

What Makes The Perfect Cup Of Ceylon Tea?

Five of Sri Lanka's top tea companies share the secret to a successful brew .



'Save the Children' and tea stakeholders aim at protecting children's lives and human rights within the tea industry.

Sri Lanka is the world's fourth largest tea producer with the industry employing over one million people in the country. Ceylon Tea is world renowned for its high quality and taste. A great cup of Ceylon Tea is made with the contribution of generations of people from the plantation communities, especially women, who spend most of their lives in the tea gardens. The protection of human rights within the supply chain, particularly those of children and women, has become crucial to the industry that relies heavily on a labor intensive workforce.

The country's leading tea producers have recognized the importance of ensuring the social protection of their workforce and sustainability in their business models. These companies understand that their labor force live and work in difficult and challenging conditions. Experiences of intergenerational marginalization and

vulnerability remain, to date. These have caused the plantation sector to lag behind progress already achieved in the rural and urban sectors of the country. The Sri Lanka tea industry is challenged by labor retention issues. A happy worker is a productive worker. Happy children mean happy families. Ensuring the wellbeing of children and their families within the tea supply chain therefore, means a more productive workforce and one that is more likely to stay within the industry. As the largest independent international organization working for children, Save the Children proposed the adoption of Child Rights and Business Principles (CRBP) to stakeholders of the local tea industry in 2017. Today, five of Sri Lanka's largest plantation companies: Horana Plantations, Kelani Valley Plantations, Talawakelle Tea Estates, Bogawantalawa Tea Estates, and Elpitiya Plantations have integrated these to their business models.

CRBP is a framework developed by UNICEF and Save the Children is based on the UN Human Rights and Business Principles framework. It is a shared ambition of both Save the Children and tea stakeholders to globally promote ethically produced 'Ceylon Tea' bringing more benefits to both plantation communities and companies by promoting children's and human rights within their businesses.

Johann Rodrigo, Chief Executive Officer of Horana Plantations said, "We found that the heart of the plantations are the mother and then the child, so we have to protect our children because they are the future of the plantations."

Rodrigo explained that there had been a gap between children on plantations, plantation workers and the rest of the population. He stated that there was no functioning mechanism to protect children on the estates, which led to his group, Hayleys, embracing the policy across all of their companies.

Adding further, he described the companies as, "Catalysts between the Government of Sri Lanka and the plantation community together"

The five companies, facilitated by Save the Children to voluntarily adopt a child protection policy, which upholds the ten child protection standards, signed a public private partnership agreement with the Ministry of Women and Child Affairs in 2019 to work in cooperation ensuring that child protection services delivered by the Government were accessible to the children of the estate communities. Under the child protection policy, the companies appointed Child Protection Focal Points for each estate from among the estate staff. There are 134 Children's Clubs on the estates now, which allow children to participate in decisions on their own

development

Village Child Development Committees have meanwhile, been established on 46 of the estates. These map, identify and respond to children's vulnerabilities. The committees are connected to the Divisional Child Development Committees and are part of the Government's child protection mechanism. As a result, the estates are now connected with child protection services at the Divisional level through the Child Rights Promotion Officers and Child Protection Officers

Rodrigo also emphasized that the companies were now the main pillars protecting the estate's children and ensuring them a better life.

For more information on child protection in the tea as well as other industries, kindly contact Save the Children at gmail.srilanka@savethechildren.org