



TEA ACTION PROJECT

Empowering Tea Growing Communities

NEWSLETTER 2020





Improving our communities everywhere, everyday.

Tea Promoters India was founded 40 years ago, with the idea of promoting sustainable human development in tea growing regions in India. At a time when conventional farming was the norm, it is this vision that enabled and guided our founder Mr. Brij Mohan, to champion and pioneer the Organic and Fairtrade movements in the tea sector.

Organic agriculture places emphasis on the interconnectedness of all living organisms found in Mother nature and how we must consciously strive to sustain a harmonious balance in this ecosystem. Using these principles, we committed to building intentional and conscious communities in our tea gardens. 40 years later, it is still one of our most important goals as an organisation. We are the only tea company in the tea world which has dedicated itself to growing only organic and fairtrade tea across four different geographies – Darjeeling, Assam, Dooars and South India.

Last year we made Menstruation and Women's healthcare the focus of our work as we believed good healthcare is the key to a prosperous and healthy future. At the beginning of the year, we conducted a pilot project for menstrual hygiene in Darjeeling and by the end of 2019, the project was successfully launched in all our tea gardens and small farmer cooperatives across Darjeeling and Assam. We regularly conduct workshops with the community and distribute environment friendly sanitary products to all women free of cost.

The success of this project made us think about other ways in which we could push the boundaries in the areas of health and sanitation for the community. Unsafe sanitation was becoming a huge area of concern for many of our tea workers. There was a large gap in the effective management of sanitation waste. With water scarcity becoming a glaring reality both in Darjeeling and Assam, building conventional toilets were expensive to operate and not a viable solution. We then collaborated with a leading NGO in India called Garv Toilets which specialises in building community toilet infrastructure. We built a cost effective toilet that would be easy to clean, use less water, and require minimal human interference for maintenance and supervision. We launched a pilot project in Assam where we have built and installed a modular, prefabricated toilet made entirely of stainless steel with an underground bio digester tank.

The project has been operating successfully for many months now and our goal in the coming months is to ensure that all our community members have access to safe, clean and sustainable water and sanitation facilities at their workplace.

For many years now, the local community in our tea gardens have always been at odds with the Elephants that move between the forests surrounding these regions. Elephants are nomadic in nature and live in large herds. We have spent the last year identifying known elephant movement zones across our gardens in Darjeeling, Dooars and Assam and have created safer pathways or corridors for Elephants to walk through our gardens. We have covered all deep open ditches and drains to prevent Elephants from falling in and getting injured.

Our mission in the coming years is to promote wildlife conservations practices in all our tea gardens and protect the spectacular and diverse flora and fauna that is present in these tea regions. We are proud to announce that Tea Promoters India is the first tea organisation in the world to be awarded the 'Elephant Friendly Tea Garden' status for its gardens Putharjhora, Snowview and Banaspaty. The 'Elephant Friendly' label is now available for all our partners to use and we hope that you can use this label to increase awareness amongst consumers on conservation efforts being made towards the Asian elephants.

The year 2019, brought together two of our passions-producing high quality teas and growing them in a sustainable way. We were awarded the Top 3 position in the category "Corporate Partnerships 2020" of the German Sustainability Awards and our tea garden, Seeyok, won the award for the best First Flush tea produced in the Darjeeling region.

In the event of the global climate crisis and Covid-19 Pandemic, we feel now is the time to find new ways to re-engage with the world we share our lives with. As we look ahead to the next 20 years, we believe we need to Redesign, Recreate, Revive, Research, Replenish, Rejuvenate and Rethink our efforts at building a sustainable future for our communities. We are focusing our efforts towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping our communities tackle climate change. We are now working towards a 100% shift to renewable energy. As part of this initiative, all our villages are now under solar lighting. We are striving to work towards a future where we find powerful, sustainable solutions for environmental and social change in our communities. It is a long and challenging road ahead, but we are grateful to have all the support of all our partners on this journey.

Ashwini Sashidhar
Design and Sustainability

Emerging Assam

Assam has deep rooted inequalities, prejudices, and indifferences from a wide spectrum of stakeholders. While these continue to gain media attention and rightfully so, we have decided to focus our attention on bringing about positive change in our tea garden in Assam called Chardwar.

When we took over the garden a few years ago, the factory was ill equipped, the tea bushes were malnourished and the community was neglected. They didn't have adequate housing while electricity and clean drinking water were sporadic. Since then we have made tremendous efforts to revive the land and community.

The factory was redesigned and expanded to accommodate automation and international health and safety standards. Our soil conditions have improved drastically over the years through organic farming practices and we now produce 400,000 kilograms of tea annually. We have worked with the local government to provide electricity to the village and in 2019, Chardwar received its first electricity connection. We are building formal houses for all our workers to live in. In addition to this we have successfully built and launched a pilot project for energy efficient homes with solar panelled roofs. The first prototype has already been installed in the community and we hope to install these solar roofs in all the community housing in the years to come. We have also built eco-toilets for all our tea workers to use at their workplace.





(1) Eco-toilets in Chardwar. (2) Electric poles being erected in the village



3.



(3) Concrete houses being built for the workers (Above) Prototype of the solar roofs
(5) The new Factory



5.

Achievements



In 2019, a luxury tea brand launched the ‘Tea Excellence at Origin Competition’ – to celebrate the quality of tea produced in Darjeeling, promote authentic tea craftsmanship and encourage the retention of skills needed to protect the heritage of tea-making in the region. They invited all Darjeeling tea gardens to participate in the competition. After several rounds of tastings, seventeen teas from various tea gardens across Darjeeling, were declared eligible for the competition. The final judging process was extremely rigorous and complex and involved several rounds of ‘blind tastings’ between a highly diverse and qualified panel of tea experts and Michelin star chefs. The teas were judged on appearance, aroma, flavour, balance and freshness. Seeyok Tea Estate took the top spot, beating all the other teas from Darjeeling to be crowned the best First Flush for 2019. Seeyok was announced as the winner of the Tea Excellence at Origin Competition during a ceremony on 13th June.

Milestones



Tea Promoters India and Naturland have been pioneering organic tea production in Darjeeling for 30 years.

Naturland and Tea Promoters India share a long history and success story. In 1989, the then Naturland managing director Dr. Storhas, visited Samabeong Tea Garden to assist in the process of conversion of the tea garden to organic standards. In 1990, it was the first Darjeeling tea garden to be certified under the Naturland organic standards. This pioneering project was the start of a long partnership between Naturland and Tea Promoters India.

At Biofach 2020 Naturland honoured Tea Promoters India for 30 years partnership with Naturland, its pioneering spirit and dedication to organic agriculture, social development and fair trade.

We look forward to continuing this partnership with Naturland for many years to come!



Elephantea !



Our tea gardens in Dooars, Darjeeling and Assam are surrounded by forest reserves which have a large elephant population. The movement of the elephants through the tea gardens and community housing colonies have always created conflict.

To address this conflict, we have conducted awareness programs in partnership with the forest range officers and local NGOs's in these regions to educate our community. We have covered all deep ditches and drains to prevent baby Elephants from falling and getting injured. All low lying electricity cables and poles have been removed to prevent electrocution of Elephants. We have also created safer pathways that are away from the housing clusters, for the herds to walk through our tea garden. We have stopped all use of fire crackers in our tea gardens and continue to educate our community on using non-harmful methods to drive the herds away. We have installed solar lighting along all walkways in the gardens to prevent surprise attacks in the night.

To take this program a step further, we partnered with the 'Wildlife Enterprise' (WFEN), an organisation that protects wildlife on agricultural lands that lie in-between forest areas, by promoting best conservation practices that assure people and nature coexist and thrive. Together we have launched a Human-Elephant Conflict Management Plan that outlines all our efforts towards protecting our Elephant and Human communities in the years to come. In 2020, Putharjhora, Snowview and Banaspaty became the first tea gardens in Dooars, Darjeeling and Assam to be awarded the 'Elephant Friendly' certification by WFEN.



Our entire Darjeeling tea production and management team participated in a study tour of several tea gardens in the Nilgiri region in Southern India. The objective of the program was to help our team gain knowledge on diverse terroir, origins, manufacturing practices and organic farming techniques in other regions.

All work and play!

Our annual office picnic is a chance for all of us to get out in the sun, unwind, build camaraderie, strengthen friendships and play lots of outdoor games especially cricket! It helps us learn personality traits, quirks, senses of humour and talents among our teammates that we might not have known about before. For example, who knew a champion world cup batsman was masquerading as a senior accountant in our office! :)

