

Supporting Burundian Tea Producers and Smallholders

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While Burundi can produce some of the best quality tea in Africa, problems with consistency and low social and environmental standards are hindering industry expansion and Burundi's ability to access premium international markets.

To address these issues and improve the livelihoods of tea workers and smallholders, Taylors of Harrogate set up a partnership with Ethical Tea Partnership and Office du Tea du Burundi, with funding from the Department for International Development (DFID) Food Retail Industry Challenge Fund (FRICH).



Factory management training

Background

Burundi has a history of political instability and poor security, which although now improved, has contributed to years of slow economic growth.

As the second most exported commodity after coffee, tea is vital to the economy. At least 95% of the tea is produced for export, the

majority of which comes from one of five factories owned and managed by the Office du The du Burundi (OTB). These five factories are supplied by 55,000 smallholders who account for approximately three quarters of the tea produced in Burundi.

Due to highly favourable growing conditions, Burundi has the potential to produce some of the best quality

tea in the world and fetch high prices at auction. Despite this, the quality of Burundian tea remains inconsistent. Social and ethical standards are also poor. Together, these challenges were severely limiting the potential of the industry and those who depend on it.

The aim of the partnership was to improve the livelihoods of

smallholder farmers and the prospects of the industry as a whole by improving the quality of tea produced, introducing more sustainable production methods, and making Burundi a more attractive origin for tea buyers.

Tackling Underlying Issues

Quality consultants worked closely with management and workers at two OTB factories, implementing improvements in processes, procedures and equipment, and delivering training in all aspects of quality and best manufacturing practices. Improvements were made at all stages of production including general hygiene, and health and safety practices within the factories. As a result, leaf processing capacity has increased by one-third at one of the factories.

New quality guidelines were developed outlining how procedures should be carried out at all OTB factories. This will help to ensure that all staff (new and old) continue to produce good quality tea.

ETP's Regional Manager and



Waste water filtration system

Rainforest Alliance staff provided training and support to two factories and associated smallholders to improve their environmental and social standards and enable them to achieve Rainforest Alliance certification. Staff from OTB's other factories were involved in the training to enable changes to be embedded across the group.

As part of the project, ways to improve smallholder livelihoods

were analysed. One of the key recommendations was to link price to quality as an incentive for smallholders to employ good practice farming techniques. The analysis also concluded that setting up strong smallholder cooperatives would give farmers better access to finance and improve their ability to negotiate with the factories.

Achievements

The changes made by OTB since the project started are reaping many benefits. The two factories that were the focus of the quality work are now consistently producing higher quality tea, leading to better prices when benchmarked against the auction average. In 2013, one of the factories had an average position of 80th at the Mombasa auction. It is now consistently nearer the top and achieved the highest price of any tea in one of the 2014 auctions.

There have been many improvements in social and environmental management practices at both factory and smallholder farmer levels, and Rainforest Alliance certification was achieved at the



Community meeting



Smallholder farm visit



Good personal protective equipment



New factory toilet and shower facilities



Tea estate pluckers

end of 2013. There have been substantial improvements to health and safety at the factories and estates reducing risks and improving worker wellbeing. Guards have been installed to all machines with moving parts, electric cabling repaired, hazard identification improved, and appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE) is now in place. Access to potable water at work, the rehabilitation of worker housing, and new toilet and shower blocks has also improved conditions for workers. The project has also led to workers gaining access to free medical care; strengthened freedom of association and workers rights; and improved HR management practices on working time, overtime, and holiday leave.

The project has delivered notable improvements to the environment. All waste is now separated and managed responsibly. Factory wastewater discharge is now treated using newly constructed lagoon wastewater filtration systems. The correct storage and application of controlled agrochemicals and

the disposal of used containers is helping to protect flora, fauna, and ecosystems. The establishment of buffer zones between tea and water areas is also helping to protect waterways.

Helping smallholder communities

The support given to smallholder farmers has helped improve their productivity and quality. They are now employing good farming practices more consistently, such as leaving pruning waste in the field for better soil conservation and nutrient recycling, and improving their weeding practices, disease control, and water management. Smallholders have also diversified the crops and livestock they keep on their farms, which increases

resilience to climate change. Village savings and loans associations that allow participants to access microfinance are also underway, and training on business skills is provided.

Additional benefits include:

- Increased production and a reduced dependency on fertilisers through the application of compost
- Reduced soil erosion through contour planting of trees
- Improved awareness towards the protection of fauna and flora
- Increased vegetative fodder for animals through the planting of Napier grass on contours and edges of streams

Next steps

Commitments have been made to further enhance the two factories potential to manufacture tea consistently to a high standard.

Following the Rainforest Alliance certification of two factories and associated smallholders, OTB have now committed to certifying the other 3 sites by the end of 2016. Sharing of learning is already taking place among the sites.

A programme to strengthen the smallholder cooperatives is underway that will enable farmers to access finance more easily and benefit from economies of scale leading to better livelihoods.

Reverien Ndarusanze Ijenda, Factory worker: “Since implementation of the Rainforest Alliance Standard, we are earning more money and working in a safer factory. We are able to pay for medical care and educate our children, before this was difficult.”

Cyriaque Ndabiruhire, Farmer: “With the application of best practices such as good harvest, leaving pruning trash in the field, weeding, I’m sure the tea production will increase and our incomes will be improved.”

Ian Brabbin, Head of Tea, Taylors of Harrogate (Yorkshire Tea): “We have worked in collaboration with the ETP on challenging development projects in Africa. Their expertise, commitment, and contacts have really made a difference on the ground to drive these projects forward.”

