Enhancing the Opportunities for Women in India’s Tea Sector

A Gender Assessment of Certified Tea Gardens
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1. Introduction

Tea, the most popular drink in the world after water, is cultivated in over 36 countries in the world. India is the second largest producer of tea, recording more than 900 million kilograms and accounts for about a quarter of world production. A labour intensive process, production of tea provides employment to over 2 million people in remote rural areas of the country, while as an agricultural commodity it earns valuable foreign exchange.

Tea is cultivated in small gardens and large plantations. Growers holding up to 10 hectares (25 acres) fall under the category of small growers, and big growers denote all growers with land holdings above 10 hectares. However, smallholders include marginal farmers owning and cultivating less than an acre while large estates or plantations can be anywhere between 100 and 1,200 acres, often part of a chain of estates owned by large corporations. Most estates have their own tea processing factories on the estate, where green leaf is processed into dry tea leaves, either Orthodox or CTC. Small growers on the other hand, sell their green leaf to Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs).

Producing tea, either on smallholding gardens or tea plantations, is hard work. The main labour-intensive activities of tea workers include harvesting, fertilising, weeding, pruning, soil conservation, control of pests and diseases. Women form over 50 percent of the workforce, and are concentrated in plucking operations that form up to 70 percent of the work in tea production. Workers are on their feet for hours at a time, a basket at the back holding harvested leaf. Discrimination of women based on sex, with women doing most of the fieldwork, working longer hours than men have been noted in estates. Representation of women in trade unions being is limited, trade unions in tea

1 CHAI TIME: Sustainable Livelihood for Small Tea Growers through CSR.
producing countries being weak and labour rights easily side stepped are also some of the vulnerabilities reported.

Growing consumer concern about the tea production methods employed, and their impact on poor people and the environment, have been translated into various certification systems that seek to address these concerns in the tea sector. In recent years, certification has expanded rapidly in the Indian tea sector. Some of the best-known initiatives are Fair Trade, Organic Certification, Rainforest Alliance, UTZ Certified and the Ethical Tea Partnership.

As certification is taking off and becoming more widespread in the tea sector, certifying bodies and NGOs are collaborating under the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH) to accelerate and upscale sustainability through the Tea Improvement Programme (TIP). In India, Rainforest Alliance (RA) and UTZ Certified are involved in Tea Improvement Programs. This research assesses the context specific gender situation at estate and tea garden level in India. It also serves as input for the Gender and Global Standards Initiative. Therefore, this report starts with the study objectives and the research methodology. An overview of the Indian tea production systems at estate and smallholder level follows. The report continues with an in-depth assessment of the gender relations in the tea sector and examines the correlation between certification standards and gender relations. Critical issues in addressing women empowerment in the tea sector through implementation of certification standards are addressed in the conclusion and recommendations.

1.1 Objectives

- Collect systematic information on:
  - The work division between women and men in tea production, both on tea plantations and on smallholder tea farms.
  - The positive and negative changes of the implementation of sustainable tea production standards for both women and men in tea production.
  - The leadership role of women in tea production and their participation in trade unions, cooperatives and other organizations, including women’s groups or women’s organizations.

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Gender and global standards initiative, consists of the following organisations: Hivos, Oxfam-Novib, Solidaridad and the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) of The Netherlands.
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- Collect systematic information on the main gender issues within the tea sector, both in the estate sub-sector and the smallholder sub-sector.

- Collect information on the expectations of women regarding sustainability standards, and the obstacles in participating in training trajectories.

- Based on these findings, to give recommendations on:
  - How to make sustainability standards systems more beneficial to women.
  - How to enable women participation in training and how to include gender awareness issues in training of male farmers and workers.
  - Ways to improve the monitoring of the situation of women.

- Identify possible partners working on women’s empowerment especially in tea gardens/industry.

1.2 Methodology

This Assessment uses the Gender Analysis Framework to identify and assess key gender issues and needs of women workers in plantations and small growers certified by either Rainforest Alliance or UTZ Certified.

There are 17 tea estates certified by Rainforest Alliance in Nilgiris (Kerala and Tamil Nadu), and one tea producer organization is UTZ Certified in the Wayanad region (Kerala). Three estates and ten small gardens were shortlisted for the gender assessment. The research team conducted field visits to Wayanad and Nilgiris during the second half of June 2011.

At the 3 Rainforest Alliance certified plantations, focus group interviews addressing sustainability and livelihood issues with a gender perspective were held with groups of respondents across different ages, religious affiliations, communities, education levels and marital status. The three estates had areas of 155, 184 and 512 hectares with a workforce of 274, 258 and 914 respectively. 60 personnel, 37 women (62%) and 23 men (38%) were covered across the estates. The primary respondents were women pluckers, followed by male workers, supervisors and management representatives. As factory workers form part of the estate workforce, including a major presence of women, factory workers and supervisors were included, as well as representatives of Joint Works Committees and Trade Unions.
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At smallholder level in Wayanad, the UTZ certified tea smallholders total 426 farmers. Among the small grower category, 22 respondents were covered: 9 male (50%) and 9 female (50%) growers, among them 2 growers (one male and one female) who own land as well as work in others tea gardens, and 4 female workers: 2 in the WAM tea factory and 2 women pluckers.

In addition, discussions were held with other stakeholders like representatives of support organisations, the agronomist who supports the small growers, tea factory management, Tea Board representatives, advisors, for triangulation as well as to gain their perspective on gender issues in the tea sector.
2. Tea production in India

India’s tryst with tea goes way back to when tea plants were first discovered growing wild in the Upper Brahmaputra valley of Assam in 1823. Tea is the oldest organized industry in India, export oriented from inception. The first Indian teas sailed to England in 1838. Nowadays, tea production is largely split between North and South India: North India (Assam and West Bengal) produces around 80 percent of the country’s tea, while South (Tamilnadu and Kerala) accounts for 20 percent.

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4. Ibid.
In 2007, 157,500 small growers held 28 percent of land area under tea cultivation and were responsible for 25 percent of the total tea production. 1,690 big growers held 72 percent, employed 1,259,950 workers directly and accounted for 75 percent of yearly tea production.\(^5\) The tea industry provides direct employment to more than a million workers, of which at least 50 percent are women. Over 2 million people earn their living from ancillary activities directly associated with the tea industry.\(^6\)

Tea was considered a safe prospect as a commodity till the 1990s. Tea production in the country went through a boom period in the 1980s, but in the late 1990s prices slumped and to date, continues to be lower than in the 1980s. The main reasons attributed to the downward spiral include increased costs of production, decreasing productivity of plantations, decline in demand of global markets and stiff competition from other producing countries.

2.1 Estates, status of workers

With over 1.2 million direct workers, the tea industry forms the second largest employer in the country. Workers in estates are usually poor migrants or descendents of people brought in when estates were set up. Older workers have little education or alternate livelihood options, but with towns boundaries stretching and access to schooling, children of workers in well-managed estates have alternative opportunities for their livelihood. However, it is estimated that barely 10 percent of estates provide adequate facilities for their workers. Within the country, South India and in particular tea estates in the Nilgiris region are known to provide good facilities for workers and their families.

In India, the Plantation Labour Act provides the foundational basis for workers rights in the tea sector. Under the Act, the plantation company is obliged to construct and service housing, as well as provide water supply, sanitation, electricity, local roads, firewood and kerosene, statutory staple food items, blankets, overcoats, space for a kitchen garden, and community infrastructure such as primary health stations, community hospitals and crèches, as well as the operation of local buses and primary schools.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) *Chai Time*, p. 24.

\(^7\) *Value chain struggles*, p. 145.
Tea plucking is arduous and repetitive work. For their part, tea workers are required to work from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. from Mondays to Fridays, and half-day on Saturday. Whilst it is true to say that tea pluckers are not at the absolute bottom rung of India’s agricultural workforce, and via the Plantation Labour Act have access to social benefits that other rural workers do not, it is equally the case that they remain significant bearers of disadvantage, inequality and poverty.8

The most pressing immediate threat to tea-worker livelihoods in South India is estate abandonment and the devastating neglect of worker communities. During the period of low tea prices from the late 1990s, the tea planting districts across South India were sites of human misery and suffering. Many estates closed or were abandoned by the management, which has left workers without wages and facilities. Between 1997 and 2006, tea production (ex-factory) fell from 23 million kg to 8 million kg.9

Though the crisis affected the whole industry, the green leaf market and workers in tea producing areas were the most crippled. Workers in tea gardens across the country suffered wage cuts and delays in payment, worsening living conditions, increasing job insecurity and casualisation, loss of welfare benefits such as sanitation, healthcare and education leading to rise in malnutrition and starvation.10

In tea plantations in Tamilnadu, a rise in malnutrition among children and increased cases of anemia among pregnant women were reported. In Idukki district of Kerala, 22 plantations with over 25,000 workers closed down, leaving workers in dire straits without work and wages.11

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**Box 1: Dying of Hunger**

“The crisis as a result of low market prices in the tea sector has probably affected India most. Ever since the onset of the crisis at the end of the nineties, many tea estates have been closed or abandoned because they were deemed to be unprofitable or not profitable enough. This tea sector restructuring has caused great misery for the plantation community. Today there are still heartbreaking reports of hundreds of people dying of

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8 Ibid, p. 146.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
hunger on tea estates that have been abandoned or closed. The former workers and their families on these estates have no food, drinking water, electricity or health care. They are trapped on the estates where their families might have toiled for generations because alternative jobs are very limited in the tea-growing regions. Causes for the crisis include a sharp drop in producer prices, lack of investment in and mismanagement of plantation estates, and rising labour costs. Some estates have recently been reopened.”

2.2 Gardens, status of smallholders and workers

The tea boom in the mid 1980’s led agriculturists in tea growing areas considering the advantages of switching to tea. Tea leaves are plucked round the year, offering a steady opportunity for income generation throughout the year. To marginal farmers, dependant on rain fed crops with subsistence livelihoods, the assurance of 174 workdays a year with little investment held great promise. In the states of West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the number of small tea growers mushroomed in the 1990’s, while conversely, the numbers and areas of large estates dwindled. When the tea crisis hit, small growers were more resilient compared to large estates as they and their families did most of the work.

In West Bengal, smallholders are 96 percent of tea growers, holding just 8 percent of the land under tea but responsible for 17 percent of production. In Assam, they account for 98 percent of the total number of gardens, and 13 percent of production. The Tea Board of India, which regulates the growth and export of Indian tea, offers subsidies for registered tea growers. However, many smallholders do not have proper land registration documents, so only around 2 percent of small growers in West Bengal and 25 percent of growers in Assam are registered with the Tea Board. In South India, over 50 percent of small tea growers are registered and have access to financial assistance and subsidies.

Most small grower families work in their gardens and employ women workers during peak season for plucking leaf, often paying lower than minimum wages.

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13 Excerpt from Chai Time, on the status of small growers and their workers, Chapters 3 and 4, pp 33-65.
Children at times help their mothers collect leaf to increase the earnings. Workers in small growers’ gardens are forced to look for alternate livelihood options after the peak season. In West Bengal, many workers, mainly women and children, turned to stone-crushing for survival, while others migrated. Poverty, children out of school, nutritional deficiencies, malnutrition and vulnerability to water borne-diseases characterizes workers in small tea gardens. Often, workers are ignorant of their right to fair wages and social security measures under labour laws, or relief schemes initiated by the Tea Board or the Government.

In Assam too, descendents of workers recruited by the British as captive labour to work in tea plantations, continue to live in estate lands or villages adjoining estates and work as casual labour for small growers. In the high season, most workers are hired by estate gardens so small growers face a shortage of labour. In the Nilgiris region of Tamil Nadu, when there was a shortage of workers in tea gardens in the 1970s and 1980s, labourers moved from neighbouring districts to work in tea plantations. However, due to the crisis small tea growers are unable to maintain their gardens, hence demand for workers is dwindling. Since tea growing areas are geographically isolated with little scope for other jobs, workers have to migrate in search of employment, women to garment industries and men to small-scale industries.

In Kerala, the main issue of small growers is low price realization, growers compromise on quality and add darker leaves to make up quantity. Growers in both Idukki and Wayanad have sold leaf for Rs.2 per kg or less, and even transported leaf to Tamil Nadu. Lack of organization and networking among tea growers are major issues. Although tea associations exist, they often fail to address issues of small growers. A majority of small growers in Idukki is not registered under the Tea Board, hence cannot avail subsidies. Unfamiliarity with the value chain beyond leaf agents and lack of information on the auction system has led to exploitation by agents and BLFs up the supply chain.

**Box 2: Tea Board of India**

The Tea Board, set up in 1953 as a statutory body under the Tea Act, 1953 to promote all round development of the tea industry, looks after all aspects related to tea from cultivation to export. Operating under the administrative control of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, activities of the Tea Board include, among others,
securing better working conditions and the provisions and improvement of amenities and incentives for workers.¹⁴

The Tea Board has initiated a number of measures for small growers such as quality awareness programmes and training on usage of chemicals and fertilizers to improve the performance of the tea sector. It supports the formation of SHGs (Self-Help Groups) or associations among small growers to enable access to government schemes. Such activities focus on improving quality by reducing damage while collecting leaf, facilitating transport to collect and move leaf to Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs), setting up storage facilities in different regions and giving short term financial assistance to meet production expenses.

In 2000, the Tea Board set up a price sharing formula mandating that 60 percent of tea sale proceeds at auctions should go to the growers and 40 percent retained by BLFs; however, this does not always work in favor of smallholders. BLF’s sell their quality tea directly in the market and the lower grades through auctions, and share the price based on the lower quality, lower priced auction rates. The exception is in Assam, where new BLF’s with up to date machinery are able to process quality tea from good leaf, and share the proceeds with farmers.

3. Gender relations in tea production

Gender relations are the ways in which a culture or society defines rights, responsibilities, and the identities of men and women in relation to one another (Bravo-Baumann, 2000).

Exploring gender relations involves understanding the relationship between men and women in the roles they play and the balance of power between them in their differential access to resources. In this chapter we explore the gender relations of male and female workers in the tea industry of South India, based on discussions with workers from 3 certified tea estates in the Nilgiris district of Tamilnadu followed by a group of small tea growers in Wayanad.

Traditionally, women have depended on men: economically, socially and culturally. “Men work outside and earn the money, while women look after the home and see to the family’s needs. If men are unable to provide enough to meet the needs of the family, women supplement the earnings to feed, clothe and educate the children.” The roles were well defined: men did the providing, women did the managing at the household level and balanced the earning with the family needs. If there was a gap, women stepped in to fill the need, so that children were nurtured and protected. In the agricultural economy the formula worked well. Cash crops changed the equation. No longer was there food security, so women in families with less earning power began working outside to supplement incomes or become primary wage earners. As opportunities dried up families migrated in search of livelihoods.

Estates work with large numbers of migrant labour. Migrants send for relatives once they are settled. For workers the estate becomes home, children grow up

15 Capitalisation of experiences on the contribution of livestock projects to gender issues.

16 Migrant worker on ‘why women work’ during discussions with women workers in estates.
on the estate, then turn employees, while older workers retire. They continue to reside in the same houses, now allotted to one of the children, till the end of their lives. With marriages between children of workers, kinship too is formed, and workers form a large interconnected community within the estate. So when women work in estates, it is within the comfort zone of the estate that is home to them, where all men and women working is the norm. Women employed on their own merit, with a contract letter that tells them so, equal wages, and support for child care, education and health care, has fostered economic parity and social empowerment among women workers. Earlier, the motivation for women to work was the money that ‘feeds, clothes and educates the children,’ ensuring a better future than they could aspire to, not possible on the income of the men alone. While this has changed with the productivity linked differential wages, whether this empowerment extends outside the boundaries of the estate is debatable.

Within households, women’s equal economic contribution has given them an almost equal voice on how money is spent. Men, on their part, have accepted women’s position as equal contributors, though not necessarily equal partners. At the household level, women continue to retain their earlier position of ‘looking after the home and seeing to the family’s needs,’ leading to an unequal sharing of domestic responsibilities. The older generation of workers who live in the house, while helping with housework and outside work, probably reinforce the stereotype of unequal relations between men and women.

3.1 Gender relations at estate level

The 3 plantations are among 8 estates certified by Rainforest Alliance in 2008-09 as part of the process to sustain the tea supply chain of Unilever. This multinational dominates world tea trade and is shifting from a conventional tea supply chain to a certified one, starting with its well-known brands ‘Lipton’ and ‘Tips’, encouraging suppliers in the chain get certified. For the estates that form part of the brands’ value chain, preparing for certification took barely 3 months because they were already following most of the social and environmental standards stipulated for Rainforest Alliance certification. As
there are only 17 estates certified by Rainforest Alliance in Nilgiris district, it is safe to assume that these 3 estates form the top 10 percent of estates that maintain sustainable production, and a management that practices corporate social responsibility.

3.1.1. Economic aspects

In the estates visited, workforce deployment is around 1.6 workers per hectare, with women 63 percent of the workforce and men, 37 percent. A level higher is the post of supervisor, where women hold 24 percent of the positions. Women in supervisory positions is not very common; yet in these estates, 30 percent among the women supervisors have held the position for over 10 years in two of these estates, 40 percent have been supervisors for under 3 years, while 30 percent have been appointed very recently, and are still under training. There are no women at Field Officer or Estate Manager levels, though estates are open to the possibility. At one estate, 3 women have been appointed recently as Executives in charge to liaise with certification agencies and monitor certification standards.

In tea production, 80-90% of the women workers are employed as pluckers; tea plucking is 60-70 percent of the work. The remaining are factory workers, nurses and support staff. There is a reason for this: Women’s effectiveness at plucking is estimated to be 150 percent that of men. Men do pluck, and in peak season, both men and women are involved in harvesting leaf. Yet, the preference is for women workers, as their work is more consistent, in both quantity and quality of plucking. Male workers are employed mainly as pruners, sprayers of fertilizers and pesticides, factory and maintenance personnel, guards, etc. Traditionally, women have been kept away from spraying operations to prevent pregnant or nursing women expose their unborn or small babies to chemicals.

Workers get paid for the number of days they work, a maximum of 26 days per month. Wages for workers range between Rs.133–Rs.134.60 against the plantation minimum set at Rs. 104. Take home wage after deduction is Rs.118-121, or a little over Rs. 3,000 per month. Male and female workers earn equal wages for the same job. There is a productivity linked differential rate, and incentive for volumes over designated quotas in each category of work, whether plucking, factory work or task based work like spraying and pruning, and
workers are paid according to how much they accomplish each day. Incentive schemes vary between estates, but pluckers report earning between Rs. 500 to 2000 a month above their wages during the peak season, when there is more leaf. The highest additional earning by an individual in a month was reported as Rs. 2,800.

In addition to wages, benefits for workers include provident fund, gratuity, family pension, insurance, bonus, paid annual and sick leave, free housing, free piped water supply, free medical treatment, maternity benefit, crèche facilities, free education for children up to the end of primary level in estate school, blankets and bed sheets. Retirement benefits range from Rs. 1.2–4 lakhs, based on the number of years put in by each worker and the benefits offered by each estate. According to estate managements, the cost per worker works is an additional Rs. 80-150 per day, which puts the total wage in the range of Rs. 213-290 per day.

Workers between them earn a little over Rs. 6,000 each month and a bonus of 20 percent a year. Expenses for a family of 4 with 2 children in the 14-19 age group appear to be in the range of Rs. 5,500, with 55% for food, 25% for education and the remaining for electricity, gas, clothing and grooming, transport and communication. The general consensus was that spouses make every day decisions on expenses together, while for buying new things, options are discussed with all other members. According to respondents, the important decisions pertain to children’s education and marriage, and in both cases, decisions are taken after a lot of discussions.

Women are part of SHG groups and save Rs. 150-250 compulsorily each month, and some avail microfinance schemes for additional income generation such as livestock. Workers take loans from the estate, as well as SHGs, banks, and wherever they can raise sufficient funds. Less than 10% of the respondents have houses or land in their names; mostly migrants who had either inherited it or had invested in small plots in their villages, and hoped to go back on retirement. But according to estate management, workers do save money and have fixed deposits in banks or own land in places like Mettupalayam or Coimbatore, bought through loans from cooperative banks.
3.1.2. Social aspects

Estates operate with an 80 percent permanent workforce. Shortage of workers is acute and two estates have recruited people from distant places like Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and the North East region, training them for estate work. The main challenge for management is absenteeism and attrition of workers, in an industry that is heavily dependent on manual labour. In one estate, fifty percent of the workers have changed over the last four years. There is a shortage of labourers in Nilgiris, so workers can get Rs.200-250 as daily wages at vegetable farms. So some workers, mainly men, make the best of both - enjoy the benefits of housing and other facilities provided by the estate, and skip to town in the morning to work outside.

It takes around 3 to 6 months for workers to become permanent employees. Temporary workers get the same facilities as permanent workers in these estates except for free housing and gratuity, and the conversion to permanent employees varies according to the availability of housing in the estate. Only 60% of workers' houses are occupied in one estate, while in another it is 88% and in the third, 100%. Accordingly, workers are made permanent in 3 to 8 months in the first two estates, while in the third, they have to wait for 5 to 6 years before being made permanent. Both male and female workers have equal access to estate housing, medical and educational facilities and other benefits.

Estates follow an 8 hours workday for pluckers, but work timings vary across estates; it can stretch up to 9 hours as they wait for transport, leaf to be weighed and volumes recorded. Plucking leaf is tough work, moving from bush to bush-wielding shears. Workers harvest leaf by hand or using shears, harvesting around 60 kg of leaf per day on an average. If plucked by hand, harvesting is done every 8 days, while with shears, every 15 days. The average output from hand plucking is 15-20 kg, while with shears workers can go up to 100 kg per day, if there is sufficient leaf. Arms, head and neck ache after long hours of work. Women (and men pluckers) receive a basket and a bag for collection of leaf and a hardy plastic wrap as protection against damp weather, but not shoes, though slipping on uneven ground while plucking is common. Nor do women get sweaters or a windcheater despite working outdoors in cold, windy weather; they manage with full-sleeved men's shirts to protect their arms from sunburn and scratches.
Men assigned to plucking work 8 hours. Spraying and pruning is task based and can take between 4-8 hours, depending on their speed, terrain and weather conditions. Sprayers are provided personal protection equipment such as overalls, masks, boots, gloves, goggles, earpieces, as per certification norms for spraying and related work. Factory workers have uniforms and masks.

Joint Works Committees are active in all the estates. Members are elected for five years; women’s representation in the committees range from 25 to 55 percent. Sub-committees with equal number of male and female workers look into different aspects, such as education, health, maintenance, etc. All workers in the estates are members of trade unions, the most known INTUC, DMK and AIADMK. There is one female union representative in one of the estates; the rest are men. Workers know that the trade unions negotiate better wages for estate workers, and they can approach the union in case of any problems at work. But they also feel the management cares about their welfare, and are confident they can approach the management either directly or through the Works Committee for any help, or suggestions for improvement.

There is no child labour in the estates; opportunities for forced labour, discrimination or harassment are reduced with women supervisors in charge of women’s teams. In case of disputes or complaints within the team, workers approach the supervisor, who tries to settle the issue to the satisfaction of all involved, or reports it to the field officer for action. In case of a complaint against the supervisor, workers approach Joint Works Committee members. Nonetheless, at one of the plantations a minority group of workers from North East India faces discrimination (see box 4.).

**Box 4: Minority Groups**

At one of the Rainforest Alliance certified estates there are around 27 families of North East Indian permanent workers. They migrated in batches a couple of years ago, as they did not have proper jobs in their hometowns and an agent arranged work in the South.

On arriving at the estate, each family received 2 utensils, 2 plates, 2 glasses and 2 mats, but no blankets or aprons for work. According to them, there is discrimination in payment of overtime wages: they get Rs.20 per hour while locals get Rs.30. They do not get a free day on many Sundays, but are asked to lope trees and gather the debris.
in areas far away from their lines, even if they do not want to. Men do not mind, but women would prefer not to work, as it is the only day they can spend with their children, wash clothes and clean the house.

Estate identity cards are not considered valid identification for mobile phone connections or opening bank accounts. Migrants have no ration cards under the Public Distribution System and without a ration card cannot get a gas connection. Without gas, they depend on firewood for cooking. Local workers get rice at a subsidized rate of Rs. 1 per kg through ration cards, while the migrants pay Rs. 6 per kg at the same shop.

Language is a major issue; even talking to doctors to explain their needs is tough. Although there is one person at a higher level, they have no representative in any committee through whom they can voice their needs. They feel that, an end to discrimination, support for children’s education in English medium schools and reimbursement of travel costs after leave will be good incentives to attract workers for the tea sector.

3.1.3 Access to resources

Households are small decision making units where decisions made each day impact the people involved, and influence their interactions with the world outside. Who has access to and control over resources, services and decision-making can determine or undermine the balance of power and impede equal participation. This assessment is based on responses from male and female workers in three estates; levels of motivation, self confidence, assertiveness and empowerment of workers and how they access and control available resources varied to some extent across estates and among workers in each estate, so an overall picture is depicted.

In their personal lives, women shoulder the responsibilities of household work and childcare along with their full time job. An average day for women is 17 hours, waking at 4.30 a.m., cooking, cleaning, fetching water, getting the children ready for school, getting ready for work at 7.30 am. At 5 pm, once back at home, she continues with the cleaning, washing, cooking and childcare till around 9.30 pm. Leisure time is watching a TV serial. Some of the women have older family members to care for, who help with looking after children. Those with cattle have the added responsibility of cleaning the shed, milking the cow twice a day and finding fodder.
Men buy provisions for the house, and provide support such as fetching water from the tap, packing lunchboxes, switching off the stove, as requested. Male factory workers do 8 hour shifts on rotation, so their schedules at times restrict supporting around the house. Sprayers work a 6-hour day on average, so they have more free time, but other than collecting firewood or cutting grass for the cows, their off-work time is more or less free.

Men are aware of the time constraints on women, and the multiple responsibilities of full time work, child care, housework, caring for the aged, and the cattle. Women estimate around 5 percent of men living on the estate share the work at home equally; most men agree that their support at home is on an ad-hoc basis, responding to an immediate need. Women see the responsibility of running the home as theirs, and have not considered the option of negotiating with family members about sharing work at home on a regular basis.

**Overview 1: Tea estates, access and control over resources**

| Physical | Men and women have equitable access to employment, technology in terms of tools and training for their work, as well as wages and facilities that support and enhance their capability at work. In personal life, men have greater access to transport and communication. Land, house, or personal vehicles, if any, are in men’s name. |
| Financial | Men and women have equal wages, savings, retirement benefits, insurance as well as credit. Both spouses utilize their wages for home expenses, and together, decide on major purchases. Access to loans is equal as estates sanction loans in the name of both. Women have control of their own savings in SHGs, the money is used for home and children’s needs. Men have access over banking transactions, but women have an overall idea of expenses and savings. |
| Social | Men have access to leadership roles in representative organizations like Trade Unions. Both men and women have fairly equal participation in Joint Works Committees and its sub-committees (though not according to ratio). Estate workers and their families form a large community, within which are more intimate networks of neighbours, friends, relatives and workmates. People from adjacent areas also join in festival celebrations at estates, so the social networks go beyond the boundaries of estates. |
Information

Educational levels vary between no education to Class 12 among women workers, women with higher levels of education are in the below 35 age group. Both men and women have equal employability in their area of work and earning power. Both have acquired skills related to their work and have equal access to training. Awareness on safety, health, hygiene, environmental care, especially related to certification norms, is fairly good among men and women workers, so there is individual and group access to information. Few women workers have shown initiative and interest to take on additional responsibilities that could pave the way to promotions, despite managements readiness to invest in training of women who have leadership potential.

Natural

Both have equal access to all the resources available at the estate; women access it more in their capacity as home managers. Workers are protective of the forest areas in the estates, and follow safety precautions near such areas.

3.2 Gender relations at smallholder level

There are over 8,000\(^{18}\) small tea growers in Wayanad, with at least 2000 hectares under tea cultivation. Tea became a viable cash crop among smallholder farmers in the 1980’s when there was a boom period for tea. The Tea Board offered subsidies and banks offered agricultural loans for tea cultivation. There were many reasons for switching to tea from lemon grass, pepper and coffee cultivation. Leaf is plucked round the year offering a continuous income stream throughout the year. It requires very little investment and less work compared to other crops. However, soon after they switched to tea and bushes grew enough for harvesting, tea prices began tumbling. Being individual small growers with tiny plots, they were sidelined by the Tea Board and research institutions, so received very little inputs on the right methods of cultivation, and ways to improve productivity and quality.

Cultural norms and education play a large part in determining who works where. The majority of small growers in Wayanad are Syrian Christians from a highly patriarchal society that has traditionally considered women in a domestic role and identified men with the outside world. Among workers men and women with primary or secondary education prefer to work in a factory or set up a shop, rather than the low-status, low-paid work in agricultural lands.

\(^{18}\) Estimated by Prakruthi, based on data collected from Panchayats in Wayanad.
Growers, on the other hand grew up seeing workers in their fields and are familiar with the concept of supervisors overseeing work in plantations, hence shy away from physical work in tea. Women too, confess more attachment to a banana patch, though a cash crop, as it falls under the category of food and appeals to their concern for food security.

Though there is some level of sharing of work between spouses at farm and home, the overall ratio of work between men and women stands at 20:80. Men and women ascribe the imbalance in workloads to religious and cultural norms. A woman in her fifties explained “We give men the respect and position as head of household, while choosing to be on a lower rung as a good (virtuous) wife, at the same time managing the home efficiently.” Men seem comfortable with the elevated status and are happy to occupy the political space outside, citing cultural norms, nurturing values and less mobility for women choosing to remain within the boundaries of farm and home, rather than the limited space available for women. Among the younger generation, there is some willingness to try and alter the skewed balance. Younger men appear to be more supportive, while women are more outspoken and willing to question values.

3.2.1 Economic and social aspects

In Manathawady district of Wayanad, 426 small tea growers, mostly second generation marginal farmers in the age group of 45-60 years, own 1,746 acres (706 hectares) of land. The growers are members of six farmers groups operating under the umbrella of a registered Society, ETKA. The groups and society were set up in 2008. Membership in groups is based on ownership of land under tea cultivation. Women who have land registered in their names are members of these groups, and constitute 20 percent of the membership. Tea is grown in 25-50 percent (averaging 40 percent) of the land, while other crops favoured are rubber, teak, bananas and vegetables such as yam, with the crops that fetch best returns on investment getting more attention.

A team of 5 office bearers leads each of the six groups; President, Vice President, Secretary, Joint Secretary and Treasurer. There are no women among these elected office bearers in any of the six groups. Producer Organisation EKTA is a registered society, with 11 elected representatives, six of them office bearers, one from each group. The remaining 5 members are elected from the general members, two of them women.
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The main role of EKTA is coordinating the 426 growers in Mananthawady and working with WAM (Wayanad Agro Movement Tea Company Ltd.). WAM is the Bought Leaf Factory (BLF) set up by the CST Congregation, along with small tea growers in Mananthawady, to end the exploitation of small tea growers. With 52 percent of the shares held by CST and 48 percent by 230 EKTA members it is a factory of farmers and a symbol of solidarity among small growers in their determination to overcome the challenges.

Around 10 percent of the 426 growers manage the tea production by themselves, sharing the workload with spouses and other family members. Around 40 percent of the growers and spouses do part of the work (up to 25 percent) such as weeding, sorting the leaf and plucking leaf during lean season. Workers are hired for harvesting during peak season, manuring and pruning. The remaining 50 percent outsource the entire cultivation to hired workers, preferring to supervise the work. Therein lies the problem – there is a severe dearth of workers in Wayanad. Many workers migrated to neighbouring districts in search of livelihood opportunities during the worst of the agrarian crisis. Workers with some education do not want low-status, low-paid jobs in the agricultural sector, they would rather work in a factory or a shop. Children of workers, now educated, have better opportunities for employment. Male agricultural labourers will not work for less than Rs. 250 per day. Men are called for jobs such as field maintenance and application of manure, at Rs. 250 per day, for around 10 days a year. For pruning, growers offer contracts to male workers on a per bush rate. This leaves financially strapped women who turn to whatever jobs are available to feed their families.

Female workers are usually hired for weeding and plucking, over 95 percent of the work in small grower farms, while male workers are hired for spraying and field maintenance. As it is difficult to get workers daily and to reduce the cost of transporting leaf to factory, growers prefer to hire a group of around 10 women, 3 times a month to pluck 3 rounds of leaf growth. Women average 15 kgs leaf per day in hand plucking, going up to 30 kgs with shears if there is sufficient leaf to harvest. The plucking rate is Rs.150 per day, no incentives are offered for additional quantities. Workers are provided hot meals twice a day, as also tea. The food costs the growers around Rs.50 per day per worker. Women are given baskets to collect leaf hooked to their back and in rains, plastic sheets to wrap around. In case of any slippage accidents or insect bites, growers provide first aid, and if necessary, call for a car to transport them to the primary health centre close by or a hospital in town, about 20 kms away.
**Box 5: Small Growers Dependency on Workers**

In Valad, 20 km from Mananthawady, 10 small tea growers with land ranging from 0.5 to 2.5 acres each, depend on workers from an estate 5 km away. Growers contact the lead worker/contractor by phone, and if there is less work in the estate, or it’s their weekly off, he agrees to take up the work. 5 workers come in a group to harvest the leaf of each grower in turn; but in season when there is more leaf, work takes longer and the remaining owners wait anxiously for their turn. Many a time, growers have had to chop off the growth, as there were no workers to harvest and leaves had been on the bush too long for it to fetch a good price. In June 2011, at the offered price of Rs. 5, it was not even worth transporting the harvest to the factory.

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**Box 6: The Economics of Tea Cultivation in Wayanad**

Work involved in a one acre farm of a small tea grower:

- **Harvesting leaf** – 1/8 of an acre per day x 8 days x 3 rounds 10 days apart : \( 24 \text{ days} \times 12 = 288 \text{ days/yr} \)

- **Weeding** - half an acre per wkr for 2 days : \( 2 \times 12 = 24 \text{ days/yr} \)

- **Application** of fertilizer, herbicide, fungicide : 8 days/yr

- **Field maintenance** (before rains) : 3 days/yr

- **Pruning** of bushes (once in 5 years) : 10 days/5 yrs

**Income**

- @Rs. 5/kg : 24,000
- @Rs. 10/kg : 48,000
- @Rs. 14/kg : 67,200

- 4,800 kg green leaf

**Expenses**

- **Picking** 288 workdays x Rs.150/day : 43,200
- **Weeding** 12 workdays x Rs.150/day : 1,800
- **Application** of Fertilizer & Pesticides 8 workdays x Rs.250/day : 2,000
- **Field Maintenance** 3 workdays x Rs.250/day : 750
- **Food Expenses** for 323 days @ Rs.50 : 16,150
- **Fertiliser & Pesticides** : 5,000

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<tr>
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<td>-40,900</td>
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</table>
Box 7: Cooking Meals and Preparing Tea

A smallholders’ wife with 2.5 acres under tea, explains a normal working day. At 8 a.m. five workers report to the house. They come walking from neighbouring villages, stop by for a cup of tea and then leave for the tea garden, about 15 minutes away. By 10 a.m. a full meal has to be prepared for them and carried to the worksite. At 11.30 a.m. they are provided a hot cup of tea, followed by another full meal at 1 p.m. At 3.30 p.m. it is another cup of tea and workers leave soon after. Cooking for the workers is a full time job for one person.

Her day starts with washing and cleaning the stable, milking the cows before she starts breakfast for the family. Family comprises her husband, son, son’s wife and small child, in addition to her. Her son’s wife helps in the kitchen, and between them, they manage breakfast for the family, breakfast for the workers, lunch for family and workers, while also caring for the child and cleaning the house. One of them stays in the house with the child, while the other walks to the worksite, carrying food for the workers and bringing back the vessels each time. Her husband supervises the workers in the field, and the son helps in the evening, while also managing a job, and follows up on supplies.

In the evening, one of the women goes to the worksite to sort through the leaf, after which they pack it for transportation. Her husband waits for the vehicle that collects the leaf for the factory. Meanwhile, the women clean the house, milk the cows, clean the shed and start preparations for dinner.

At the end of the day, there are 110 kgs of leaf weighed; at the rate paid in May, they can expect Rs. 550 from WAM, while paying out Rs. 750/- to the 5 workers for the day, as well as providing the food. The cost of food works out to around Rs. 50/- per person which means a total outlay of Rs. 1000 for a price realization of Rs. 550/-. Many of their neighbours have resorted to chopping off the leaves and adding it to the compost pile, rather than paying for the labour and transportation. Yet others are contemplating rooting out the bushes and planting rubber or oil palm. Though she would like to grow vegetables for the house, this is not an option. The previous year, tapioca planted for home consumption was ravaged by wild boars, leaving not even one tuber intact.
3.2.2 Access to resources

Among small growers, roles between men and women seem split into outside and inside work – men handling the work outside, while women manage the work indoors. However, most of the work in tea cultivation (and other cash crops) is outsourced to workers, while the man supervises workers, helps sort leaf, transports the leaf to factory, buys fertilizers and other inputs, and manages the funds. The woman does the house work like cooking, cleaning, washing, ironing and dusting, caring for children, aged dependents and guests, livestock (including milking and cleaning the shed), apart from any plucking and weeding possible during the lean season, and sorting the leaf before it is transported. Women have the additional responsibility of feeding the workers, cooking two meals and carrying the food and two rounds of tea across to the worksite. Though there is some level of sharing of work between spouses at farm and home, the overall ratio of work between men and women stands at 20:80.

Overview 2: Smallholdings, access and control of resources

| Physical | All members own their land, as membership is based on land registration. Only 20 percent of members are women who have land registered in their names. Men have control over the tools and inputs for farming. Women manage the house and all the activities, but the house and vehicles are registered in men’s names. Men have control of all cash crops, including tea and vegetables, if any, while women have control over vegetables grown for home consumption. Men access and interact with hired labour to work on the farms, while women cook for them. Women depend on men for transportation in personal vehicles, as growers live long distances away from town; public transport though available is infrequent and less convenient. Both men and women have equal access to communication, though more men have mobile phones. |
| Financial | Men have control over all income from the land including income from land owned in the name of the women, and any remittances from family members. Men also manage payment of all expenses, including payment of wages to workers as well as all banking and credit related activities. Women have access to credit through SHG group linked banks. Growers do not have any insurance for their crops. |
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Social

Men have control over the political space in farmers groups and EKTA as land owners, members and office bearers. Women have access to women’s SHG groups where thrift and savings, income generation activities, leadership and entrepreneurial development form part of the agenda, so they have some access to trainings and representation in political spaces. Men make the decisions on expenses and what to grow, but matters are discussed at household level. Both men and women have access to events at family, friends and community level, yet more often men represent the family due to men’s ability to get around the issue of transport, while women are limited by home responsibilities. The exception is meetings and trainings at SHGs, which women attend unfailingly, as there is a penalty for non-attendance.

Information

Men and women have practical knowledge about farming, as most of them are second generation agri-entrepreneurs. In the last 3-4 years, members have had access to trainings conducted by EKTA, which have been shared with spouses. Skill level is low to medium, not many growers do the work themselves on a full time basis, but depend on hired labour. Less than 10 percent of the younger generation is inclined to pursue farming as their occupation, as they cannot make a living from farming.

Natural

Growers have access to soil, water and air, but the soil quality is average, degraded from overuse of chemicals. Water sources available are protected and waste water treated. Every available inch of land is used for cultivation; shade trees are silver oak, teak and rubber with the occasional coconut and areca in between, all cash crops.

19 Launched by the Government of Kerala in 1998 to eradicate poverty in the state through concerted community action under the leadership of local self governments, Kudumbashree is today one of the largest women-empowering projects in the country. The programme has 37 lakh members and covers more than 50% of the households in Kerala. It has three critical components, micro credit, entrepreneurship and empowerment. Kudumbashree operates through a 3 tier structure: the grassroots of Kudumbashree are Neighbourhood Groups (NHG). NHGs send representatives to ward level Area Development Societies (ADS). The ADS sends its representatives to the Community Development Society (CDS). This network brings women to Grama Sabhas, and helps them bring the needs of the poor to the attention of the local governments.
Box 8: Prakruthi’s Support for Certification of Small Growers

Prakruthi, a development organization working with commodity value chains, entered the picture in 2007 when small growers and WAM (Wayanad Agro Movement) Tea Company Ltd. were struggling with productivity issues of tea farmers. Working with 176 growers through lead farmers, they increased the membership base to 426 growers, and with trainings, demonstrations, intensive field maintenance and monitoring through Internal Control Systems (ICS), the average productivity rose from 2,000-4,000 kgs in two years. In November 2009, WAM Tea Company and the 426 small tea growers were certified under UTZ Certified standards. During this period, the average procurement price rose from Rs.3-4 in 2007 to Rs.9-10 in 2008-09. With improvement in the quality of tea, WAM tea began fetching Rs.90 per kg in auctions against Rs.60-70 of other BLFs. Since 2009, WAM has been offering a premium for higher qualities, adding Rs.2-3.50 to every kg of A and A+ grade of tea produced by growers.
4. Certification and gender relations

Various certification standards systems are used in the Indian tea industry. All the systems promote sustainability in production processes through a combination of social, economic and environmental standards. The estates have practiced aspects of the current corporate social responsibility agenda long before standards systems and process certification came into the picture. For small growers, it is a new concept, which they hoped would solve all their problems. The standards in the estates covered are Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance, while the small tea growers of Wayanad are certified under UTZ Certified.

Overview 3: Three Tea Standards Systems

**Fair Trade**, covering smallholders working in cooperatives and workers in plantations, addresses the imbalance of power in trading relationships and unstable markets, offering consumers an alternative approach that gives producers a fair price for sustainable production and poverty alleviation through a small premium to improve social and economic conditions at the community level.

**Rainforest Alliance** encourages sustainability of farming through environmental protection, social equity and economic viability and promotes sustainable livelihoods by transforming land-use and business practices while managing natural resources. Its standards focus on areas such as crop management, water, soil and biodiversity conservation, waste management, as also fair treatment of workers including access to housing, healthcare and education for children.

**UTZ Certified** promotes responsible production and sourcing of agricultural commodities. UTZ Certified products carry an assurance of professional, social and environmental quality, with traceability of the product from its origin. The UTZ Code of Conduct incorporates efficient farm management as well as socially and environmentally appropriate growing practices to achieve economic sustainability, food security and social equity for growers. In addition, it strives to empower farmers with professional marketing techniques to access more markets and develop better relations with buyers.
4.1 Estate workers

Among the estates visited, Dunsandle was certified under Fairtrade in 1998. Dunsandle, Glendale and Kairbetta are part of 8 estates certified together by Rainforest Alliance in 2008-09. The initiative for Rainforest Alliance certification came from Unilever, which buys a major portion of their leaf; Unilever supported the certification process by paying the certification fees of Rainforest for the first year, along with a support price of 10 pence (approximately Rs.6) per kg to the estates, a small measure to offset the costs estates bear to comply with certification standards. The estates did invest large amounts of money on upgrading facilities, but the process of certification took only around 3 months, a testament to the social and environmental standards that were already in place at the estates. According to a manager, “the main difference is that while earlier efforts were more informal, certification moved it to a more formal note, with documentation.”

Nevertheless, changes are visible. Both managements and workers are unanimous that certification’s impact has been most effective in the areas of health and safety, improved living conditions for workers and management of waste and environmental protection.

The focus on workers wellbeing has led to better understanding and relationships among different levels such as workers and management. Managements are now more aware of conditions in which workers live, and responsiveness to maintenance issues is quicker. Women workers prefer female supervisors as they are more amenable and have more empathy about women’s needs; workers are allowed short periods of rest, or even go home for part of the day if they are unwell. Teams work better, the overall outcome is increased productivity and more content workers.

Women have always been the majority in all three estates. In terms of gender equity at higher levels, certification has led to more numbers of women supervisors heading women’s plucking teams, as also at the factory. Two estates have had women supervisors for almost 15 years but after certification, the numbers increased. The third estate has recently recruited supervisors. At higher levels, 2 women have recently been appointed at management level as Executives in charge of certification monitoring and liaising in one estate.
Plucking tea is tough on women, and they do suffer aches and pain, especially from wielding shears the whole day and carrying tea in baskets hanging from their heads. Estates have addressed this to some extent by giving women net baskets which weigh less, and collection bags that are placed at the end of each row, so that women carry less leaf, thus reducing the strain on their head and neck. Two estates are organic (80-95%), while the third ensures scientific use of safe chemicals for its spraying operations. Both management and workers make efforts to adhere to certification standards with clear demarcation of buffer zones, caution signs around areas being sprayed, use of personal protection equipment and safe discharge of water used for cleaning equipment. After spraying, the areas are cordoned off with no movement permitted for 10 clear days, unlike one or two days earlier. Women gain from this, as they were earlier exposed continuously to the chemical residue on the leaves.

Workers houses have been upgraded with cement floors and sheeting below tiled roofs for better insulation, with additional plug points and platforms for gas stoves. In one estate, the process is still on, with workers shifting into fully renovated houses as they get ready. Piped water is available beside each row, comprising 4-6 houses in a line, an improvement from 1 tap for 8 houses or more. Access to adequate safe drinking water beside houses benefit women the most, as it reduces the time women spend in carrying and boiling water to make it potable.

Estates have facilitated gas connections for those with ration cards. Maintenance issues are dealt with more promptly and there is provision for painting houses every two years. These improvements have benefited women, by reducing their time spent in cooking, cleaning and fetching firewood.

The biggest impact of certification is in the awareness and emphasis on health and hygiene in homes and all over the estate. All waste is segregated into biodegradable for compost and recyclable plastic and glass. Even children are conscious of the need for segregation of waste, protection of trees and conservation of water. Estate nurses visit each house weekly, monitoring hygiene and cleanliness. All this has led to healthier families. Records at an estate clinic show a reduction of almost 70% in the number of sick persons visiting the clinic for treatment a day, compared to 5 years ago. Cases of diarrhea and gastritis have reduced. There are no cases of anemia recorded in the last 2 years, while 5 years ago, one estate alone had at least 5-6 cases of female workers with
anemia. Women, particularly, have benefitted from these changes, giving them more free time by reducing the time spent on housework, and in caring for ill family members.

All 3 estates run primary schools on the estates, support higher education of children through loans and advances, and facilitate scholarships at UPASI run vocational training centres. The additional benefits through certification have come from utilization of fair-trade premium for notebooks for school children, scholarships for higher education, support for infrastructure at the estate school and computers. There are no cases of workers’ children having dropped out of school, at least in the last 5 years. Many of the youth opt for vocational courses after school. Both boys and girls get equal opportunities for higher education, though in choice of careers, girls seem to have opted for lower-paying careers like teaching, office administration and nursing. Many boys have qualified as doctors, engineers and accountants and are pursuing their professions.

Each estate has evolved ways to improve lives of women in their estates to create more of a level playing field. Dunsandle estate has, in consultation with workers, used part of the fair-trade premium to invest in energy saving utensils - pressure cookers and rice cookers for all families, reducing cooking time and energy. Glendale offers a one percent bonus for maintaining a plastic free environment, thus making all workers responsible for waste segregation and management rather than just the woman in the household, on whom the burden usually falls. They have a lady doctor visiting the estate every week, so that women feel comfortable enough to discuss personal health issues or contraceptive needs. In Kairbetta, if children below 8 fall sick, mothers have the provision to take sick leave to be with the child, taking into account that women form the primary caregivers of the family.

4.2 Smallholders and workers

Reeling under the push and pull of market demand, disadvantaged small growers look to certification for economic, social and environmental sustainability. Becoming UTZ Certified tea producers in 2009 created hopes of better price realization, access to stable markets and protecting their livelihood.

Members of EKTA agree that following good agricultural practices has led to definite improvements in productivity. Individual growers rate the increase in
quantity of leaf between 10 and 60 percent, on average productivity has more than doubled from 2000 to 4800 kg per year. Areas of direct improvement include better field management, following correct pruning schedules and optimum fertilizer application cycles. Furthermore, reduced plucking frequency from 20-21 days to 10-11 days and post-harvest quality control like sorting of leaves before packing, preventing bruising by checking the quantity of leaves packed into one bag and transporting the leaves by the end of the day to the WAM factory.

In the entire Manathawady region small tea growers outside the EKTA network improved their productivity and quality of leaf in 2009 and 2010. The Periapake factory, another BLF in Manathawady has often commented, “thanks to the example set by UTZ certification, the quality of leaf produced in the entire region has improved, and we benefit too.”

The WAM Tea Company has been functional since 2006. Because of the implementation of UTZ Certified production standards, WAM moved from disordered to a more systematic way of functioning. Workers have noticed the better wages from Rs.100-140, overtime wages and facilities such as separate spaces to eat and to change clothes. Still efficiency issues cripple the unit, preventing the made tea from making the grade for premium markets.

Growers and workers are unanimous that awareness and care about food safety, health and safety have increased to a large extent. All UTZ Certified red listed agrochemicals were removed from the premises of growers, and alternatives were identified. Growers ensure that any chemicals and pesticides used are in specified quantities, stored safely in designated areas, and disposed with care. Separate buckets are used to mix the chemicals, personal protection equipment is used and water after rinsing containers and buckets is disposed safely in soak pits away from drinking water sources. This is a big change from days before certification, when half used containers often shared space in growers’ bedrooms, before being carried out to spray the rest of the crop the following day.

Access to new value added markets is an area where small growers have not seen any change, despite their high hopes. WAM continues to be their only link to the supply chain. The UTZ Certified tea supply chain lacks demand, which could ensure a premium and guaranteed demand of large quantities. This lack of access to new markets and opportunities for better price realization, despite all
efforts to improve the tea quality and productivity, has caused immense frustration among the growers.

This frustration is also related to a slump in procurement prices. In 2011, the procurement price dipped from Rs.10 to Rs. 8 and since May it continues at a rate of Rs. 5. When the procurement price slumped, quality followed.20 Prices do dip in peak season due to abundance of leaf, and BLF’s often reject leaf they cannot process citing poor quality. While prices are low during season, growers spend less effort to maintain quality (See box 9 about technical support and incentives for quality).

Despite the ups and downs of price realization, farm wages increased for women workers from Rs. 90 in 2008 to Rs. 150 per day in 2011, while men’s wages increased from Rs. 150 to Rs. 250-350 based on the nature of work. However, these reflect the minimum wages paid to workers in Wayanad. The living wage is estimated around Rs. 300 per day. Men, with barely 11 days of work a year in a one acre farm, and pruning for 10 days once in 5 years, cannot make a living from working for tea growers. Invariably, it is small growers with less than half an acre who take up work on other farms to supplement their income.

Box 9: WAM Tea Company Limited

The Wayanad Agro Movement (WAM) Tea Company Ltd. was set up in 2003 to process the leaf from small tea growers to ensure a fairer share of the tea revenues. The NGO Prakruthi supported the WAM Tea Company to become certified under UTZ in 2009, along with 426 small growers. Training and monitoring under the Internal Control System (ICS) led to increased productivity and quality in tea and in turn better prices from WAM. From the existing price of Rs.3-4 per kg, growers received Rs.9-10 per kg in 2008, Rs.11-12 in 2009, and Rs.12-14 in 2010. The high prices of 2010 slipped to Rs.10 in 2011 and in May 2011 back to only Rs.5. In 2009, WAM tea fetched Rs.90 in auctions against the Rs.60-70 of other BLFs. The current auction price is Rs.60.

A reason for lower prices is that there are only 3 BLF’s operating in Mananthawady – WAM, Periapkep and Parrison’s Estate factory, so with less competition, farmers are forced to accept the prices offered. Also, once prices dipped from Rs.14, growers stopped taking as much interest in growing quality tea.

20 Discussion with small growers and interview with Father James of WAM.
Another issue is that WAM is struggling with efficiency issues. Lack of knowledge on the right tea processing machinery, factory planning and design, insufficient working capital and low management capacities have contributed to mismatched machines and a less than efficient operation, resulting in higher operational costs. The made tea quality is negatively affected due to the less than ideal processing, so it cannot be channelized into premium markets.

4.3 Promotion of gender equality

Most of the policies in the estates have gender equality built into the framework. Wage policies and social policies specify equal opportunities for both men and women. Existing norms for fair treatment of workers that evolved over a period of time in response to local needs do address and contribute to gender equity and equality to a large extent. For estates harvesting and processing leaf is its core business and in harvesting women hold the expertise. With picking forming almost 70 percent of the work on an estate, the wellbeing of its workers holds priority. To retain workers and enhance women’s capabilities to function effectively, these estates have been focusing on workers’ wellbeing by providing security through permanent jobs and support systems.

**Overview 4: Estate policies contributing to gender equality**

**Economic: Continuous and gainful employment opportunities for women**

- **Living wages** through 2 earning members, enabling families to meet their monthly needs comfortably.

- **Equal wages and benefits** for men and women.

- **Opportunities for employment of women at higher levels**, including management.

- **Opportunities for vertical movement of women**, through appropriate trainings and exposure for promotion to higher ranks.

- **Incentives for higher productivity** to motivate women to perform and earn better.

- **Wages paid into individual accounts** so women have control of their own earnings.

- **Opportunities to enhance income** through maintenance of a cow and calf, and sale of surplus milk after consumption needs.
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Social: Enhanced capabilities for effective functioning

- **Access to quality housing, adequate safe drinking water and sanitation.** Women bear the burden of housework, so access to safe drinking water reduces the time women spend in fetching water and boiling it to make it potable. Sturdy houses provide security, reduce the time women spend in cleaning and increase their wellbeing.

- **Access to upgraded electric connections, gas and energy saving appliances.** Upgraded electric connections and additional plug points for heating, grinding and ironing reduce women’s time in housework. Energy saving utensils and gas connections provide support to women, saving their cooking time, energy and effort in collecting firewood, reducing the drudgery of housework.

- **Access to quality healthcare, hygiene and nutrition.** Well equipped dispensaries with full time nurses and access to lady doctors for women, promote focus on health, regular checks for anemia and other symptoms of low nutrition levels among women and children, as also better control for women over their bodies through family planning measures. Waste management and focus on hygiene within and around lines promotes wellbeing and reduces chances of illnesses and epidemics.

- **Access to crèches, time for feeding babies, resting time for pregnant women.** Acknowledging and ensuring ways to support women’s reproductive role and accommodating the special needs enhances women’s capacity to work effectively and build their esteem.

- **Leave for women to care for sick children.** Acknowledging that women form the primary care givers and that children heal faster when secure and cared for, women have the option to take leave if children below 8 years are sick and at home.

- **Bonus for maintaining a plastic free environment** has enabled one estate increase awareness on environmental issues, cut their cleaning costs and preempt injuries to women by slipping on plastic waste while plucking. Women’s onus of segregating waste at the household level is reduced, as all people on the estate are equally responsible for the plastic free environment.

Empowerment: Supporting the creation of a level playing field

- **Equal opportunities for participation in leadership and decision making roles.** In Joint Working Committees and Sub-Committees, women and men are moving towards equal representation, and as workers representatives, mediating with management on workers issues.
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- **Equal access to loans and advances.** By distributing loan amounts between spouses, workers are eligible for larger loans to meet marriage or education needs, while estates ensure that both are aware of the loan, and that both are equally responsible for repayment, signifying spouses equal status in the eyes of the management.

- **Equal access for higher education and professional training** for children of workers, whether boys or girls, for better opportunities and livelihoods.

- **Participation in microfinance groups (SHGs)** facilitated by estates motivate women to save small amounts monthly for their security, promote income generation and serve as encouragement to develop latent talents such as entrepreneurial and leadership skills.

- **Celebration of festivals and community functions at the estate.** Social occasions are important to workers, so estates use these occasions for workers, especially women, to get a break from their routine, recharge, connect and network with friends and relatives, while also adding to the sense of well-being.

At smallholders’ level there are no specific strategies for promoting gender equality. For small growers, women are the only option as pickers. Trainings transferred by growers provide opportunities for women to upgrade their skills and increase productivity. However, with earnings from tea less than sustainable, at this stage, growers are unable to offer any hope of continuous employment, or benefits apart from daily wages and hot meals on the days they work.

At the level of EKTA, the main strategy for gender equality is providing opportunities to women on par with men to participate in trainings to improve productivity, generate awareness on health and safety, as well as leadership.
5. Conclusion

The assessment of estates and small growers shows that compliance with certification standards has improved productivity and efficiency of operations. It has led to definite improvement in occupational health and safety, effective use of agro-chemicals, waste-management, health and hygiene standards at estates, and in turn impacted workers lives, especially those of women, positively.

From the three estates assessed it is evident that following sustainability standards has contributed to a better quality of life for workers, with amenities leading to a more healthy and content workforce. It is also apparent that there is gender equity to a certain level, and women continue to strengthen their position. Nonetheless, the direct relationship of being a Rainforest Alliance certified plantation and the level of gender equity remains unclear. For example, specific gender issues related to standards are centred on Health & Safety and Maternity labour rights. There is no coverage or assurance of gender equity and equality regarding work time, workload and division of work, wages and social benefits. The three plantations assessed were premium estates with managements committed to CSR practices. Despite following most norms, they still invested considerable amounts in complying with specifications. From a scaling-up perspective, it remains to be seen if other estates with less financial means can comply with these standards, when investment costs are high and market access is not assured.

Although all the standards systems mention minimum wage, there is no special reference to ‘living wage’. The words fair or decent wages do not emphasize the need for wages to meet living needs of families through one worker’s earnings. The general opinion of respondents on this issue was the discrepancy between India’s minimum wage and earning a living wage should be addressed by international standards systems. Estates operate on wafer thin margins, diversifying to dairy and vegetable production, as well as tourism hospitality to
supplement their earnings in tea. Certified small tea growers in Wayanad are subsidizing the industry and consumers, as price realization at present is well below their production cost. Can this be termed fair or sustainable production, or is it certifying poverty?

At the level of small tea growers and their organizations, the Utz Certified standards do not specifically promote gender equality and empowerment of women farmers. To foster social change female participation is paramount in farmer organizations. As women comprise the majority of the total rural workforce, it is important to consult them regarding their desires and needs in designing and implementing the training activities. Currently, specific gender issues of the women agriculture workers are not addressed, like division of work and workload. These need to be incorporated in the standards systems and their support mechanisms, so that equitable participation of women in the organization or association, awareness on gender equity, acknowledgement of women’s role in production and women’s participation in decision making are visible as well as internalized, and can become part of the organizational culture.

The certified small tea growers in Wayanad stress the fact that the inputs and handholding by Prakruthi to promote Good Agricultural Practices and Internal Control Systems (ICS) played a major role to focus on quality and sustainable production methods. The enthusiasm has waned after the slump in prices, so focusing on bringing about a better balance in the division of workload between men and women growers without economic incentives through improved market access and value added price realization will be an uphill task.

Cultural norms of each region shape the way people relate to each other. In India, the reality is that women will seldom speak their views or voice their needs in front of elders, especially in-laws. Patriarchal norms inhibit women’s representation in forums seen as men’s spaces. These pose challenges in estates and among smallholder associations where larger families live and work together. In this context, standards systems should involve local stakeholders like Trade Unions and NGOs to help contextualize the standards for local needs, collaborate in developing internal quality systems and help in training, implementing and monitoring in each region.
6. Recommendations

**Estate Managements**

**Ensure living wages:**
Even in the best-managed estates, one worker’s wage does not stretch to meet a family living needs. When there are two earning members in a family, the family’s needs are covered. But what of families with single incomes such as widows or separated women with families?

**Introduce women supervisors and higher level opportunities:**
Women supervisors have proved their effectiveness in leading women's teams. Further, the possibility of women in higher levels such as women field officers, as well as at management levels needs to be promoted. Women need inputs on personality development, and men need to be sensitized on gender and being supportive of women’s choices.

**Address the inequality of workload:**
There is a lack of transparency and subtle discrimination in women doing time based work while men do task based work and earn the same wages. In effect, men earn in an average of 6 hours what women earn for 8 hours work.

**Provide personal protective equipment for women:**
Women are out in the field plucking all day long. Comfortable shoes with sufficient grip help negotiate uneven ground and reduce accidents. In the bitter cold and rain, women need sweaters and windcheaters to protect them against the cold. Women buy these work needs, while men are provided protective clothing for spraying as recommended in the standards of the codes of conduct.

**Increased representation of women workers in committees:**
Women are underrepresented, as well minority groups, widows and single and
young women. Roles and responsibilities of joint working committees should be expanded, as well as the awareness on the role of trade unions.

Provide equal opportunities for housing for single women:
Estates have a preference for families living in estate houses. While considerations such as optimum use of available accommodation, lack of security in remote rural locations are valid concerns, it still constitutes discrimination based on marital status. Single women (and men) usually live with their parents, and once married, are allocated houses based on their seniority. Yet, there are more women than men in each estate, which means there are single women, separated, unmarried or widowed.

Introduce English as instruction language in estate schools:
Free education is available up to primary school with Tamil as the language of instruction. Parents are apprehensive that their children will be marginalized, given the importance of English as the language of education. Migrant workers too show a preference for English.

Small Growers

Promote women membership:
Land registrations, as basis for membership in EKTA is a discrimination against women. Membership should be considered for spouses rather than the person whose name is on the land registration document, so that women who are more likely to be working on the land are included in the fellowship and their role and contribution to tea production is acknowledged at organizational level.

Provide opportunities for leadership:
Associations are generally seen as political spaces ‘owned by men.’ Women are underrepresented in decision making bodies, hence inclusion of women as office bearers, and their active participation needs to be emphasized and made mandatory at all forums, so that women’s needs and issues get voiced. Forming a Women’s Committee within EKTA to focus on issues of women among small growers would be a good starting point.

Enable women participation in meetings and trainings:
In attending meetings and trainings, women are handicapped in two ways: they
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carry the burden of household work including cooking and serving, so their
time for meetings is limited, and the other, limited mobility as public transport
is not always available at convenient times. A way forward would be to plan
meetings at timings and locations more convenient for women, because their
participation is important to EKTA.

Connect with SHGs to create labour pools:
SHGs promote opportunities for income generation among women. By
connecting with neighbourhood groups, it should be possible to develop labour
pools involving SHGs in each area. Working through SHGs is viewed very
differently, women see it as entrepreneurship as against agricultural labour.
SHGs can promote training for women on tea cultivation to build their skills.

Create incentives for Workers:
Currently women workers are paid a subsistence wage of Rs.150 (on par with
minimum wage and NREGA). Workers could be motivated to increase
productivity by offering them differential wages for higher volumes, thus saving
labour costs through reduction in workdays.

Rearrange meal provision structures:
The women of tea growers take up cooking meals for workers because it reduces
the burden of cash outflow. Connecting with neighbourhood groups (SHGs) for
providing lunch and tea breaks, or switching to more workers with lesser hours
could be ways of relieving growers from the burden of additional cooking.

Promote the sharing of domestic responsibilities:
Both men and women are complacent about their unequal relations; women
carry the burden of domestic and associated responsibilities as well as fulfilling
society’s expectations of ideal women. Sensitizing members on equitable gender
relations and sharing of responsibilities is something EKTA can take up.

Promote the membership of Trade Unions:
The AITUC, for instance, has members in the unorganised or informal sector,
especially in areas where women’s employment is significant such as Accredited
Social Health Activists. Associations like EKTA can explore the possibilities of
unionizing small growers and workers in small tea gardens.

21 Gender Equality and Social Dialogue in India, p. 17.
Create partnerships with responsible estates:
Estates in Nilgiris have developed successful partnerships with small growers, ensuring a steady supply of quality leaf for their factories. Wayanad has a few estates; it may be possible for EKTA to explore possibilities of such partnership where small growers can access a steady market and stable prices, as alternate avenues.

Standards Systems

Focus on the high-hanging fruits:
While certification is easy with the creamy layer of estates which are part of large corporations that have CSR policies in place, the challenge will be in certifying the medium level estates and small growers that have less focus on workers welfare or gender relations. Codes of conduct that spell out expectations and provide guidance on gender equity and equality will be helpful.

Provide market access:
Many growers joined EKTA hoping to be part of a value chain supplying to stable export markets. Growers have demonstrated their ability to conform to quality requirements and comply with certification standards. Improving product quality and quantity should go hand in hand with providing market access to added value tea markets. Standard systems should ensure a substantial market demand and provide small growers associations with up to date market analysis and prognoses.

Create cost effective certification:
Cost effectiveness will motivate producers to consider certification of their tea and other products. For most farmers, tea is one of their crops, in this connection certification and marketing of all farm crops makes sense. It is also worthwhile to consider the possibility of the certification of tea producing regions, like Nilgiris, thereby promoting harmonization of all standards systems.

Assure gender balanced audits:
Inspections and audits should be done by men and women teams, to create access to gender sensitive information.
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Involv e Trade Unions and NGOs in contextualizing the codes for local needs: Intensify the collaboration with rural development NGOs in developing internal quality systems, training curriculums and implementing and monitoring standards in each tea-producing region. While standards systems concern labour practices, trade unions too could contribute to the local adaptation of a standards system and its successful implementation and monitoring.
Annexure

Factors that influence gender relations in the industry

Tea, as the oldest organized, export-oriented industry of India, has numerous stakeholders with varied interests, wanting to protect their stakes. Policies to protect workers in estates, the most vulnerable stakeholders, have been in force for over fifty years. The ones that influence and promote opportunities for women in the industry can be said to be:

The Government of India, through organizations, Acts & Regulations

i. The Tea Board, set up in 1953 under the control of the Union Government of India, looks after all aspects related to tea, from cultivation to export. The activities of the Tea Board include among others securing better working conditions and the provisions and improvement of amenities and incentives for workers\(^\text{22}\) and facilitating setting up of self-help groups to enhance quality of leaf.\(^\text{23}\)

ii. The Plantations Labour Act, 1951 outlines the facilities to be provided by Plantations for its workers, both men and women, such as drinking water, medical, educational, housing and crèches, with details of how, where, when.\(^\text{24}\)

iii. The Ministry of Labour and Employment, is responsible for policies with respect to labour matters including co-operation between labour and management, settlement of labour disputes, regulation of wages and other conditions of work and safety, including those related to women labour. The Ministry also commissions studies on socio-economic conditions of

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23 Chai Time, p. 165.
Women Workers and the welfare facilities available to them vis-à-vis various labour laws in organised and unorganised sectors, among them the Plantation Sector. A separate Cell within the Ministry pays special attention to women’s problems.25

iv. The Equal Remunerations Act, 1976 (ERA) guarantees protection against gender-based discrimination in recruitment and promotions and a Committee advises the Government on providing increasing employment opportunities for Women.26

v. The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, that fixes minimum wages to be paid by employers in scheduled employments including Plantations or estates maintained for the purpose of growing tea.27

vi. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA), which provides a legal guarantee for at least 100 days of employment on asset-creating public work programmes every year for at least one person in every household, is an important recent legislation that has enhanced rural women’s employment. The Act provides that “priority shall be given to women in such a way that at least one third of the beneficiaries shall be women who have registered and requested for work under this Act.” (Schedule II, paragraph 5). This act has forced employers to match or pay higher wages than offered by NREGA if they want workers.

Small tea growers are not covered under the Plantation Labour Act, labour and employment and equal remunerations acts, as individual small holders and their operations fall below the minimum numbers specified in such acts.

Growers Associations

i. UPASI

UPASI (The United Planters’ Association of Southern India) set up in 1893, is the body of planters of tea, coffee, rubber, pepper and cardamom in Tamil

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Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. Three State Planters’ Associations and 13 District Planters’ Association are affiliated to UPASI and it is the premier representative body of buyers, sellers, processors, exporters, co-operatives and all other market intermediaries of tea coffee, rubber and spices. UPASI’s operations cover economic research, market intelligence, industrial relations, liaison, public relations, scientific research and publications.

In 2000, UPASI started a Tea Quality Upgradation programme to create awareness among small growers and BLFs on tea quality improvement. UPASI and the Tea Board initiatives have narrowed the chasm between estates and small growers, by making improvement programmes accessible to registered small tea growers. However, it is estimated that at least 50 percent of small growers are not registered with the tea board, and hence are unable to avail the subsidies and trainings. Further, there is no focus on gender equity in participation of women in trainings or seminars.

**ii. EKTA**

In Wayanad, EKTA is the registered society and apex body of 6 farmers groups comprising 426 small tea growers. EKTA has focused on increasing productivity of small growers, focus on certification through setting up ICS, negotiating and mediating with WAM on pricing and forging links with stakeholders such as the Tea Board, UPASI-KVK to avail subsidies and training opportunities. Social organization and promoting gender equality has seen comparatively less focus.

**Civil Society**

**i. Trade Unions**

The major trade unions active in the estates covered are the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). There are 13 major trade union federations in India and in the country, collective bargaining in the sector can occur at multiple levels – estate and factory level, regional level, or industry level. All the workers in these estates are part of trade unions. Active trade unions can ensure gender equality in payments and benefits and help focus attention on specific concerns of women workers in the tea industry, in both estates and among the smallholder sectors.
Though at present workers in the smallholdings are not part of any trade unions or associations connected with collective bargaining, increasing unionization of agricultural and rural workers hold out hope for possibilities for unionization in future.

**ii NGOs**

There are no NGOs working with any of the 3 estates in Nilgiris. In Wayanad, at smallholders level, Prakruthi has been working with small growers through EKTA society since 2007-08. Other NGOs like Shreyas and Wayanad Social Service Society approach growers for surveys, but no other NGO interacts with them on a regular basis.
Abbreviations

AIADMK  All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Trade Union)
AITUC  All India Trade Union Congress (Trade Union)
BLF  Bought Leaf Factory
CTC  Cut, Tear and Curl – A variety of tea processing
DMK  Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Trade Union)
EKTA  Name of the Producer Organisation in Wayanad, EKTA means Unity
ETP  Ethical Tea Partnership
INTUC  Indian National Trade Union Congress (Trade Union)
KVK  Krishi Vigyan Kendra
NREGA  National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NREGS  National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme
SHGs  Self Help Groups
UPASI  United Planters Association of South India
WAM  Wayanad Agro Movement
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**A Gender Assessment of Certified Tea Gardens**

This research assesses the context specific gender situation at estate and tea garden level in India. It gives an overview of the Indian tea production systems at estate and smallholder level. Based upon qualitative field research, the report analyses existing gender relations in the South Indian tea sector and examines the correlation between recently introduced certification standards and gender relations. To contribute to addressing critical issues in women empowerment, specific recommendations for the main stakeholders are included.

**Prakruthi**

Prakruthi, a Bangalore-based not-for-profit organisation established in 1991, envisages a society where the economic and social divide created by a non-equalitarian system is minimised. Prakruthi works with the poor and the marginalised among plantation workers, small and marginal farmers, women, youth and children. Prakruthi addresses these issues in garments, tea, coffee, cotton and sugarcane sectors with special focus on social, economic and environmental sustainability.

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