

## **Giving Ramala her childhood back**

### ***Rescuing children from child labour in Assam***

Ramala\* is from a very poor family who live and work on a tea estate in Assam, India. Three years ago, when she was just 12 years old, her parents made the difficult decision to take her out of school and sent her away to work to help make money for the family.

Ramala ended up working for a family as a servant in Duliajan. She didn't like her work and desperately wanted to be back home with her own family and go to school with her friends.

After two years of child labour Ramala told her mother and her employer that she wanted to return home. However, her employer didn't want to lose her and forced her to stay.

Ramala's mother didn't know what to do and so she turned to her local Child Protection Committee in Madhuting for help.

Unicef and the Ethical Tea Partnership are working together to establish Child Protection Committees on tea estates in Assam. The Committees are trained to protect children from abuse and exploitation and to identify and intervene whenever a child is at risk. As of early 2016 the partnership is working with 310 committees, who are being trained to protect children like Ramala.

Once Ramala's mother had raised her problem with the Committee they decided to go to Duliajan and help bring Ramala back to her family.

Six members of the Child Protection Committee went with Ramala's mother and elder brother to the house where she was working. They confronted the employer who refused to release Ramala to them. As per their training, the Committee then informed the employer that they were breaking the law by engaging Ramala in child labour and that they would go to the police.

Eventually the employer agreed to release Ramala and allowed her to return home to her family.

Unicef and the Ethical Tea Partnership are working to empower more young girls, like Ramala, to understand their rights and grow in confidence to protect themselves and become agents of change in their community. The programme is strengthening child protection systems with local and national governments and empowering the tea industry to support positive change for children.

Ramala is now settled back home with her family, where she belongs. She is enrolling back in school where she will learn alongside her friends and receive an education to give her the best possible second-start in life.

*\* Name has been changed to protect identity*

