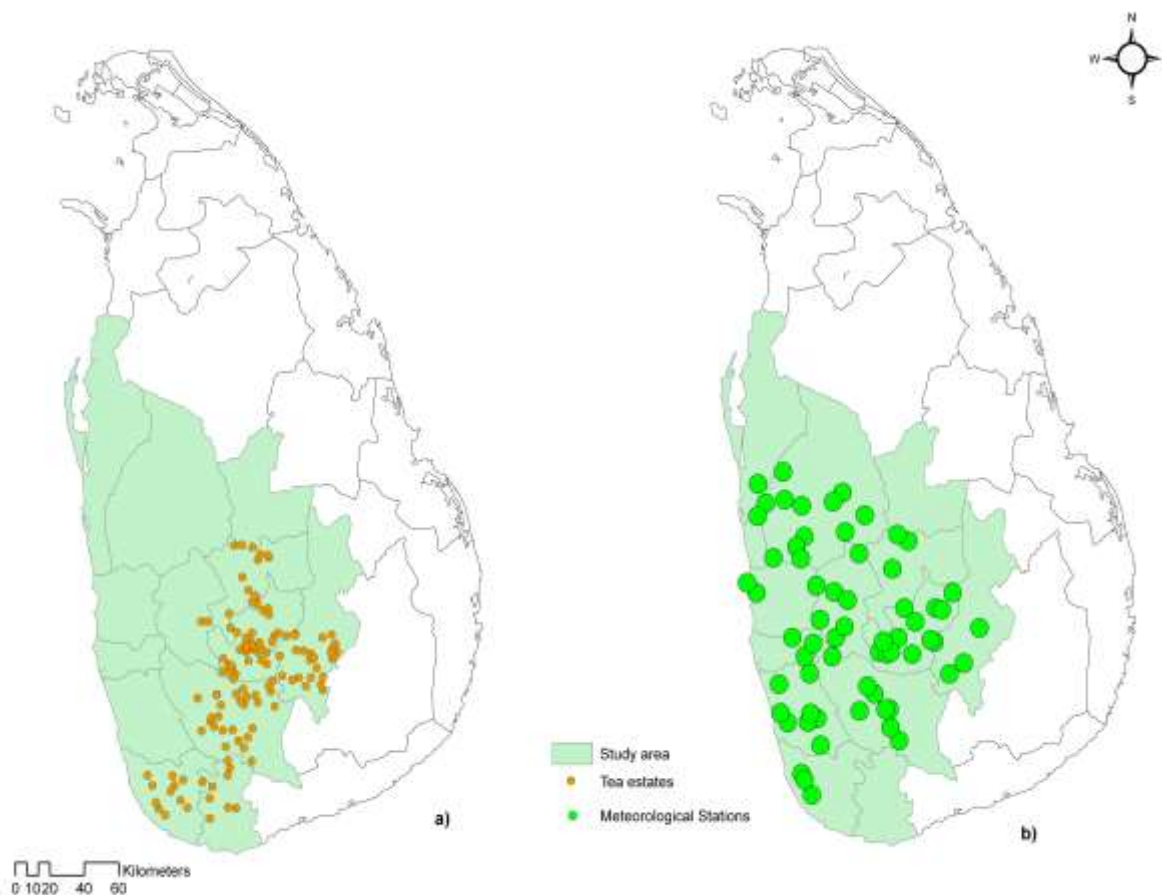


Figure 2: Location and distribution of a) tea estates; and b) meteorological stations (Source: Generated from the research survey)

Tea yield data were collected from vegetative propagated clones (aged between 4 to 20 years; plant spacing 1.2 m x 0.6 m; less than 0.5% of mortality; Nitrogen application 230-265 kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹) from each estate.

Table 2: AEZ-wise distribution of plantation estates for tea under study area

Crop	AEZs	Total estates	Sample size*	Error level
Tea	Low country wet zone (WL)	45	31	10%
	Mid country wet zone (WM)	52	34	10%
	Up country wet zone (WU)	37	29	10%
	Up country intermediate zone (IU)	49	33	10%

* calculated as per Yamane (1967)

Spatial and temporal maps creation

Spatial and temporal maps for crop suitability, spatial yield maps for tea crop and individual climatic factors maps were generated using ArcGIS 9.3 software. Tea crop suitability and yield dynamics were illustrated for 1980-1992 and 1993-2007 two time-frames. The geo-referenced data were transformed into spatial rainfall, relative humidity, temperature and evapotranspiration maps using the inverse distance weighing (IDW) interpolation, for 1980-1992 and 1993-2007 time-frames. Digital geo-referenced location maps for tea estates were created by using Geographical Positioning System (GPS). Actual yield data of tea estates were incorporated with attribute tables of each estate's location on the map. Spatial yield maps were created and variations in crop yield under two time-frames were analysed.

Crop suitability maps

Five factors including three climatic (RF, RH, T) and two crop factors (ET, CY) for crop suitability were ranked in the order of weighted average index (WAI) using Equation 1 (Miah, 1993).

$$WAI = [R_I (1.0) + R_{II} (0.5) + R_{III} (0.33) + R_{IV} (0.25) + R_V (0.20)] / \sum i^{th} \text{ rank} \quad (1)$$

Where,

$R_{i=I-V}$: Frequency of i^{th} relative importance factor of crop suitability

Pair-wise comparison matrix was constructed for climatic and yield factors to assess relative weight of those factors for their suitability to tea crop. This matrix was filled through research survey questionnaire, based on 1 to 9 point scale for pair-wise comparison. Consistency Index (CI), which denotes level of deviation from consistency, was computed using Equation 2 (Satty and Kearns, 1985).

$$CI = \frac{\lambda_{max} - n}{n - 1} \quad (2)$$

Where,

n : number of activities
 λ_{max} : maximum Eigen value

The ratio of CI to average Random inconsistency Index (RI) for the same order matrix is known as Consistency Ratio (CR). The relation of RI with n values is tabulated in Satty

(1980). By definition, the CR should be below 0.1 to obtain the acceptable consistency in the pair-wise comparison matrix.

Hopkins (1977) showed that the final suitability or impact is best deduced as a weighted sum of several factors, and suggested linear combination method. Crop suitability of tea crop, therefore, was expressed as a linear sum-product of suitability factors and weight assigned for its corresponding factor ($W_i, i=1-5$). The crop suitability was thus computed by the linear combination method (Equation 3) after calculating the weighing scores.

$$\text{Final suitability model} = (W_1 * \text{RF}) + (W_2 * \text{RH}) + (W_3 * \text{T}) + (W_4 * \text{ET}) + (W_5 * \text{CY}) \quad (3)$$

Where,

RF	: Rainfall
RH	: Relative humidity
T	: Temperature
ET	: Evapotranspiration
CY	: Crop yield

Tea crop suitability map was generated overlaying climatic factors maps (RF, RH, T) and crop factor maps (ET, CY) in GIS environment by using Equation 3 under two time-frames. The suitability maps of both time-frames were compared to identify the temporal changes of tea crop under the climate change.

The geographic shifts of crop suitability classes and yield classes were also computed. For this purpose, raster maps of crop suitability were classified into five distinct suitability classes. After their conversion into vector format, spatial analyst tool operations were performed. Centroids of each polygon of similar suitability class were calculated; which in turn were used to locate the overall centroid of the group to represent the corresponding class as a point value. The centroids were calculated for all five crop suitability classes of 1980-1992 and 1993-2007 maps for tea crop. The geographic (distance and direction) shifts of centroids thus represented corresponding shifts of each suitability class. These geographic shifts were measured and compared for tea crop.

Statistical and economic analysis

The normal distribution of data was checked by normality test. The paired samples t-test and sign test were assigned to identify the magnitude of tea yield change between two time-frames of each AEZ. The descriptive statistics were done for the analysis of rainfall, temperature, relative humidity and evapotranspiration. Annual rainfall values in different AEZs were analyzed using linear regression to study the long term behavior.

Average annual yield change was calculated for 1993-2007 with respect to 1980-1992. The average annual yield change for tea was measured in $\text{kg ha}^{-1} \text{yr}^{-1}$. Five yield classes were defined by the respective research institutes (Ministry of Plantation Industries, 2008). And five suitability classes were categorized using overlaid map of climatic and yield related factors viz. rainfall, relative humidity, temperature, evapotranspiration and yield. The total production loss or gain, during 28 years, was computed under two time-frames, considering mid value of the yield class and the area of its corresponding aerial extent.

Results and discussion

Priority order of suitability factors, and crop suitability model

Perspectives of academicians and experts of tea crop, retrieved through first-hand interviews, were recorded. Levels of suitability factors (both climatic and crop yield) are presented with five crop suitability classes and five crop yield classes in Table 3.

For tea crop suitability factor, WAI values were calculated (Equation 1). Priority order of these factors, for tea crop, was determined based on WAI values (Table 4).

The consistency ratio (CR) in the pair-wise comparison of tea was 0.05. The crop suitability model was deduced by the linear combination method after weighting scores ($W_{i, i=1-5}$) were identified for tea crop (Equations 4).

$$\text{Tea suitability} = (0.45 * \text{RF}) + (0.05 * \text{RH}) + (0.11 * \text{T}) + (0.05 * \text{ET}) + (0.34 * \text{CY}) \quad (4)$$

Table 3: Levels of crop suitability classes and crop yield classes

Suitability class	Rainfall (mm yr ⁻¹)	Relative humidity (%)	Temperature (°C)	Evapo- transpiration (mm day ⁻¹)	Yield class <i>Tea</i> (kg ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)
Tea					
Not suitable	1000-1500	84-88	30.0-33.0	>4.5	< 900
Marginally suitable	1500-2000	80-84	26.5-30.0	<2.5	900 - 1200
Moderately suitable	2000-2500	68-72	16.0-19.5	3.5-4.0	1200 - 1500
Suitable	3000-3500	72-76	23.0-26.5	3.0-3.5	1500 - 1800
Highly suitable	2500-3000	76-80	19.5-23.0	2.5-3.0	> 1800

Table 4: Priority order of crop suitability factors for tea crops

Crop suitability factor	Tea	
	WAI	Ranking in order of WAI
Rainfall	0.90	1
Relative humidity	0.22	5
Temperature	0.41	3
Evapotranspiration	0.27	4
Crop yield	0.47	2

Changes in climatic factors

The climatic parameters were analyzed for the period of 1980-2007; descriptive statistics comparing the two time-frames for the study area is shown in Table 5. The mean temperature of the study area significantly increased by 1.4 °C. Changes in rainfall and temperature during two time-frames are depicted in Figure 3 (a, b). Previous studies on regional climatic modelling (Benjamin et al., 2006) also estimated the temperature rise in the Asia and Pacific region of the order of 0.5-2 °C by 2030 and 1-7 °C by 2070.

Table 5: Changes in climatic factors in the study area during 1980-1992 and 1983-2007

Climatic factor	Time-frame	Mean	S.D. ^a	Minimum	Maximum
Rainfall (mm)	1980-1992	2574	282	2062	3057
	1993-2007	2522	355	1904	2989
Relative humidity (%)	1980-1992	80	2	77	83
	1993-2007	81	2	79	86
Temperature (°C)	1980-1992	27.4	0.5	26.3	28.1
	1993-2007	28.8	0.3	26.7	31.9

^a Number of observations, n=65 (RF); n=25 (RH); n=22 (T)

Long term mean annual rainfall values were compared at different AEZs, a total of 65 rain gauges were analyzed (Table 6). Mid country wet zone (WM) showed significant steep reduction in receiving annual rainfall. Although, WL, WU and IU indicated decreasing trends, yet not with statistical significance.

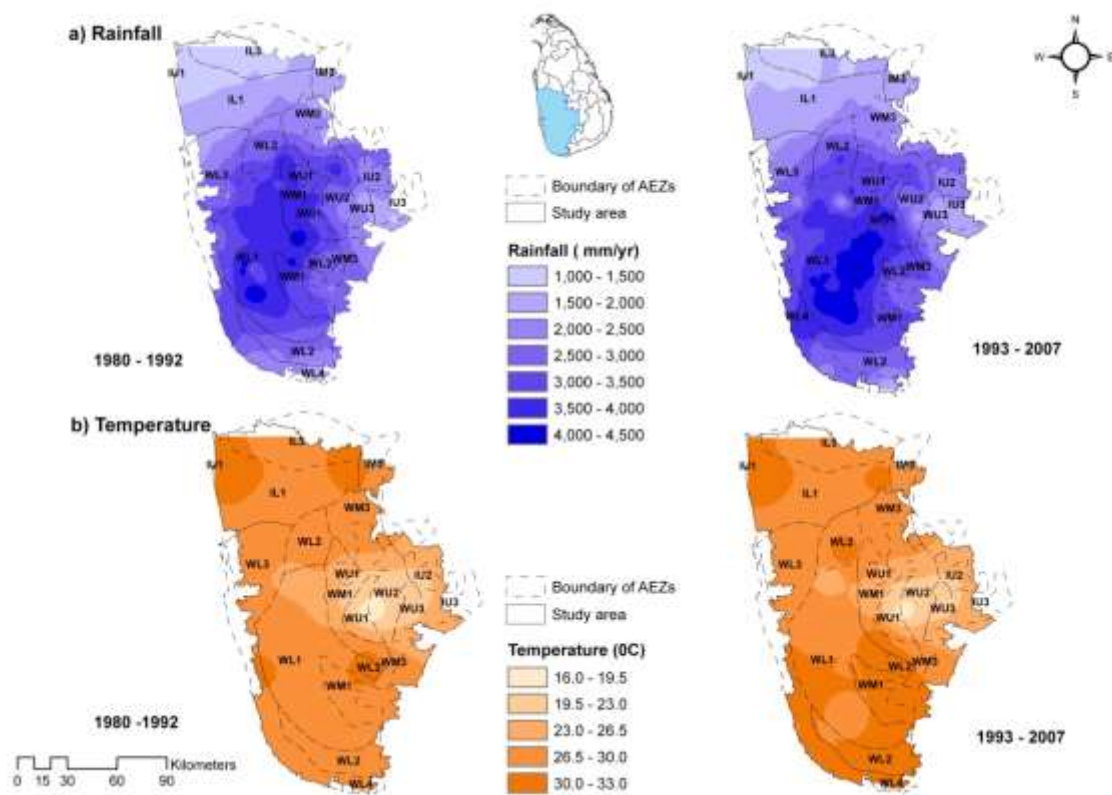


Figure 3: Change in a) rainfall: and b) temperature during the period of 1980 – 1992 and 1993 - 2007

Table 6: Results of linear regression analysis of mean annual rainfall values during 1980 - 2007 in different AEZs

AEZ	Regression coefficient	t-value	Significance probability
WL	-1.65	-0.21	0.832
WM	-23.70	-2.92	0.007*
WU	-23.55	-1.69	0.103
IU	-6.24	-0.83	0.417

* Significant at p=0.05

Evaluation of changes in crop yield and crop suitability

Paired samples t-test and sign tests were conducted for paired yield data of two time-frames for tea crop to detect AEZ-wise crop yield change (Table 7). The tea yield was significantly affected in both WM and IU zones. Reduced tea yield in WM mainly corresponds to the declining rainfall (Table 6).

Table 7: Crops' average annual yield comparison under two time-frames

Crop	AEZs (no. of observations)	Mean (SD) of yield		p-value
		1980-1992	1993-2007	
Tea (made tea kg ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)	WL (n=31)	1376.9 (586.9)	1358.0 (470.3)	0.845
	WU (n=29)	1805.6 (470.0)	1641.3 (332.7)	0.148
	WM (n=34)	2067.6 (355.6)	1452.2 (369.0)	0.000*
	IU (n=33)	1551.0 (277.6)	1799.0 (301.9)	0.000*

* Significant at p=0.05

The tea crop suitability maps were generated in GIS environment, and are shown in Figures 4. Changes in extent of different suitability classes for tea crop under two time-frames were analyzed. For tea crop, percent change in aerial extent according to five crop suitability classes (Table 8) and five yield classes (Table 9) during 1980-1992 and 1993-2007 were computed. There was no change in the total extent, as only those estates are considered for which data in both time-frames were available for comparison.

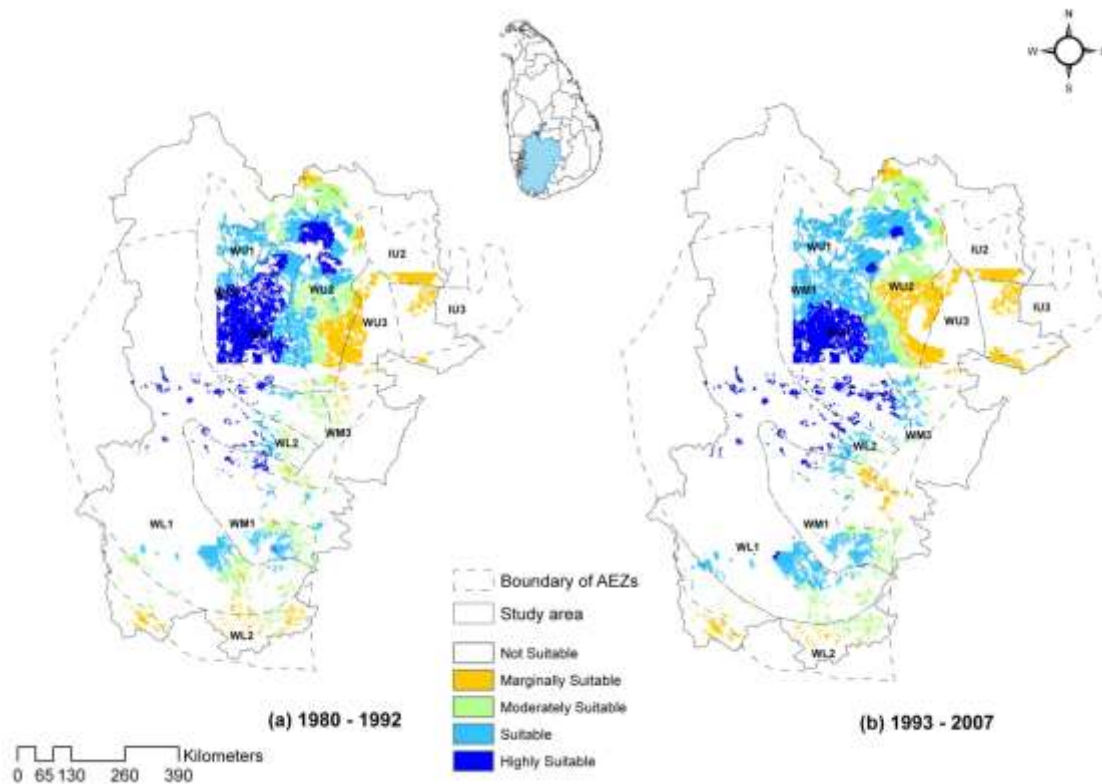


Figure 4: Crop suitability of tea during the period of a) 1980 – 1992; and b) 1993 – 2007

Table 8: Relative spatial shifts in aerial extent of crop suitability classes under two time-frames

	Crop suitability Class	Extent in 1980-1992 (km ²)	Extent in 1993-2007 (km ²)	% change w.r.t. first time-frame	% change w.r.t. total extent
Tea	Not suitable	91.01	131.79	44.8	2.4
	Marginally suitable	293.48	318.4	8.5	1.4
	Moderately suitable	390.59	337.24	-13.7	-3.1
	Suitable	508.74	637.29	25.3	7.4
	Highly suitable	442.51	301.61	-31.8	-8.2
	Total extent (km ²)	1726.33	1726.33		

Threatening incidence was observed in tea sector, where *not suitable* and *marginally suitable* land increased by 2.4% and 1.4% respectively; and area under *highly suitable* class decreased by 8.2%. The WM and WU AEZs, where large estates are located, the prevailed declining trend of rainfall has badly affected tea yield. The extent of 1500-1800 kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ and >1800 kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ tea yield categories have declined by 4% and 1.3% respectively. The experts have ranked rainfall as their first priority for tea suitability (Table 4). The yield distribution of tea crop maps were generated in GIS environment, and are shown in Figures 5.

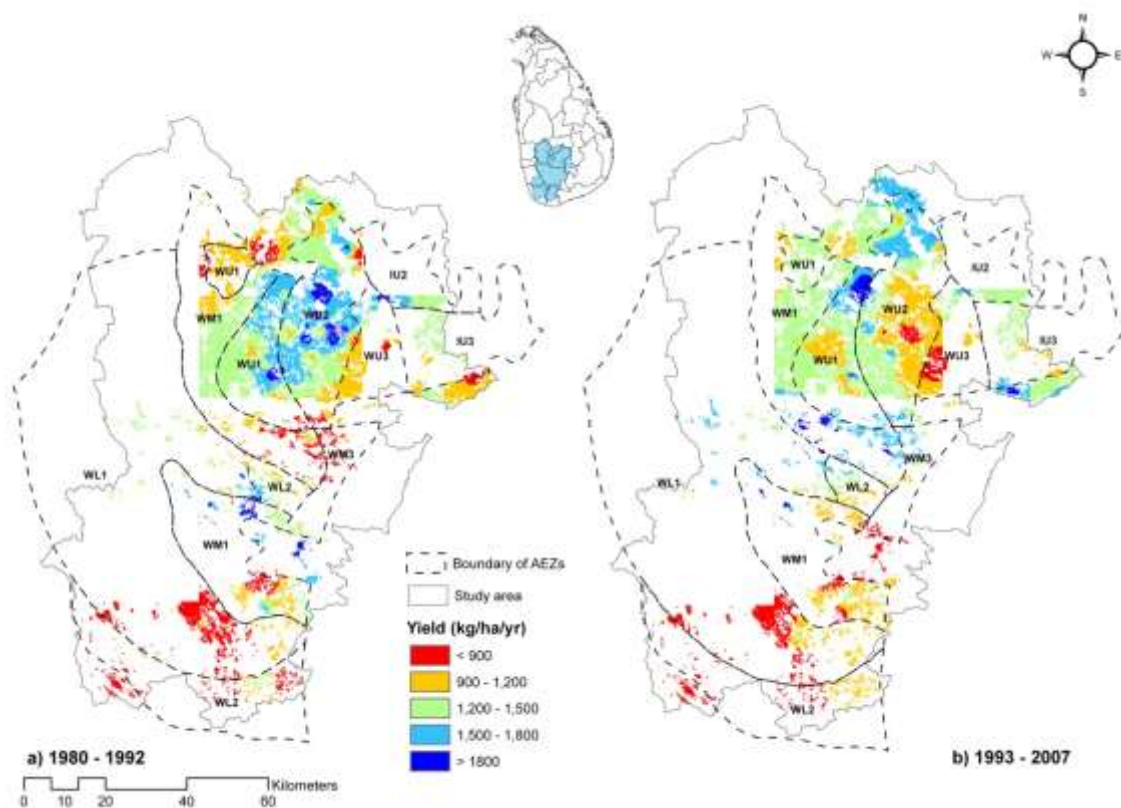


Figure 5: Yield distribution of tea during the period of a) 1980 – 1992; and b) 1993-2007

Table 9: Relative spatial shifts in aerial extent of crop yield classes under two time-frames

	Yield class	Extent in 1980-1992 (km ²)	Extent in 1993-2007 (km ²)	% change w.r.t. first time-frame	% change w.r.t. total extent
Tea(made tea kg ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)	< 900	253.71	194.02	-23.5	-3.5
	900 - 1200	412.27	480.82	16.6	4.0
	1200 - 1500	661.48	743.18	12.4	4.7
	1500 - 1800	332.75	264.21	-20.6	-4.0
	> 1800	66.15	44.13	-33.3	-1.3
	Total extent	1726.36	1726.36		

Loss/Gain of Tea Plantation Production

The total production of tea crop got altered during both time-frames, corresponding to changes in respective yields and aerial extents, which is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Loss or gain in Tea production during the two time-frames

Crop	Yield class Tea (kg ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)	Total production during 1980-1992 Time-frame	Total production during 1993-2007 Time-frame	Change in total production during 1980-2007
Tea (made tea million kg)	< 900	148.42	130.96	-17.46
	900 - 1200	562.75	757.29	194.54
	1200 - 1500	1160.90	1504.94	344.04
	1500 - 1800	713.75	653.92	-59.83
	> 1800	154.79	119.15	-35.64

The highest tea production gain of 344.04 million kg showed in 1200-1500 kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ yield category, while the highest loss recorded in 1500-1800 kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹ category. Overall, net gain was noted for tea which is 425.65 million kg.

Geographic Shift of Suitability, Yield and Climatic Factors Classes

Highly suitable class of tea shrinks and shifts 11.29 km South-West from its earlier centroid (1980-1992 period) (Table 11). The geographic shifts of yield classes are illustrated in Table 12. The highest yield category of tea moved away 8.79 km North-West from hill country area with declining trend of rainfall (Table 6). The rainfall class of 3500-4000 mm yr⁻¹ moved 13.67 km South-West (Table 13), which is reflected in declining rainfall at WM zone.

Table 11: The geographic shift of crop suitability classes

Crop	Suitability class	Geographic shift*	
		Distance (km)	Direction
Tea	Not Suitable	11.04	NW
	Marginally Suitable	6.18	N
	Moderately Suitable	6.43	N
	Suitable	2.87	W
	Highly suitable	11.29	SW

*Centroid of respective classes during two time-frames

Table 12: The geographic shift of crop yield classes

Crop	Yield class	Geographic shift*	
		Distance (km)	Direction
Tea (made tea kg ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)	< 900	3.77	SE
	900 - 1200	10.18	SW
	1200 - 1500	4.78	NE
	1500 - 1800	1.48	N
	> 1800	8.79	NW

*Centroid of respective classes during two time-frames

Table 13: The geographic shift of climatic factors

Climatic factor	Categories	Geographic shift*	
		Distance (km)	Direction
Temperature (°C)	16.0-19.5	2.01	S
	19.5-23.0	3.12	E
	23.0-26.5	9.50	NE
	26.5-30.0	30.44	N
	30.0-33.0	82.95	SE
Rainfall (mm yr ⁻¹)	1000-1500	4.21	NW
	1500-2000	6.11	NW
	2000-2500	13.67	N
	2500-3000	-	-
	3000-3500	7.70	NE
	3500-4000	13.67	SW
	4000-4500	4.82	E

*Centroid of respective categories during two time-frames

Conclusions

Analysis of meteorological data reveals significant declining trend of annual rainfall in mid country wet zone (WM) during last three decades. The mean temperature of the study area has shoot up by 1.4°C during 1980-2007.

The study reveals that crop suitability classes have reshuffled clearly between the two time-frames of 1980-1992 and 1993-2007. The aerial extents of five yield classes of each crop have undergone substantial change, much in-line with corresponding change in prevailing climate. Areas under lower tea yield categories have expanded with shrunken extent of higher yield categories.

With respect to the base year 1980, the highest average annual production loss of tea (219 made tea kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹) was recorded in WM AEZ, while WL (68 made tea kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹) and IU (162 made tea kg ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹) AEZs recorded loss during 1981-2007. Considering changes in both yield and the aerial extent of yield classes, overall net gains were calculated for tea (425.65 million kg), during 1980-2007.

Tea crop growers may be made aware of these shifting trends of crop suitability and yield classes in concurrence with climate change. Results of this study could help planning appropriate land use change not only for new plantations and replanting, but also for formulating strategies to maximize the returns. More importantly, it is hoped that tea plantation managers will use this information to rationalize inputs by concentrating on areas that require costly agronomic practices.

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