



Press Release

Joining hands to address issues of violence, abuse and exploitation of children in tea-estates of Assam

UNICEF and Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) announce 3-year programme

18th December, Guwahati: A one-day symposium on promotion of child rights in the tea-estates of Assam, marked the formal launch of a new partnership between UNICEF and Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) to help protect and change the lives of children and young people living in tea gardens in Assam. The project supported by the Government of Assam, Assam Branch of India Tea Association (ABITA), and the Bharatiya Cha Parishad (BCP) is the first of its kind as it brings together key stakeholders in the tea-industry-both public and private organizations; and the supply chain to tackle child abuse and exploitation across the tea-sector. Ms. Runumi Gogoi, Chairperson, Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (ASCPCR) inaugurated the symposium as the Chief Guest.

Although representing 17 per cent of the State's population in Assam, the tea-communities are, among the most marginalized and socially excluded groups in Assam, with poor development indicators, exacerbated by traditional social norms such as child marriage and child labour. Education, especially for adolescent girls from the marginalized tea communities still poses challenges due to concerns relating to access, language, and more importantly early marriage, and employment during adolescence.

Dr. Tushar Rane, Chief of Field Office, UNICEF Assam, speaking at the launch, said, *'Child protection interventions, in the tea-communities of Assam, are of significant importance. These communities contribute 51 per cent of India's tea-production but remain marginalized. Women and children from the tea-garden, he said, form a core focus area of UNICEF's social inclusion and equity programming in the State and the new partnership will build upon the existing interventions in the tea-gardens.'*

The 3-year programme (2015-2017) will:

- Work with families in over 100 tea-gardens and 350 villages across Dibrugarh, Sivasagar and Tinsukia districts to empower and safeguard young people
- Provide life-skill training and education to nearly 25,000 girls and 10,000 community members to protect themselves against abuse and exploitation;
- Strengthen child protection systems with local and national government and empower the tea industry to support positive change.

Ms. Runumi Gogoi, Chairperson, ASCPCR, congratulated the stakeholders for taking this joint initiative of strengthening the child protection measures with particular focus on tea-tribes of Assam. She also highlighted the need for a multi-pronged approach to strengthen child protection measures and the need for up-scaling the initiatives across the tea-garden community.

Although the project will be active in only select tea-gardens, the objective is that the impact will be sector-wide as the project aims to bring about systemic change through good-practice guidelines on child protection in the tea estates, responsible business practices for tea-estates, and support to the overall child protection structures and systems.

Ms. Diya Sharma, ETP, in her speech, congratulated the strong coalition of companies and organisations that have joined together to address some of the deep-rooted protection issues in the tea-garden. Stressing on ETP's commitment to improve the sustainability of the tea sector and the lives and livelihoods of those that produce it, she added that ETP is delighted to be partnering with UNICEF in Assam, because it will give children, particularly girls and young women new life skills, improved confidence, and much better opportunities in life than before.

The UNICEF-ETP project is supported and funded by tea companies: Tata Global Beverages, Taylors of Harrogate, OTG, and Typhoo; UK retailer Tesco; and IDH, the Sustainable Trade Initiative.

Participants, at the symposium, included Managing Directors and Managers from select tea companies, senior officials from the State Labour Department, Officials from the Tea-Tribe Welfare Department, Department of Social Welfare and State Child Protection Society, senior representatives from ABITA and BCP, NGO representatives and UNICEF officials.

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