

## Supporting Change in Assam

The tea industry in Assam is affected by many social and environmental issues, many of which are deep-rooted. These issues are well known to the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) - a membership organisation of more than 40 international tea companies and retailers. ETP works with a range of expert partners in Assam on programmes that improve conditions for tea workers, farmers, communities, and the environment in which tea is produced.

While poverty, according to the World Bank, has declined sharply over the last couple of decades it still endures in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa – where many tea growing regions are located. Poverty so often comes hand-in-hand with a range of other issues such as poor health and well-being, malnourishment, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, low quality housing, unsafe migration, and limited access to education to name a few.

### The Indian Tea Sector

The Indian tea industry is large (second only to China) and over 80% of Indian tea is consumed within India. The majority of exports are for Russia, other Asian countries, and the Middle East.

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 (PLA) governs the Indian tea industry. The law covers employment matters such as working hours, wages, and leave, while also providing clear guidelines for healthcare, sanitation, canteens, accommodation, educational, recreational, and other facilities that the tea gardens must provide for their workers. However, these services are not always provided at a decent quality, government schemes have only had limited coverage and success in tea regions, and there are significant issues facing tea communities.

ETP therefore works in partnership with a range of organisations, including Indian institutions and the Indian Government, to improve the economic, social, and environmental conditions of the Indian tea industry. So, how is ETP's work contributing to change in Assam?

### Improving Young Lives

At the end of 2014, ETP entered into a major partnership with UNICEF in Assam that is working with 350 communities linked to more than 100 tea estates to help give young people brighter futures and a good quality of life.

The partnership brings together all key stakeholders in the tea industry as well as public and private partners to tackle child exploitation across the sector. Through peer support and education, the

partnership is working to reach 25,000 girls and 10,000 community members to help protect children from violence, abuse, and exploitation including trafficking and unsafe migration.



The programme focuses on giving girls access to education and training because girls living on tea estates don't typically enter into secondary education. This has been implemented through the strengthening and setting up of more than 350 Adolescent Girls' Groups (AGGs). AGGs empower girls with the confidence and knowledge they need to stay safe from exploitation. Girls also attend regular health talks and life skill classes, such as hygiene, sanitation and cooking, as well as taking part in drama and sports.

With the help of exposure visits to government services, banks, transport, and health facilities etc., adolescent girls are more aware of the services available and how to access them. This is also helping to build trust and understanding between communities and the police, which is often a significant barrier.

In addition, almost 300 Child Protection Committees (CPCs) have been formed to support child protection at the tea garden level. As well as training community members to understand the dangers of child trafficking and unsafe migration, the CPCs also intervene to demand the safe return of children engaged in exploitative labour and provide counsel to families that might be considering early marriage of their daughters.

A 'Tea Atlas' of Assam is being developed as part of the project, which will include information on health, education, and other basic amenities for each tea estate.

The project is also helping to improve financial literacy and saving habits among the tea garden workers to help ensure families have the financial resources to support their needs such as education

and medical emergencies. To date over 1,700 savings accounts have been opened and there are also plans to install ATM machines inside the tea

estates giving workers much better access to their money.

### What the girls think about the ETP - UNICEF project

**Bondona** is 14 years old and wants to be a doctor when she grows up because it is something that would make herself and her whole family very happy.

She says that the Adolescent Girls' Group has helped her to be able to communicate better with lots of different types of people. Now she feels more comfortable speaking with her elders and supporting younger girls in the group. The most important lesson that she has learnt from the club is how to be responsible for herself.



**Pallabi** is 15 years old and wants to be a teacher when she grows up because she enjoys teaching and learning and wants to help other children feel the same.

She says she enjoys the Adolescent Girls' Group because she has gained so much knowledge and has learnt new things.



**Sonali** is 16 years old and wants to be a lawyer when she leaves school. She says that a lot of people are scared to go to the police if they need help and she wants to be a lawyer to help people feel safe and confident to access police services.

She enjoys being a member of the Adolescent Girls' Group because it provides a forum to discuss issues that affect girls. It has also provided Sonali and her friends with an avenue to explore their talents, figure out what they want to be, and how to pursue their dreams.



### Bringing together partners to accelerate progress

Each year ETP hosts TEAM UP, the largest conference on tea and sustainability in the world. In 2016, TEAM UP was held in India, bringing together several hundred senior delegates to agree how to develop and scale-up approaches to deal with the sustainability challenges facing the Indian tea industry and communities.

The event led to the development of a *Roadmap for a sustainable and thriving Indian tea industry* (see last page) that benefits tea farmers, workers, and the environment. The Roadmap sets clear objectives

for 2020 and provides a guide for industry, governmental, and non-governmental organisations on where to focus their efforts.

### Improving Wages and Benefits

In May 2013, ETP and Oxfam released the report *Understanding Wage Issues in the Tea Industry*. The report was the culmination of a multi-stakeholder collaboration to increase understanding about wages, benefits, and the basic needs of tea workers to enable appropriate changes to be made so that tea plantation workers are paid a decent and fair wage.

The report highlighted that estate worker wage packages are made up of a cash component and in-kind benefits. Also, tea worker wages are set at the regional or national level and not by individual companies. This means all tea workers in a region are paid the same rate regardless of the profitability or certification of the estate. The report increased consensus about the need for improvements, and that changes are needed to regional wage-setting processes, and to the value and balance of the cash and in-kind components of tea worker wages.

In brief, while audits show that tea producers are paying legally required wages, concerns remain about the ability of wages in some tea growing communities including Assam to cover the needs of workers and their families.

Increasing worker wages is on the agenda. The last collective bargaining agreement (CBA) for Assam, which came into effect on 1 January 2015, raised cash wages from Rs95 to Rs115 per day. At the start of 2016 this was raised to Rs126 and in 2017 it will be increased to Rs137. The latest proposal from the Assam Government is that the cash part of the overall package should be further increased to bring it more into line with other sectors. ETP will continue to use the influence that we have to support improvements on wages and benefits.

### **Improving Sanitation and Housing**

A few years ago, ETP and its partner, the Indian Tea Association, together with technical assistance from UNICEF, improved the installation of water pumps and latrines on tea estates. The project was used to demonstrate an efficient way of improving sanitation facilities that could be readily replicated at tea estates across Assam.

Over the past year, in consultation with Indian tea producers and international certification bodies, ETP has developed a housing and sanitation assessment tool that delivers a detailed assessment of housing and sanitation at estates, which can be used to calculate upgrading costs and predict future needs. This enables everyone to understand the current situation, judge progress, and helps producers to plan and budget more effectively for upgrading housing stock and sanitation facilities to an acceptable level.

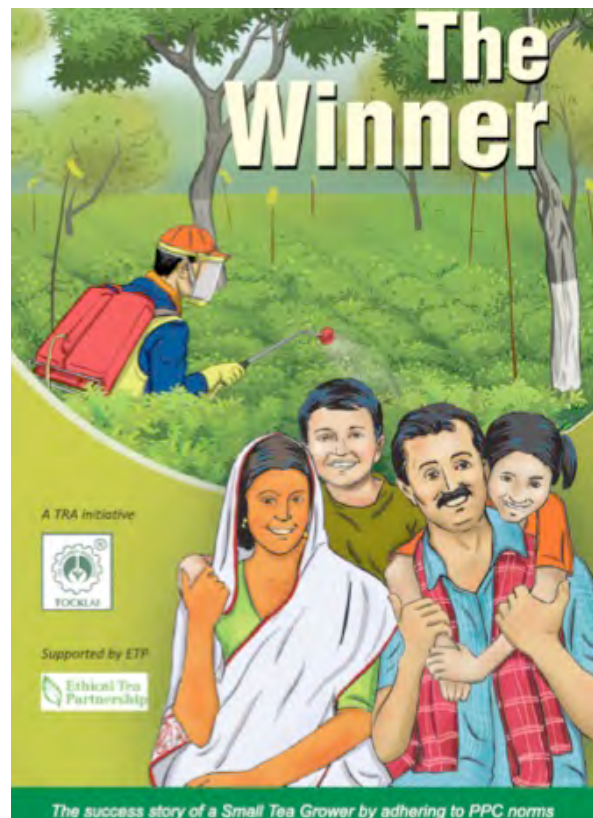
In a country where almost half the population doesn't have a toilet, getting a complete sanitation system that is valued and well used by local people takes both considerable infrastructure investment and good engagement with users. Prime Minister Modi has announced a major programme to improve sanitation across India, which is a welcome boost.

### **Training and Support to Improve Standards**

ETP offers training and support programmes to raise standards around health and safety, environmental management, and the safe use of pesticides. Improving agrochemical management is a challenge due to the incredibly humid conditions and because poor practice has been embedded for so long. Even after training, some workers may continue to spray without protective clothing although they are aware of the dangers. This is an issue we are continuing to focus on by working with estate managers to embed consistent and safe spraying. We are also looking at promoting different spraying regimes, increasing the use of non-chemical pest management systems, and exploring better protective clothing solutions.

In March 2014, the Tea Board of India unveiled the Plant Protection Code (PPC), which ETP as part of the *trustea* verification programme helped develop. This landmark policy requires the industry to minimise pesticide use and ensure responsible chemical management. It is a key framework to improve agrochemical use in the tea industry.

To support the safe use of agrochemicals across smallholder communities, ETP and the Tea Research Association (TRA) Tocklai developed an innovative comic-book style training manual on the safe and judicious use of agrochemicals, which is available in 3 languages (Bengali, Assamese, and English). The book is aimed at farmers and their families.



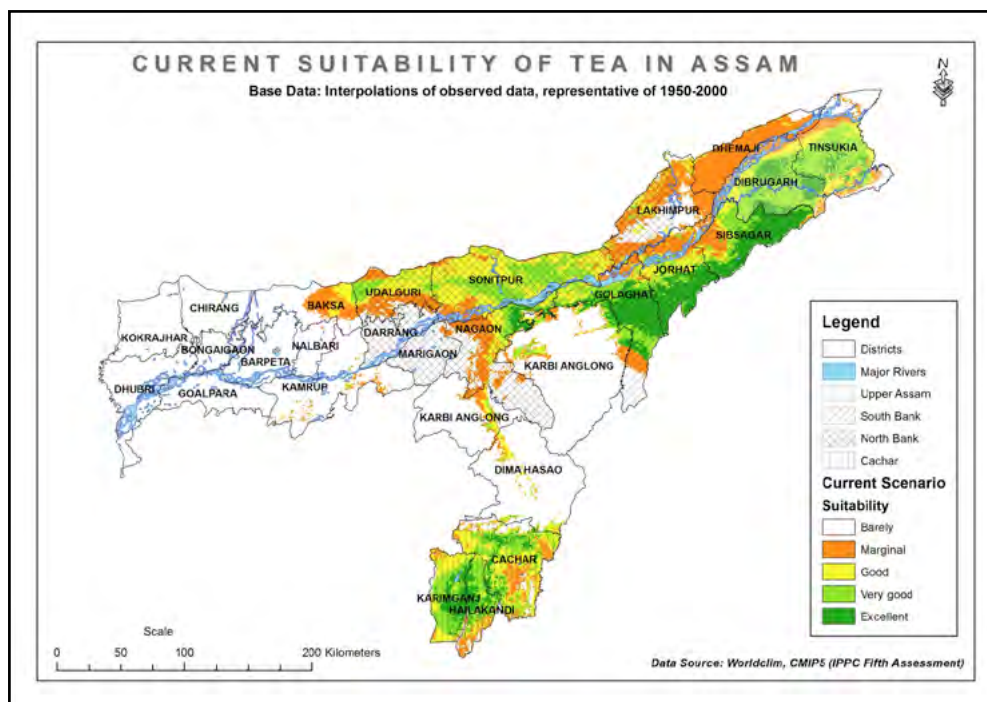
### Increasing Resilience to Climate Change

To support the industry in developing its approach to adapt to the effects of climate change, Tata Global Beverages Ltd. (TGBL) funded a partnership between ETP and Tea Research Association (TRA) Tocklai that assessed the likely impact of climate change on tea production in Assam. Climate modelling maps (see below) have been produced that predict how the current tea producing regions of Assam will look unless comprehensive adaptation strategies are initiated. Results of the mapping show that without intervention the four main tea growing regions of Assam (Upper Assam, South Bank, North Bank, and Cachar) will become far less suitable for tea cultivation, primarily due to changes in temperature and precipitation patterns.

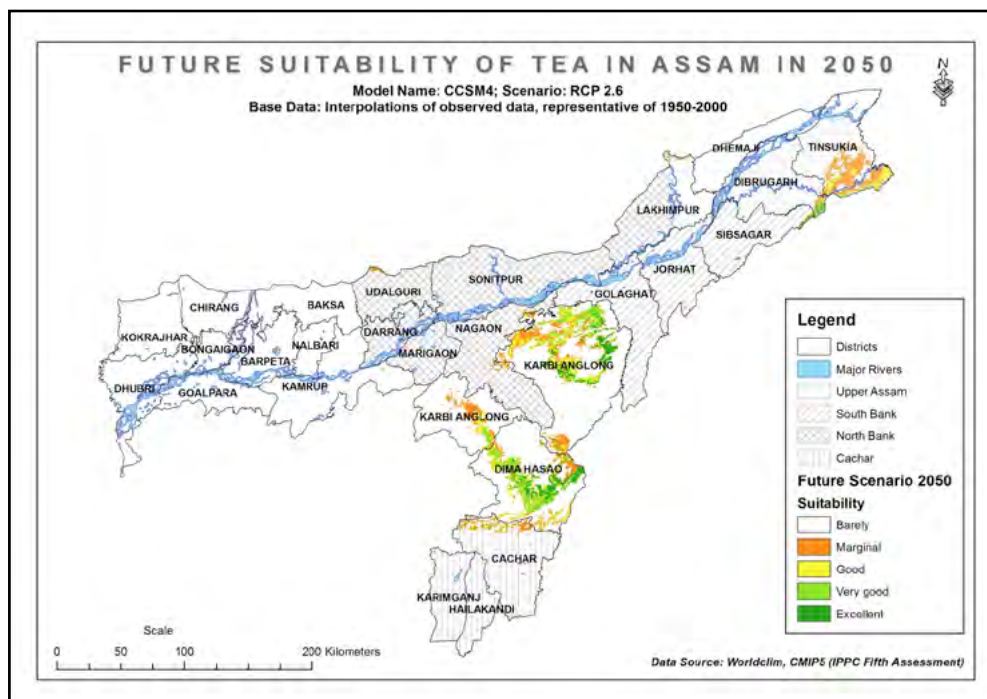
Key changes predicted by the model are:

- Both minimum and maximum temperatures will increase across all the major tea growing regions of Assam, which will impact on the suitability of the region for growing tea
- Rainfall is likely to reduce in the first quarter of the year and the amount of precipitation is likely to increase during monsoonal months

ETP, TRA, and other partners will now work together to create industry-wide awareness about the issues, and help both large-scale producers and smallholder tea farmers (currently about 200,000) adapt to the effects of climate change. ETP's experience of running climate change adaptation programmes in Africa should prove invaluable.



Current suitability of tea in Assam based on Maxent model



Future suitability of tea in Assam by 2050 in RCP 2.6 IPCC Scenario

# The Roadmap for a sustainable Indian tea industry

