

Time to Care #HumanCostofTea

Keywords- #ASSAM Tea; #TruthAboutTea, #HumanRights, #ChaiPeCharcha #PLA1951
#PlantationLabourAct1951

Topic: Introductory session on Human Cost of Tea

Date: 16th October 2020

Time/Duration: 14:00 IST/ 3hrs

Location: Online

Background

How do the daily wages of a tea labourer compare with the profits of Tea Industry? What is the value share of one packet of tea for a tea plucking worker vis-à-vis other actors in tea value chain? Questions like these kind have been of keen interest to economists, policy makers, industry associations, trade unions and the alike since the times of Adam Smith and Karl Marx.

The industrialists and big corporate houses who own tea plantations do have independent auditors who often collectively project a compelling and stunning story about their bottom lines after assessing the opportunity cost of involving their time, money and resources in the business. Sadly, there are no concrete mechanisms available yet which can assess the working conditions of tea labourers and the Human Cost (emotional, physical and financial) that is prevalent in producing our one cup of tea. The mechanisms that do exist are nothing but ineffective as, in reality, they have not been able to resolve the issues on the ground.

Assam is the largest tea producing state of India producing slightly more than 51% of the total tea in India. Tea produced in Assam contributes significantly to the GDP of Assam. Yet, its seven lakhs workers, mostly women working in the upstream of the supply chains, are forced to work and live in highly undignified and exploitative conditions with poverty wages. Their rights though guaranteed to be protected under several laws, including the PLA 1951, have been historically violated.

Oxfam's' last years' tea campaign #TruthAboutTea, which was based on two studies conducted by TISS, Guwahati and BASIC, reiterated the findings voiced by several workers, trade unions, CSOs and academician in terms of share of value of one packet of tea received by the workers versus the other various stakeholders. It highlighted the abject living and working conditions, fractured public health and education infrastructure of workers in these plantations. The current COVID-19 crisis have exposed the fault line even more.

The webinar series proposed by Oxfam attempts to initiate thinking amongst the change makers, think tanks, influencers, decision makers and consumers on the existing gaps in the tea supply chain and how they can play a bigger role in improving the lives of tea labourers by engaging in dialogues, debates and discussions to address the Human Cost of Tea.

Target Audience:

Students, Academicians, CSO, Social working groups

Specific session learning objective:

1. Provide an opportunity to discuss and learn Business & human rights risks present in the Assam tea industry
2. To discuss and understand the role of civil society actors, students, human rights defenders, media to fill the gap

Draft Session Plan:

Duration	Potential topics to be covered	Speaker
<i>40 mins presentation, followed by 15 mins Q&A</i>	Introduction: Food for thought- Discussion around decent work and fair living conditions	
<i>40 mins presentation, followed by 15 mins Q&A</i>	The new normal in the Assam tea industry in the post Covid-19 times	
<i>40 mins presentation, followed by 15 mins Q&A</i>	Access to Remedy: Holding businesses accountable against the widespread human rights risks in the Assam tea plantations	