



THIRST

Progress Report 2018-2021



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1

Why THIRST exists



Human rights issues in the tea industry



Tea production is estimated to employ around 13 million people around the world. Numerous reports have found that these workers' human rights are being breached – with particular emphasis on wages, housing, healthcare and water & sanitation.

Tea estates

Tea workers traditionally live and work on tea estates, also referred to as tea plantations or tea gardens. Women form the majority of workers in the lowest-paid plantation roles and, like their sisters all over the world, bear the burden of unpaid domestic work and often lack the capacity to speak out on their rights. The shortage of adequate health services on tea estates – along with poor nutrition – puts them at higher risk of maternal health related problems.

Smallholder farmers

A growing number of tea workers – around 9 million so far – are now smallholder farmers. These small tea farmers – like small farmers everywhere – lack the bargaining power individually to ensure the best possible prices for their tea. The reasons behind these problems are complex and systemic.

What lies behind these problems?

Tea is a ubiquitous, yet deeply undervalued staple in most of the world's kitchens and cafés. And with the undervaluing of the product, comes the under-payment of the majority of workers and farmers who produce it.

In many countries, tea companies provide permanent workers and their families with housing, education, healthcare, subsidised food and more. Many on both sides see the relationship as paternal rather than feudal, and in many ways the lives of tea workers are more secure than other low-paid labourers. Owners point to the low rate of COVID-19 infections on tea plantations as evidence of this.

But other workers and their champions – including many trade unions, NGOs, academics and activists – see the relationship as one of exploitation amounting to forced labour. They contend this is because housing is reliant on working on the estate, cash wages are too low to afford escape and workers often end up in debt. They say that when the legally mandated benefits are provided (and often they are not), they are of very poor quality. As a result, in some regions, health (and other social) indicators for tea workers are worse than for the population in general or for other agricultural labourers.



Tea has gone from being a relatively rare, high value delicacy traded within the framework of a powerful economic and political empire, to a cheap and over-plentiful commodity traded between a few large and powerful companies and hundreds of smaller producers. Almost every report on tea begins with the statement that tea is the second most popular drink in the world, after water. It is a ubiquitous, yet deeply undervalued staple in most of the world's kitchens and cafés. And with the undervaluing of the product, comes the under-payment of the majority of workers who produce it.

Yet the global popularity of tea persists, generating sufficient profits for some companies to thrive. In common with many – if not most – agricultural commodities, profits are concentrated at the branding and retail end of the value chain.

What can we do to change this?

It would be easy to respond to this complex picture by focusing on the negative, pointing fingers and laying blame – identifying goodies and baddies – but that is unlikely to lead to constructive solutions. Indeed it has failed to do so, so far.

THIRST was established to provide a platform for civil society to bring together its knowledge, experience and voices to challenge and support the industry to change. One of the six principles that civil society organisations set for THIRST is that:

“In pursuing our primary goal of improving the lives of tea workers, tea farmers and their families, [we] recognise that each stakeholder in the tea sector is part of a complex, interdependent economic and social ecosystem and act accordingly.”

Many worthy attempts to improve the lives of tea workers and farmers in specific ways have been and continue to be made. These efforts date back to the birth of the industry, but unilateral efforts can only ever have a limited impact because of this complex set of global interdependencies.

Tea's ecosystem needs a social, political and economic reset.

And this will require global action on multiple levels, giving birth to a fair and sustainable tea industry where workers and farmers are empowered and their rights are protected. THIRST aims to be a midwife to that process.

THIRST's goal is to transform the tea industry so that tea workers and farmers are empowered and their human rights are protected.



Photo by: Jordygashagaza. Published under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license.

We aim to achieve this through:



Convening stakeholders

THIRST is the first civil society driven organisation dedicated to *bringing together* key actors in the tea sector to discuss problems and explore solutions. For example, facilitating a group of NGOs to challenge and monitor company responses to allegations of sexual abuse on Malawi tea estates. We convene stakeholders through:

- Open international roundtables
- Working international roundtables
- Making introductions



Sharing our resources and expertise

THIRST disseminates knowledge about human rights in the tea sector to help ensure that tea workers' and farmers' representatives, civil society and the industry have access to the most up-to-date insights and information. We do this through:

- Our Monthly News Roundup (distributed via email and on social media)
- Our Knowledge Hub
- Producing original resources
- Consulting and advising



Catalysing change

Where appropriate, in alliance with other civil society organisations and in response to evidence gathered, THIRST advocates for changes in the tea industry and by relevant governments to protect tea workers' and farmers' rights. This includes:

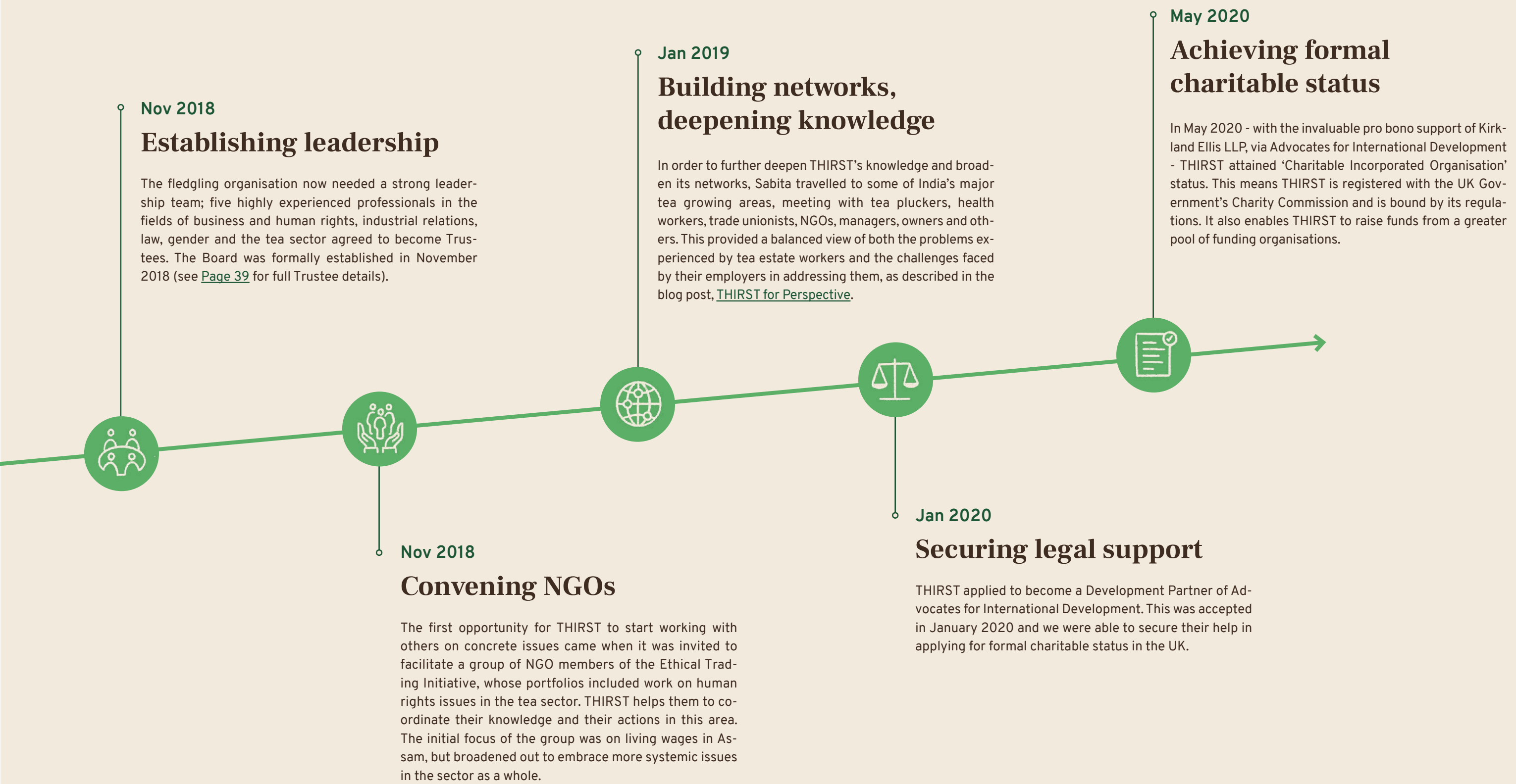
- Advocacy
- Raising awareness
- Human Rights Impact Assessment

2

THIRST's
inception years







3

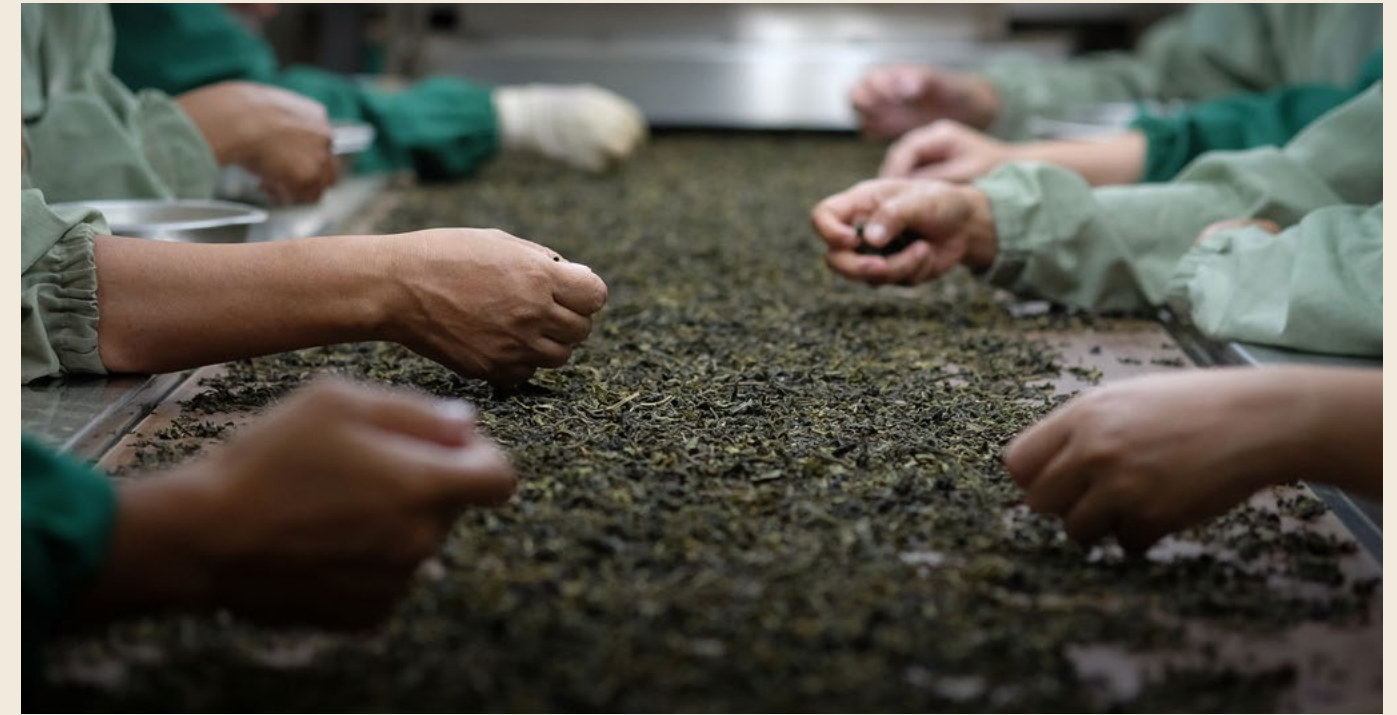
Progress report



3.1

Convening stakeholders

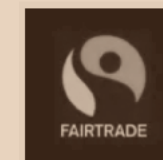
Working international roundtables



THIRST has continued to convene the group of NGO Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) members – originally concerned about living wages in Assam. It has met regularly to share information on activities in Assam and beyond and discuss the possibility of joint advocacy. The group included Care International, Dalit Solidarity Network, the Fairtrade Foundation, Oxfam, Save the Children, UNICEF UK, and Women Working Worldwide.

In 2021, the group expanded its remit to include the wider tea industry on the basis that the issues facing tea workers in Assam are shared by tea workers in many other parts of India and the world and that their causes are systemic in nature and therefore need to be tackled at a sector-wide level.

The purpose of the group is to share knowledge and information to ensure consistency and avoid unnecessary duplication in their work. For example, the THIRST-facilitated meetings helped two members of the group to realise they were both developing grievance mechanisms in tea plantations of the same region and could then discuss how to ensure consistency and share learning.



Open International Roundtables

In June 2020, THIRST convened its first international roundtable meeting, ‘Building Tea Back Better’. Based on the UN concept of “Building Back Better”, the event was attended by almost 100 participants from around the world and from many different parts of the tea value chain including corporates such as major supermarkets, NGOs, Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives, standards bodies, universities and law firms. It demonstrated healthy demand for events that enable dialogue between tea stakeholders. This was followed by a series of discussions (TEA Talks) on key issues raised at roundtable meetings.

THIRST’s TEA Talks have prompted new links between players in different parts of the tea value chain and across countries and continents for mutual learning and benefit.

The TEA Talks have led to a number of tea company start-ups contacting the speakers on speciality tea about potential sources of sustainable and ethically sourced tea.



11

THIRST’s TEA Talks have been attended by people from eleven countries worldwide.

489

A total of 489 tickets were sold for our tea talks within this period.

6

Participants included members of civil society, standards organisations, industry, retailers, government and academics.

Our open roundtables to date:

Making Social Dialogue Work for Women Tea Workers in Africa With the support of Bananalink, we invited women trade union leaders from Latin America to share their experience with civil society actors in the Malawi tea sector. Oxfam’s Juliet Suliwa spoke about the work of the Malawi 2020 Tea Revitalisation Programme to address challenges faced by women in the tea sector. Trade union leaders, Iris Munguia and Adela Torres, told us how they used findings of a study identifying problems for women in the banana sector to push for improvements.	Simplifying the value chain and distributing value more fairly Kathrin Gassert of Teekampagne expanded on their business model. Will Battle, tea procurement advisor to IDH introduced its Sustainable Procurement Kit. A discussion, facilitated by Oxfam’s Workers’ Rights Senior Manager, Rachel Wilshaw, blossomed into a fascinating discourse on transformative business models, innovative financial approaches and the fundamental question of how we as a global community value food.
Are cooperatives better for human rights? In February 2021 Dr Miriam Wenner and Bebika Khawas shared the findings of their research on the different outcomes in two Darjeeling cooperatives, and we had input from THIRST Trustee, Michael Pennant-Jones, on his experience of tea cooperatives in Kenya.	Can speciality tea be a force for good? In March we heard from two UK-based specialist tea companies, Postcard Teas and Comins Tea who shared their experience and philosophy to explore the question, can specialist tea be a force for good, a force for change in the wider tea sector?
Technology, Transparency and Tea Bhathiya Bulumulla, Director/CEO – Elpitiya Plantations PLC shared his vision of a high tech tea sector in Sri Lanka using apps to improve the lives of workers and the prosperity of tea estates. Supriya Sahu, CEO of INDCOSERVE explained how it embraces new technology from electronic tea scales ensuring accurate payment directly into tea pluckers’ bank accounts to apps that help farmers procure good quality leaf. Darjeeling Organic Tea Estates’ CEO, Indroneel Goho, shared how they are using facial recognition software to ensure tea pluckers are paid accurately.	Can tea & forests healthily co-exist? Expert panelists, Sheeba Sen of Alaap, Thwango Ndalama of the Ethical Tea Partnership and Sammu Kirui of Finlays spoke about how they and their organisations are helping not only to stem the destruction of forests, but how they are recreating them and, in so doing, creating livelihood opportunities for the communities around them so that both the forests and the communities can become ‘self-sustaining ecosystems’



Making introductions

THIRST has brought together diverse global actors including a group of experts on modern slavery and a group of legal organisations to discuss legal approaches to protecting tea workers' rights.

These included the UK law firm Leigh Day who bring court cases against companies implicated in human rights abuses, Nazdeek who train paralegals, and campaign on legal right to living wages, maternal healthcare etc. in India, The Human Trafficking Legal Center and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.

THIRST's Network

THIRST has also been developing its own valuable strategic relationships with other organisations like the Ethical Tea Partnership (a grouping of tea brands and retailers); the Global Tea Coalition (a coalition of tea brands and producers convened by IDH); the Tea and Herbal Association of Canada; the UK Tea and Infusions Association; Birkbeck University; Tata Institute of Social Science, Assam (India); the Global Living Wage Coalition and the IUF (the food, farm and hotel workers' global trade union federation). We are also developing dialogue with tea brands and producers around the world.

These new conversations are helping to build a more cohesive global picture of the tea industry.

They also encourage cross-regional and cross-discipline learning – each one taking us a step closer to decent lives for tea workers and farmers.



Monthly News Roundup

To ensure that their work is effective, it is important to ensure that those working to protect the rights of tea workers and farmers have access up-to-date information on issues such as changes in the law, price trends, the impact of COVID, and of the climate emergency.

THIRST has been publishing a monthly News Update bringing together media reports on issues affecting the human rights and environment of tea workers and farmers worldwide. The mailing list for the update is continually growing and proving to be an invaluable resource for civil society and other concerned actors.



Photo credit: The Standard

Monica Oluoch and Janet Nyambane - the only female directors elected to Kenyan tea factories in the recent shake-up from our May 2021 News Roundup.

Feedback from subscribers

“““

Thanks for this excellent overview of the recent development in the tea sector. Your monthly updates are an incredible support to keep track of these developments and to refine my view on the sector, especially since you point at the often controversial opinions concerning labour, wages, etc.

– Miriam Wenner, Universität Göttingen.

“““

Excellent and useful summary - thank you.

– Louise Nicholls, MD Suseco

“““

The THIRST monthly update brings complex and comprehensive insight into the human rights challenges of tea production. The real-world experiences of tea workers are always well-represented. It's changed the way I look at a cup of tea. Highly recommend subscribing to these updates, they are really informative!

– Jenny Stanger, Anti-slavery Taskforce, Australia

3.2

Sharing expertise



Knowledge Hub

There is a large number of reports on the conditions under which tea workers and farmers are living and working. Bringing them together in the Knowledge Hub makes them easier to find and to cross reference.

THIRST has brought together a collection of important reports on the human rights and environment of tea workers and farmers around the world.

This provides civil society, industry and government easy access to the wealth of information that is available on these issues. THIRST continues to curate the collection and to keep it up to date.

Knowledge Hub feedback

“““
I have found your knowledge hub really insightful (I have ordered 2 books you’ve listed!)
– Céline Gillart, Twinings

“““
As a small, volunteer-run not-for-profit, we didn’t have much capacity to carry out extensive research but we wanted to make sure our campaign materials were evidence-based. The Knowledge Hub, which is usefully organised by publication date, topic and country, helped us save time and understand the research landscape on wages and working conditions, including interviews with workers.
– Clare Bartram, Board Member, Project Didi Australia

Producing Resources

As well as collating existing literature, THIRST raises awareness among stakeholders about any gaps it identifies, and, where feasible, fills some of those gaps with its own publications:

Human Rights in Assam Tea Estates – The Long View A literature review of 15 years of reports on the problems of working and living conditions that have been reported since the inception of the industry in India – highlighting the four areas that are most often cited as highly problematic: wages, housing, water & sanitation and healthcare.	THIRST Briefing: East and South East Asia A literature review of reports on issues for tea workers and farmers in East and South East Asia highlighting the dearth of material on this topic and a gap that needs to be filled by further research.
THIRST Briefing: Initial impact of Covid-19 on tea workers Notes on the impact that the lockdowns and economic slow-down had on tea workers in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic including loss of the valuable ‘first flush’ crop, loss of markets, travel and transport restrictions etc.	THIRST Briefing: Pempila Orumai In 2015 in Munnar, in the South Indian state of Kerala, several thousand women tea pluckers struck for nine days, calling for a 20% bonus to be reinstated, a wage rise and improvements in their benefits and conditions. They disassociated themselves from trade unions, claiming they were not representing them effectively. They won on the bonus issue and a slight wage increase, but the struggle for better conditions is ongoing.

Consulting and advising



Photo by [Anjadora via Flickr](#). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic license.

THIRST provides expert advice on issues relating to human rights of tea workers and farmers, drawing on the extensive knowledge and expertise of our Board members and CEO which between them covers the tea sector, business and human rights, industrial relations, gender, and the law.

Fairtrade International Hired Labour Standards

THIRST was invited to take part in the civil society consultation on the revised standards. THIRST called (among other things) for the standards to be more ambitious on wages, using living wages as the benchmark instead of international poverty lines.

Global Living Wage Coalition

THIRST provided input into The GLWC's living wage benchmark for the tea-growing region of South India, the Nilgiris. THIRST questioned the inclusion of in-kind benefits in the living wage calculation.

Business and Human Rights Resource Centre

THIRST advised BHRRC on tea supply chain transparency issues and local contacts which fed into their development of the Tea Transparency Tracker and accompanying report.

Commerce Equitable (Fair trade) France

THIRST was interviewed for their study investigating the sustainability issues and the impacts of fair trade on the tea sector in Darjeeling and Sri Lanka.

Oxfam

THIRST provided feedback on Oxfam's Research Backgrounder "Risk Factors for Gender-based Violence: The Case of Indian Agriculture". THIRST CEO, Sabita Banerji, also co-authored the Oxfam report, 'Addressing the Human Cost of Assam Tea'

Ethical Tea Partnership

THIRST was consulted on ETP's strategy and advocated (among other things) for greater transparency of the share of value along the supply chain and for tea brands and retailers to take greater responsibility for human rights in their supply chains. THIRST was also consulted as part of the recruitment process for the Chair of ETP.

Human Trafficking Legal Centre, New York

THIRST was invited to comment on whether to call for Indian tea to be subject to a Withhold Release Order by US Customs under forced labour regulations THIRST advised against as this would only further commercially damage an already struggling industry.

Leigh Day Lawyers

THIRST provided insights into the tea sector as a whole (NB Following pressure from Leigh Day the tea company Camellia has conceded to calls for compensation and mitigation measures for women in Malawi who had brought cases of sexual harassment).

Be Slavery Free and Project Didi

THIRST provided input into a draft submission by the two organisations to the US Department of Labor calling for Indian tea to be listed as a product of forced labor. If accepted this could result in advocacy and support from the US Government to the Indian government and tea industry to tackle forced labour issues.

3.3

Catalysing Change

Advocacy

In order to bring about lasting change in the tea sector, THIRST believes that the policies and practices of many companies and governments need to change.

THIRST seeks this change by joining with other civil society actors to raise well-researched issues with these bodies and call for relevant action.

THIRST seeks to convene civil society voices for joined up advocacy when needed. For example, when 400,000 Assam tea workers went on strike in September 2020, calling for Rs 350 a day, THIRST convened the ETI NGOs to draft and agree a position statement urging British tea companies to support them. The ETI published the position statement [on its blog](#). Other NGOs used the message in their dialogue with companies and through their own social media channels – such as [this post by Oxfam on LinkedIn](#).

THIRST raised questions on sexual abuse and human rights in tea at Tesco's Shareholder Meeting on June 18th 2021 and at Sainsbury's AGM on July 9th 2021. THIRST also provided input into a draft submission by Be Slavery Free and Project Didi to the US Department of Labor calling for Indian tea to be listed as a product of forced labor. The submission was delayed due to the Covid pandemic restrictions, but may be made at a later date. If accepted this could result in advocacy and support from US Government to the Indian government and tea industry to tackle forced labour issues.

Raising awareness

While tea is famously the second most popular drink in the world after water, the issues faced by the women and men who tend, grow, pluck and process it are not widely known. Advertising has created a warm, idyllic image of smiling women plucking tea in the sunshine and the drink itself is associated with comfort, calm and good health.

THIRST raises awareness of the reality behind these perceptions so that consumers, investors and employees of tea companies as well as civil society can make informed decisions and call for change where necessary. And also so that tea companies themselves can make positive changes.

THIRST in the Media



Women's rights in tea with Sabita Banerji and Krishanti Dharmaraj

You can't just break it down overnight and destroy the well being and the ability for tea communities and individuals to live. This is where the collective power of the government, the industry and the workers needs to come together.

BY ARAVINDA ANANTHARAMAN
MARCH 10, 2021

In recognition of International Women's Day, Tea Biz spoke with Sabita Banerji and Krishanti Dharmaraj from THIRST, The International Roundtable for Sustainable Tea. Sabita was born

[View article on Tea Biz](#)



JING meets Sabita Banerji of THIRST

Bringing positive change to the tea industry

Sabita Banerji is a lifelong campaigner for human rights, ethical trading and now she's CEO of THIRST - The first International Roundtable for Sustainable Tea. As tea is in United Nations International Tea

[View article on JING](#)



Sustainability and Tea

An Interview with Sabita Banerji of THIRST

[View blog post on Tea For Me Please](#)

Public speaking



THIRST CEO, Sabita Banerji, has delivered talks and lectures to a wide range of audiences, raising awareness of the plight of tea workers and farmers around the world and the complex causes underlying these problems – but also offering suggestions for what can be done to address them.

Sabita delivered talks for Sunningwell WI and South Oxford WI, was a panellist on Fairtrade Yorkshire's AGM event, and delivered lectures for two of Oxford Brookes Business School modules; Business in Society and International Business Management. In previous years THIRST has spoken at the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum.

Feedback from talks

“““

Sabita Banerji provided a guest lecture on my module International Business Strategy in which she problematized multi-national corporate strategies for profit maximization. Sabita presented compelling and thought-provoking quantitative and qualitative evidence that problematizes free-market ideology. This included a broad range of material on imperialism, value chains, and environmental degradation, together with implications for people and societies. Students reported that they would like more opportunities to engage with expert testimonials from within the field of international business.

– Dr Guy Huber, Senior Lecturer, Oxford Brookes University

“““

I found the research study presented and the numerous stories shared quite revealing; the need for policy reform and awareness on the international and national stages prove paramount in confronting exploitation seen in the tea industry!

– Madeline Linnel, International Justice Mission

“““

Thank you for the amazing story you shared today! It was really informative and impactful to discuss about such a difficult topic.

– Junghoon Park, University of Michigan.

Human Rights Impact Assessment

Why do a global tea sector HRIA?

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights call on companies to conduct human rights due diligence in their global supply chains. A vital aspect of this due diligence is an assessment of the company's impacts on the human rights of people in its supply chain. Several companies – including some tea companies – are now doing this. But many of the problems identified are systemic and beyond the scope of an individual company to address.

Many civil society organisations have also sought to understand and address certain aspects of well-reported human rights breaches in various parts of the tea sector. But none – as far as we

know – has looked at the root causes in the sector as a whole, taking into consideration the global nature of the tea industry and the interdependence of its various parts.

That's why THIRST plans to analyse the sector itself – the whole sector, not just parts of it. THIRST believes this will help to build mutual understanding between its stakeholders of the factors that are driving human rights breaches, to seek out and share good practice and innovative solutions, and to foster constructive dialogue that can lead to positive action.

Progress so far

THIRST has begun work on the literature review that will form the basis of the tea sector HRIA to be published at the end of March 2022. It includes an insider's look at the tea industry explaining who is involved and how it works, an outline of the key international human rights standards, laws and policies that protect tea workers' and farmers' rights in principle and a summary of the findings of a wide range of reports on their human rights in practice. The review concludes with a selection of case studies of innovations and practices designed to improve the lives of tea workers and farmers. A panel of expert advisors is providing a range of perspectives from within the industry and beyond.

Next steps

The next phase of the HRIA will be the analysis phase; interviews with key stakeholders and technical experts will enable us to explore where in the value chain improvements could be made to the way that the system impacts on workers' and farmers' lives and what obstacles stand in the way of change.

In the final phase THIRST will convene international roundtable meetings and working groups to bring all the learning together and work out how to implement the changes we've identified together and who needs to make them.

The HRIA will ensure that the perspective of women, who form the majority of workers in the lowest-paid roles, is fully understood and respected.

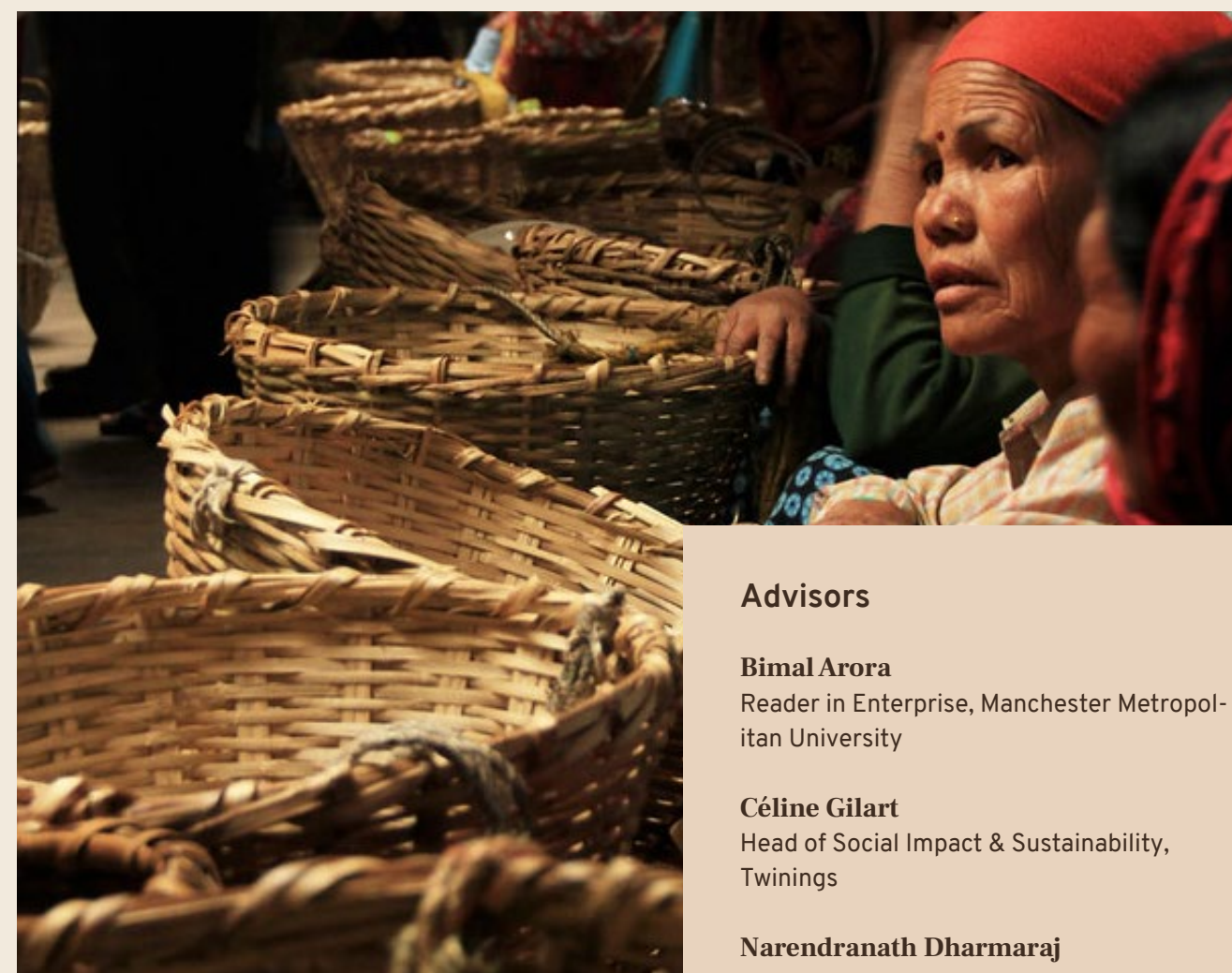


Photo by Thunderbolt Tea. Marked with CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 license.

Advisors

Bimal Arora

Reader in Enterprise, Manchester Metropolitan University

Céline Gilart

Head of Social Impact & Sustainability, Twinings

Narendranath Dharmaraj

Independent Consultant

Ella Frankel

Senior Advisor: Food, Farming & Fisheries ETI

Caroline Brodeur

Business and human rights specialist, Oxfam America

Jenny Costelloe

Director, Ethical Tea Partnership

Otilie Cunningham

Tea Buyer, Fortnum and Mason

Geetanjali Master

Head of Social Impact, UNICEF India

Justin Rippon

Tea Procurement Consultant

THIRST trustees: Debbie Coulter, Krishanti Dharmaraj, Stirling Smith and Nikhil Subbiah.

Intended outcomes

By the end of the HRIA, THIRST aims to have achieved the following objectives:

- The tea industry will have a pragmatic, timebound “highway map” co-created with civil society stakeholders – including tea workers’ and farmers’ representatives – towards a fair and thriving tea industry. This will provide a broad framework for the more detailed roadmaps industry and civil society on particular issues and regions.
- Civil society organisations will have a shared body of evidence on which to base their advocacy and programmes providing a deeper, shared understanding of the dynamics of the industry, how they may be driving breaches of human rights and how these breaches impact differently on women and on men.

4

Governance,
administration
& thanks



Governance

Governing document and constitution

THIRST was established as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation on 15th May 2020 and is a registered charity with no share capital. The charity is governed by its constitution, dated 20 February 2019.

All trustees are members of the charity. The only persons eligible to be members of the charity are its trustees and any member who ceases to be a charity trustee automatically ceases to be a member of the charity. As at 31 March 2021 there were 5 members. In the event of the charity being wound up, no liability accrues to the members for settling the charity's debts and liabilities.

Organisational structure

The governance of THIRST is carried out by a Board of Trustees that meets quarterly. Day-to-day management is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Appointment of Trustees

Charity trustees are appointed for a term of 3 years, with the passing of a resolution by the existing trustees. Trustees must have due consideration to the skills, knowledge and experience needed of the effective administration of the charity. Newly appointed trustees are provided with a copy of the current version of the charity's constitution, together with the latest Trustees' Annual Report and financial statements.

Staff, consultants and volunteers



Sabita Banerji – Founder and CEO

An economic justice advisor who was born and raised on tea plantations in Kerala and Assam, Sabita has nearly 20 years experience working in ethical trade and international development having held strategic posts at Oxfam and the Ethical Trading Initiative. She was previously a member of the Board of Directors of Just Change, UK – a voluntary community tea trading initiative.

Philippa Bird – Fundraising consultant

Philippa Bird is an experienced consultant whose expertise includes fundraising from the charitable and public sectors. In her work in the cultural field she led teams raising c £100m from European and Lottery funds. In her voluntary work as Chair of the Basotho Educational Trust she is at the forefront of raising funds from individual donors and trusts to maintain BET's work.

Valeriia Bognar-Chagnaud – Comms and Research Intern (May – Oct 2021)

Valeriia is a professional in international commerce and marketing in FMCG goods with over 10 years of experience. In addition to working full time and doing a part-time Master's Degree in Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability with PR and Communications modules at Birkbeck University, she gave two days a week to support THIRST in our research and communications.

Caroline Sloane

Provided research into international law relating to tea production and supported with notetaking for THIRST TEA Talks.

Madeline Linnel

Supported with notetaking for THIRST TEA Talks.

Board of Trustees



Debra Coulter – Trustee and Treasurer

An active trade unionist for over 30 years, Debbie was elected Deputy General Secretary of the GMB Trade Union in 2003. She served as an ACAS Council Member and on the Women & Work Commission into Equal Pay and the Commission for Vulnerable Employment. She was Ethical Trading Initiative’s Head of Programmes.



Nikhil Subbiah – Chair of Trustees

Nikhil is an investment funds lawyer at a leading global law firm, with experience working with impact investments, development finance institutions and in emerging markets. He was previously a Churchill Memorial Trust Fellow and conducted a research trip to tea plantations in India and Sri Lanka.



Aarti Kapoor – Trustee

Founder and CEO of the ethical trade consultancy Embode, joined THIRST Board of Trustees. She is keen to help THIRST move to a secure financial footing and to raise awareness and funding from the general public.



Stirling Smith – Trustee

Stirling is an independent ethical trade consultant and former Chief Technical Adviser for the International Labour Organisation in India. He has worked for DFID, British Council, Fair Labour Association, trade unions, NGOs and several companies.



Krishanti Dharmaraj – Trustee

Krishanti is the Executive Director of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in New York and co-founder of WILD for Human Rights (Women’s Institute for Leadership Development) and the Sri Lanka Children’s Fund. Formerly, she was a spokesperson for Amnesty International USA.



Michael Pennant-Jones – Former trustee

Michael is currently Head of Technical & Capability at Impactt Ltd. He was formerly Group Head of Sustainability of James Finlay Ltd, a member of the Tea Advisory Group for Utz Cert. and Swire Sustainability Committee. Prior to Finlays he worked for Premier Brands Typhoo.

Administration

Registered charity name	The International Roundtable for Sustainable Tea
Charity registration number	1189499
Address	THIRST Unit 36017 PO Box 6945 London, London W1A 6US United Kingdom
Independent examiner	Theresa Warren FCA 8/9 The Old Yard Lodge Farm Business Centre Wolverton Road Castlethorpe Milton Keynes MK19 7ES United Kingdom

Acknowledgements

THIRST could not have come into existence or come as far as it has today without the help and support of so many people.

We would like to offer our heartfelt thanks to the following people in particular for their voluntary work, advice and moral support: Caroline Sloan, Sloane Hamilton, Madeline Linnel, Peter Williams, Rachel Wilshaw and Wilbert Flinterman.

Warm thanks to Michael Pennant-Jones for his crucial work as a THIRST trustee from 2018-2021, to Matthew Merkle and Elio Gaarthuis of Kirkland Ellis LLP for getting THIRST over the finish line as a registered charity and to Design by Maia for our logo, branding, website and report designs.

Thanks also go to all who have provided encouragement, support, advice, donations, subscribed to THIRST emails and participated in our TEA Talks.



THIRST is grateful to the Ethical Trading Initiative for its support in making this report possible.



THIRST

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