

Chaa Sambad

the voice of small tea growers

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Third Year on, Small Tea Growers Witness Delayed Post-Winter Rains



"Production of tea is again behind schedule due to delayed rainfall. This is creating financial difficulties for us," says Sonam, small tea grower, Organic Ekta Small Tea Growers' Society, Darjeeling.

It will be the third bad year in succession for Darjeeling tea growers. The phenomenon of delayed monsoon is not restricted to Darjeeling, though. There are reports of delayed rains from other parts of West Bengal such as Jalpaigudi and Uttar Dinajpur, and parts of Assam including Sonitpur and Karbi Anglong.

Since small tea growers are highly dependent on weather conditions, any anomaly may cause an adverse effect. "Successive delays in post-winter rain indicate a shifting rainfall pattern in the tea-plantation areas. This is taking a heavy toll on us small tea growers," Ajit Payeng, a small tea grower from Sonitpur, remarks.

Three additional factors need to be understood here. One, small tea growers usually do not have access to irrigation; two, they remain uncovered by agricultural insurance facilities; and three, the new price stabilisation fund (PSF) is yet to see the light of day.

In hilly areas, tea plantations are dependent on rains. During the winter months, rainfall is almost absent. It is with the first post-winter shower that the first flush arises. According to reports from tea estates in Darjeeling, rainfall has reduced by

almost 50 per cent in the hilly areas. Usually the first flush would come by 25 March, but this is now getting pushed to mid-April. Between the first and second flushes, there is a dormancy period when there is bungee leaf. So the delay affects the subsequent tea-plucking period as well.

We need some form of government support for setting up irrigation facilities in our area," points out Noor ullsmal, a small tea grower from Khoribari, Darjeeling.

Damru Munda, secretary, Atur Kimi Small Tea Growers' Society in Karbi Anglong, reiterates the point: "We have made repeated representations to the government authorities to help us by providing irrigation facilities. We hope that something is done soon."

The Agriculture Insurance Company of India Limited (AIC) was set up to provide financial support to farmers in case of failure of any of the notified crops as a result of natural calamities, pests and diseases. However, while plantation items like rubber and coffee are covered under the schemes, tea is yet to be included. Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, president, Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Association (CISTA), has been quoted as saying, "We have requested the Union finance minister to consider this in the next budget proposal."

The price stabilisation fund (PSF) scheme, launched in April 2003 for a period of 10 years, was supposed to provide financial relief to growers when prices of tea fell below a specified level. The scheme expired in 2013 and now the new one is awaited.

The livelihood of over two lakh tea growers are at stake and it is high time that the government worked towards reducing their insecurities and putting a support system in place.

STGs of Mizoram Set to Move up the Value Chain

Facilitated by the societies, Mizo Tea, Kim Tea, Kannan Tea and Darzo Tea are becoming popular brands in the local markets of the state. So far, about 25 small tea growers' societies have been formed in Mizoram.

At present there are three running mini factories: Kannan Tea Factory in Kawnpui, Kolasib district, Samuel Tea Factory in Biate, Champhai district, and Ngopa Tea Factory in Ngopa, Champhai district.

The setting up of the sub-regional office of Tea Board of India in Aizawl, led by Diganta Barman, assistant director of Tea Development, in January 2014 has given a boost to the STGs. They have been able to avail of subsidies - new planting subsidy under Plantation Development Scheme (PDS), pick-up vehicle and leaf sheds.

Under an initiative by Tea Board, Kannan Farming Society, Kawnpui, has started producing Mizoram Tippy Green Tea, which is becoming a brand with organic certification. In Darzo, an organic tea nursery has been established with three lakh seedlings that are fully organic. A micro factory is under construction in Darzo village and is expected to be completed in August 2015.

In S. Vanlaiphai, Lunglei district, one mini factory has been proposed to connect the villages of Lungleng, Muallianpui and Sangau. s year Tea Board has set a target of 100 hectares for new planting in the state.

Concept & Design by
The Information and Feature Trust (TIFT)
Laxmi (Kayyadam)
Thondayad, Chevarambalam P.O.
Calicut - 673017
M: 9526577902 / 09868182420
E: edit@labourfile.org
W: www.labourfile.org

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EqualiTea Enables Women STGs to Access Fairer Terms of Trade

Until 2002, Bhiton Kalioni in Karbi Anglong district, Assam, had seen paddy and vegetable fields. Farmers' income was low and prospects to increase the same were limited. It was around this time that the first tea cultivation started. By 2009-10 most of the homes had planted tea. Women had taken the lead in this. Some took loan from the bank and some others used up all their savings to start tea cultivation. TV 23 (Tocklai vegetative tea-clone variety) is what they all opted for. They got saplings from a nearby nursery at the rate of four rupees per sapling (including transportation charges). In the first year, some of them had additional crops like cosso saag. After the second year they started plucking the tea leaves, and tea became their primary source of income. They would pluck the leaves and give it to an agent, who paid Rs 18 at the start of the season; this would fall to Rs 7 by the end of the season. In November 2013, EqualiTea staff visited the growers and asked them to form a society and engage in direct leaf trade.

The general body meeting of the society took place in January 2014. An executive committee was appointed with Nina Lethepi as chairperson of the society. The society also resolved to start a savings account in the nearby bank. Named as Panjan Women Mini Tea Plantation Society, it has a total of 37 members.

Members informed that the main reason for forming the society was to be able to get a fair price for the green leaf and to ensure a better income for the women STGs. As the chairperson said, "We have been

doing tea cultivation but not getting the right price." "We are very happy with the formation of the group. Women are taking responsibility in the group and we hope to take it further," she added.

In the beginning, the lack of training was a problem. The women were plucking the leaves in their gardens following a seven-day cycle, but for pruning they were relying on estate labour. Having no knowledge of pruning, they were often misled by those who would come to do the pruning. "Sometimes the labourers we hired pruned even those bushes that were supposed to be left unpruned. This was something we realised only once we formed the society and received technical training. We hope that with more training we will be able to do the pruning ourselves," said Hamsara Katharpi, a member of the executive committee.

The second concern was with regard to fertilisers and pesticides. "So far we have been using what the agent supplied. After forming the society we have got a list of harmful chemicals and now we will be making our own purchases," Florence Hansepi, another executive committee member, informed.

The society has entered into an agreement with a bought leaf factory for 3.5 kg of tea for this season. They have fixed two vehicles for carrying the leaf. None of the members has taken an advance from the agent this season. They have negotiated with the same BLF where the agent used to supply their leaves. All the members are determined to supply good-quality leaves and improve their income from this season.



Tea Cultivation - It's Changed My Life for the Better

International

Md A Rahim of Chowdhurygoch village is a poor farmer. He lives in Salbahan Union of Tetulia upazilla, the northernmost part of Bangladesh. He has 80 decimals of land; it is mostly fallow land, not suitable for seasonal crops. He used to cultivate paddy and jute in his land, and some vegetables around his home. Paddy cultivation required irrigation and with water sources being far away, he needed to rent a 'latapipe' (creeper/twiner pipe), which was charged on a per-hour basis.

As he could not meet the needs of his family with the income from the land, Rahim also took to driving a van for living. Even then he had to struggle to continue the children's education and meet other requirements. When he heard about the EqualiTea project, he decided to join it. In October 2012 he joined the project and started tea cultivation in 2013.

Rahim received relevant training as a participant in the EqualiTea project. In 2013, he received training on 'selection of land, land preparation, planting, bush formation, frame-forming prune, tipping and step-up plucking, and maintenance foliage', 'pruning and winter cultivation', and 'irrigation, mulching, weed control and tipping'.

In 2014 he received training on 'fertilizer application, methods of making

compost, pests, and disease and integrated pest management', 'plucking, shade trees, and semi-permanent species', and 'raising nursery for own plantation and cost control and accounting'. Rahim also received training on 'effective group formation'.

In addition to the training, Rahim received 5,000 tea saplings for starting cultivation. He planted these saplings in 60 decimals of land. After about twelve months, they started collecting some leaves.

In 2013, Rahim invested Tk 14,280 in the tea cultivation and earned only Tk 2,101, as tea trees needed at least two to three years for reaching full plucking stage. In 2014 he invested Tk 25,232 and harvested 2,050 kg of green leaf, earning Tk 43,731. Up to March 2015, he had invested Tk 14,600 and earned Tk 15,737.

Rahim says, "I can now provide better education to my children. They have better food and clothes too. My social status has improved." He is already making careful plans to expand his small farm and make it a real business. "What's most important," he says, "is that the other members in the group grew more confident as they saw my growth, becoming a better farmer, earning a better income, and providing better food to the children."

At Chawliagochh, the Small Tea Growers Come into Their Own

Chawliagochh is a small village in Chopra block of Uttar Dinajpur district in West Bengal. Tea cultivation directly contributes to the livelihood of the people in this village. On an average, each small tea grower holds a land of 1.5 acres for tea cultivation. A relatively secluded place, none here had heard about Tea Board of India.

Small tea growers were selling their green leaf to agents. The price these growers got was hardly commensurate with the value of their produce. Growers had to accept an average price of Rs 5 to Rs 6 per kilogram of leaf. This price was for 21 per cent of fine green leaf. Overall, the small tea growers were cheated by leaf agents. The price that agents secured from the bought leaf factory (BLF) was not disclosed to the small tea growers. As a result, these growers were deprived of the actual price of the green leaf produced by them and they had to accept whatever price was offered to them.

Once, an anxious group of small tea growers from Chawliagochh visited Mount View BLF to know the actual price being paid to agents for the green leaf. "We were unaware of the actual price being paid for the green leaf we produced. The leaf agents never told us the price they were getting from the BLF. So some of us decided to go to Mount View BLF and talk to the managers there, in the hope that they would give us exact information. However, when we reached there, we were threatened by the managers and employees of the factory. We were told to be satisfied with the price we were getting and not to intervene in this matter in the future," Haradhan Mondal, a small tea grower of Chawliagochh, narrated.

Subsequently, Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) explored this small village and convinced the small tea growers to form self-help groups so that they could get a fair price for the leaf. CEC has succeeded in creating the Maa Durga Group. Growers are now doing leaf trade through the group. Society registration, bank-account opening and BLF linkage are in the process of being done.



The Team

Name & Location	Email & Mobile No.
J John Project Director	jjohnedoor@cec-india.org 09868164009
Pallavi Mansingh Project Manager	pallavimansingh@cec-in.org 09810393391
Priyanka Bharadwaj Delhi	priyanka.bharadwaj@cec-in.org 08447301299
Minto Goswami Karbi Anglong, Tinsukia	minto.goswami@cec-in.org 07399062142
Pijush Goyary Bodoland, Sonitpur	pijush.goyary@cec-in.org 08011008314
Sujit Hazarika Jorhat, Golaghat	sujit.hazarika@cec-in.org 09435670378
Shampa Das Shibsagar	shampa.das@cec-in.org 09508760636
Ratul Gogoi Dibrugarh	ratul.gogoi@cec-in.org 09435906932
Kaustav Roy Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Coochbehar	kaustav.roy@cec-in.org 08509221406
Ayananta Roy Uttar Dinajpur	ayananta.roy@cec-in.org 09474415544
Mungei P Arunachal Pradesh	mungei.p@cec-in.org 09089397867
Dayananda Pashi Tripura	dayananda.pashi@cec-in.org 09436923630
Ramdinmawia P. T. Mizoram	ramdinmawia@cec-in.org 09774332355

Northern West Bengal Gives Its Mixed Response over Union Budget 2015

The Union Budget received a mixed response from north-west Bengal, with some initiatives receiving kudos, while many demands appear to have been lost in the din.

While speaking on the budget, PK Shah, ex-chairman, CII, North Bengal chapter, said, "Being the gateway to the north-east, north-west Bengal will benefit from the projects of the north-eastern region like the AIIMS in Assam."

The tea sector, a major driver of the economy of the region, was most disappointed. "The famous Darjeeling tea is going through a crisis. But there's nothing for it in the Budget," said a senior planter from Darjeeling.

Small tea growers contribute 36 per cent to the national tea yield. "But we are deprived of almost all major support. Once again our cry went unheard," said Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, secretary of Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Association (CISTA).

Source: *The Economic Times*, February 28, 2015

Small Tea Growers Welcome Proposal to Amend Tea Act

Small-scale tea growers have welcomed an amendment to the Indian Tea Act proposed by the Indian Tea Board (ITB). "We are happy that the ITB has kept us in its priority. The changes incorporated in the proposal were suggested by us and have been in discussion for long," said Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Association.

They are particularly happy about the move to officially define the small grower. According to ITB's proposal to the Union ministry of commerce and industries, "a small tea grower is a person who owns less than 25 acres of estate in his name." The existing Tea Act is silent on this.

Another proposal in the group's favour is the change suggested on the method that controls extension of plantation. More importantly, the proposed amendment includes a provision to ensure reasonable pricing of green leaf for the small growers. The provision says: "The central government may, by general or special order, give directions for ensuring the reasonable price payable by the registered manufacturers for the green leaf bought by them."

Source: *The Economic Times*, February 2, 2015

EqualiTea Societies that have Received TBI Subsidies (as on 31 March 2015)

SI No.	Name of Society	District
1	Dhoroni STG Society	Golaghat
2	Vasundhara STG Society	Golaghat
3	Dharitri STG Society	Golaghat
4	Jyoti STG Society	Golaghat
5	Nabajyoti STG Society	Jorhat
6	Aukur STG Society	Jorhat
7	Trinayan STGSociety	Jorhat
8	Kakodunga STG Society	Jorhat
9	Seujttam STG Society	Jorhat
10	Alok STG Society	Jorhat
11	Jagaran STG Society	Jorhat
12	Mahan STG Society	Jorhat
13	Panjan Women Mini Tea Plantation Society	Karbi Anglong
14	Ranagaura STG Society	Tinsukia
15	STG Development Society	Tinsukia
16	Luitpuria STG Society	Tinsukia
17	Seuji Khudrok Chah Khetiyok Samiti	Tinsukia
18	Himalayan STG Society	Tinsukia
19	Tagera STG Society	Tinsukia
20	Uttar Axom Tea Society	Tinsukia
21	Kailashpur Khudra Chah Khetiyok Samiti	Tinsukia
22	Chaulung Sukhafa STG Society	Tinsukia
23	Sunrise STG Society	Tinsukia
24	Krishna Nagar STG Society	Dibrugarh
25	Green Leaves STG Society	Sonitpur
26	Somaina STG Society	Sonitpur

SI No.	Name of Society	District
27	Rwdwm STG Society	Sonitpur
28	Chaiduar STG Society	Sonitpur
29	Heuj Amtola STG Samiti	Sonitpur
30	Chatrang Balijan STG Society	Sonitpur
31	Uttar Gohupur STG Society	Sonitpur
32	Sona Bilai STG Society	Udalgudi
33	Rwdwmkhang STG Society	Udalgudi
34	Rwdmsha STG Society	Udalgudi
35	Hajw Sher STG Society	Udalgudi
36	Milanjyoti STG Society	Udalgudi
37	Baba Loknath STG Society	Jalpaigudi
38	Jaigir Fakirpara STG Society	Jalpaigudi
39	Latagudi STG Society	Jalpaigudi
40	Amgudi STG Society	Jalpaigudi
41	Dhappanj Udeyoman STG Society	Jalpaigudi
42	Dhappanj Nabasangram STG Society	Jalpaigudi
43	Patkata Baropetia STG Society	Jalpaigudi
44	Koralbari STG Society	Jalpaigudi
45	Chawalhati Nehati STG Society	Jalpaigudi
46	Evergreen STG Society	Sibsagar
47	Jagaran STG Society	Sibsagar
48	Nava Alok	Sibsagar
49	Pragati STG Society	Sibsagar
50	Astha STG Society	Sibsagar
51	Biate STG Society	Mizoram
52	Darzo STG Society	Mizoram

Biopesticides

Extensive use of chemicals in controlling pests and diseases has led to pest resistance, pest resurgence, environmental pollution and so on. Against this, biological control of pests is one viable method of integrated pest management. Some biological control agents are as follows:

- Botanical pesticides
- Microorganisms (bacteria, fungi, viruses and nematodes)
- Pheromones
- Insect growth regulator
- Transgenic product

Factors affecting performance of biopesticides

Soil acidity, pathogen virulence, host resistance, pesticide residue, temperature, shelf life, and quality are some of the factors that determine the efficacy of biopesticides.

Biopesticides in tea

Trichoderma

Trichoderma is an antagonistic soil fungus that inhibits growth of plant pathogens. It has been found to be highly effective in controlling Poria branch canker, thorny stem blight and primary root diseases, namely charcoal stump root rot and brown root rot in tea.

Neem seed kernel extract: Aqueous extract of neem seed kernel is found to have pesticidal activity against a wide range of tea pests.

Availability of biopesticides in India	Quantity	Constraints
Neem 300 ppm	Over 1,000,000 litres	Quality and stability
Neem 1,500 ppm	Over 250,000 litres	Quality and stability
Bacillus thuringiensis	Over 50,000 kg	Quality and stability
NPV (liquid)	0.5 lakh	Quality and stability
NPV (WP)	Nil	Quality and stability
Beauveria	Meagre	Quality and stability
Pheromone traps	Over 5 lakh	Quality and stability
Lures	Over 20 lakh	Quality and stability
Trichogamma	Meagre	Quality and stability
Chrysoperia and others	Meagre	Quality and stability
Biocontrol insect	Meagre	Quality and stability
Trichoderma	Over 500 tonnes	Quality and stability

Sources: *Miscellaneous Reports of Toklai and Tea Board of India; Manual for Training of Tea Plantation Workers & Small Tea Growers, Centre for Education and Communication (CEC)*



Centre for Education and Communication
173-A, Khirki Village, Malviya Nagar
New Delhi - 110017
T: 91 11 29541858 / 29541841
F: 91 11 29542464 E: cec@cec-india.org
W: www.cec-india.org