



Global Position on

Climate Resilient Agriculture



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Introduction

Climate change is already putting pressure on agricultural systems globally, with the most severe impacts being felt in the Global South, where tea is often produced. These impacts include rising temperatures, changes to rainfall, and unpredictable and extreme weather that have devastating effects on people and the environment.

Farmers, workers, and communities who rely on tea for a living are especially vulnerable to these impacts. This is largely a result of high poverty levels and because tea depends on specific and stable conditions to grow, meaning that even slight climate variations can significantly reduce the volume and quality of harvests. Therefore, tea industry stakeholders must play their part in addressing the threat to livelihoods by supporting climate resilience practices and reducing vulnerability among tea growers, while also contributing to global efforts to mitigate climate change.

This paper outlines ETP's position on climate resilience in the tea industry. It describes some of the challenges to achieving a climate resilient tea sector and ETP's approach to catalysing change.



Terms and Definitions



Climate resilient agriculture

Climate resilient agriculture refers to the ability of agricultural systems to prepare for, adapt to, and recover from the impacts of climate change.

Building resilience involves adapting farming practices and using new technologies, and also addressing the broader economic and gender issues that prevent communities from withstanding climate change. This includes a wide range of activities that strengthen communities' capacity to deal with climate shocks, such as supporting farmers to access financial credit, ensuring women have decision-making power, and diversifying crops and livelihoods to reduce dependence on tea.

Climate change adaptation

ETP defines climate change adaptation as direct changes to practices that help protect livelihoods and reduce the risk of climate-related damages and crop losses. Planting drought-tolerant tea bushes, investing in irrigation systems and practising effective soil management techniques are some examples of climate change adaptation in tea.

Climate Change and Human Rights

ETP recognises that the impacts of climate change threaten the enjoyment of many rights defined in the UN's Universal Declaration on Human Rights, including the right to life, health, food, water, sanitation, housing, and development.

Climate change adversely affects crop yields, increases poverty, and causes widespread displacement. Natural disasters and increased occurrences of diseases caused by climate change also present a significant threat to life. These impacts disproportionately affect rural communities that depend on agriculture and vulnerable groups such as women, children, and people living in poverty.

The interconnectedness of human rights and climate change is outlined in the [Paris Agreement](#), adopted as part of the United Nations Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which says that states "should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights". In accordance with the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), we believe it is important that businesses follow suit and take a [rights-based approach](#) to their activities in relation to climate change, as well as focusing on protecting the planet.

In addition to promoting human rights, our work on climate resilient agriculture aligns with several key frameworks and international bodies, including research by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and [National Action Plans \(NAPs\)](#) in the countries where we operate.

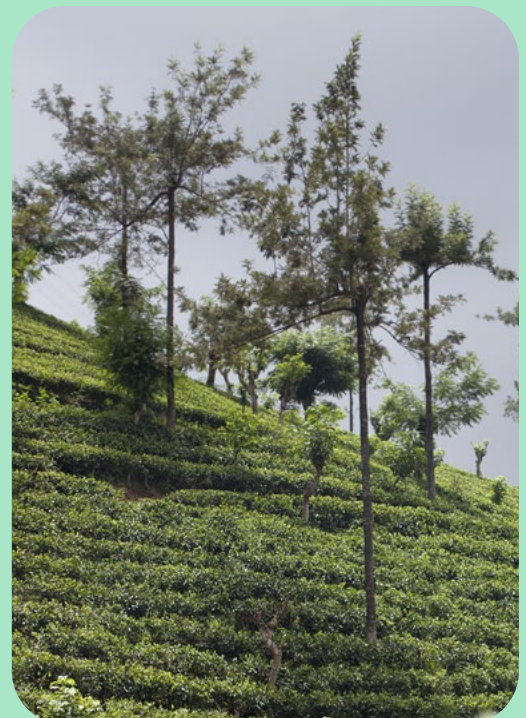
Challenges

Extreme weather events

Floods, droughts, heatwaves, and other extreme weather events are becoming more intense and more frequent because of climate change. These events are being felt most severely in developing countries – particularly in East Africa and South Asia, where tea is widely grown. They pose serious challenges for tea growers – they can harm tea bushes, reduce crop yields, and destroy tea estates and farmland.

Unpredictable weather patterns

Tea depends on stable temperatures and consistent levels of rainfall. However, climate change is causing a shift in precipitation patterns, changes to seasonal timing, and rising temperatures, all impacting crop yields and quality. The exact timing and severity of these changes are hard to predict, and tea growers are therefore unable to easily adapt and prepare strategies to withstand them.



Increased occurrences of pests and diseases

Milder winters and warmer summers are increasing the prevalence of new types of pest attacks and plant diseases in tea-growing areas, especially in Africa. Farmers and producer companies are having to adapt to these changes and risk losing large amounts of their harvests if they are not effectively managed.

Pesticides are frequently used to mitigate this, although farmers are not always trained on using them safely, and there is often a lack of awareness on which pesticides are more harmful than others to human health and the environment.¹

Soil degradation

Healthy soils are the lifeblood of agricultural production and are fundamental to farmers being able to grow tea successfully. However, climate change is resulting in a large-scale decline in soil quality. Unpredictable and extreme weather events are affecting soil nutrient composition and fertility, decreasing water-holding capacity, and causing soil erosion and a breakdown in soil structure. Local environmental degradation, such as deforestation and over-applying fertiliser, also reduces soil quality.

Poverty and resources

Adapting to climate change can be costly, and its impacts are therefore felt most severely by the poorest communities. Poverty limits farmers' access to many essential resources such as climate resilient seeds, fertilisers, and water storage and irrigation systems, making it difficult for them to withstand and recover from adverse climate impacts.

Farmers in remote locations also tend to have poor access to financial credit, which further reduces their ability to invest in adaptation measures. Additionally, because tea is a perennial crop, it can take years before new plants begin producing yields. This means that farmers are unable to switch to growing more resilient tea bushes without sacrificing some of their income.

¹ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/219887/Pesticides%20health%20and%20food.pdf>



Access to information

Climate change resilience mainly depends on tea growers' awareness of climate change and their capacity to implement adaptation measures. While there is extensive awareness that climate change is happening, farmers commonly face challenges accessing information about expected climatic changes, effective adaptation methods, and agricultural extension services and training available to them. This makes it challenging for farmers to plan effectively and protect their livelihoods. Other factors, such as low levels of education and literacy, unequal access to information and resources, and a lack of finance can also restrict the uptake of adaptation measures.

Disproportionate impacts on women

Women tea farmers face more barriers to adapting to climate change than their male counterparts. They have less access to the resources and credit needed to build resilience, and lack of land rights and decision-making power can mean women are less able to implement climate change adaptation measures on their farms.² Women in tea producing regions also typically have lower levels of education and literacy and are less likely than men to attend agricultural training, which often covers information on adaptation.

² <https://idronline.org/article/gender/women-farmers-land-ownership-and-climate-resilience/>

Our Approach

ETP's approach to climate resilience is centred on reducing vulnerability and increasing the adaptive capacity of impacted communities. To achieve this, we use participatory and systems change approaches, which is reflected in our [Strategy2030 and Theory of Change](#). This means that all of our work seeks to ensure local communities lead solutions, and we recognise that economic, equality and environmental issues are interconnected and must be addressed jointly to achieve change.

As part of this, we are committed to the following actions:

Supporting farmers with information and resources

Through our projects, we work closely with farmers to strengthen their understanding of climate change and develop their skills to enable better resilience. We conduct training and in-person demonstrations on key farming practices – including optimum fertiliser use, effective pruning, and pest management techniques – that help improve crop yields, protect livelihoods, and benefit the environment. We also directly channel vital resources such as agricultural inputs and climate resilient seedlings to farmers to boost their resilience.

The types of support we offer are driven by farmers' needs and equip them with the skills to address local challenges that they identify. To help ensure our activities have a lasting impact, we encourage farmers to actively share what they learn and influence others within their communities to adopt more resilient practices.

Diversifying income sources and livelihoods

Changes to crop yields and seasonal timing mean that those who rely on tea as their only source of income are becoming increasingly insecure. Income and livelihood diversification is a way of spreading and reducing risk by establishing income streams from multiple products or services. This is especially important for farmers living in poverty, who often cannot earn enough income from tea and have little other means of preparing for climate change. ETP recognises the importance of diversification as a tool in building resilience and supports farmers to establish alternative income sources such as beekeeping and growing food crops, and agroforestry, where trees are planted alongside tea bushes for additional income.

Building resilience holistically

We recognise that the barriers to climate resilience are wide-ranging. Progress depends on many social, economic, and environmental factors and requires more than simply training farmers to adopt new practices. To build resilience, we seek to address the broader causes of vulnerability, from low incomes and unequal access to opportunities, to unsustainable practices in tea production. This includes incentivising farmers to adapt to climate change through Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) and supporting women's rights and decision-making so they can access training and make financial choices about adaptation on their farms. We also help enable adaptation by providing economic support, such as supporting income diversification, delivering financial training, and establishing community-based finance models.





Working in partnership

Forming diverse partnerships is a key part of our approach to climate resilient agriculture. We understand the value of bringing together multiple stakeholders to pool resources, share perspectives, and deliver more innovative solutions at scale. We collaborate with a number of organisations – including tea companies, research institutes, donors and governments – to develop our understanding of climate resilience and help us implement activities on the ground.

Building knowledge and influencing

Building climate resilience among tea farmers requires various stakeholders to have a mutual understanding of the threats of climate change and the technical solutions to minimise its impacts. ETP is committed to undertaking research and sharing information to boost resilience as the climate crisis continues.

We aim to highlight the significant threat climate change poses to livelihoods while also remaining pragmatic and solutions focused. This involves reviewing regulatory landscapes and identifying policy gaps, producing evidence-based policy papers, and working alongside partners to uncover innovative ways of supporting farmers. By engaging in meaningful dialogue and sharing what we learn, we aim to build knowledge and influence policy change at all levels.

Conclusion

Climate resilient agriculture is becoming increasingly important for the tea sector as the impacts of climate change become more severe. We believe that by taking a holistic approach and addressing multiple issues together, we can reduce vulnerability and support farmers to boost their adaptative capacity. This can only be achieved by working collaboratively and by fostering shared learning to broaden our impact and deepen our understanding of the solutions.

ETP has expertise in bringing together diverse stakeholders, including influential tea companies, civil society, and governments, to achieve transformational change. We will continue to promote industry-wide collaboration and the sharing of information and data to boost climate resilience in tea.



Resources

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