



Ethical Tea
Partnership

INDIA COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE FINAL REPORT

December 2021

Responding to the pandemic to keep tea communities safe in Assam

In May 2021 India was reporting 222,000 Covid cases a day. Due to the dense population and lack of isolation facilities on tea estates throughout Assam, Covid-19 was spreading at speed and urgent action was needed.

The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) worked closely with the Indian Tea Association and medical professionals to listen to the needs of those most at risk in tea communities and acted through an emergency appeal.

Funds were raised by over nine ETP members, including A.C. Perchs Thehandel Aps, DAVIDsTEA, Bigelow Tea Company, East West Tea Company, Ringtons Limited, stick & lembke GmbH, Taylors of Harrogate, The Republic of Tea and Wollenhaupt Tee GmbH (Tea Trading Division).

The funds were used to supply urgent medical equipment, including testing kits and oxygen concentrators to help reach over 400,000 people across 100 tea estates as well as frontline staff at hospitals.

ETP Project Manager for India, Diya Kharwadkar comments: “The collective support from ETP’s members allowed us to deliver much needed medical equipment at a critical time of the pandemic. This was essential to slow down the spread of the virus and to help keep tea communities safe.”



Medical equipment distributed at an estate hospital.

Wider work in the region

At the same time as the emergency appeal, ETP leveraged the agility of its Plantation Community Empowerment Programme (PCEP) to build awareness, inform and educate tea communities as the pandemic continued.

This three-year programme acts as a catalyst for change through community-led, participatory decision making. The programme brings together workers, management, estate residents, trade unions and the wider community on tea estates, to ensure there is shared understanding and ownership of the challenges faced by tea communities and solutions are collectively put into place.

Throughout the pandemic, ETP's community empowerment groups have played a key role in informing and educating as the pandemic continues. They work closely with tea estate management to educate and to put local mitigation strategies in place. This includes enforcing social distancing, encouraging thorough handwashing, and regularly disseminating up-to-date information.

As time has progressed, the community empowerment groups have evolved and took their own initiatives to keep their communities informed and safe as new strains of the virus emerged.

Vaccinations

When India opened its Covid-19 vaccination programme (April 2021) for those aged forty-five and over, ETP's community empowerment groups were quick to respond. They encouraged people through door-to-door visits to make sure all eligible tea workers and their families had the right information to get vaccinated. This also included helping tea workers and their families to fill in their online registration forms, and to get the most vulnerable to the centres for the vaccines.

The community development groups have continually worked to dispel myths about the virus and encouraged more people to see the long-term benefits of the vaccination in the fight against Covid. Through these efforts, over 1,000 community members on tea estates that are part of the PCEP project have been vaccinated and/or tested.

Project Manager for India at ETP, Diya Kharwadkar further adds: "The support of the community empowerment groups has really helped to build trust, inform, and educate. By working to empower the community groups, we are reaching more people within tea communities especially those that are most vulnerable."

The PCEP programme is an important aspect of ETP's Strategy2030 to ensure a participatory approach sits at the heart of all programme design and activity. Tea communities are empowered through this model of working to ensure true sustainability once a projects end, as we have seen in the Covid response.



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