



Global Position on

Equal Opportunities for Women and Young People



Published April 2023

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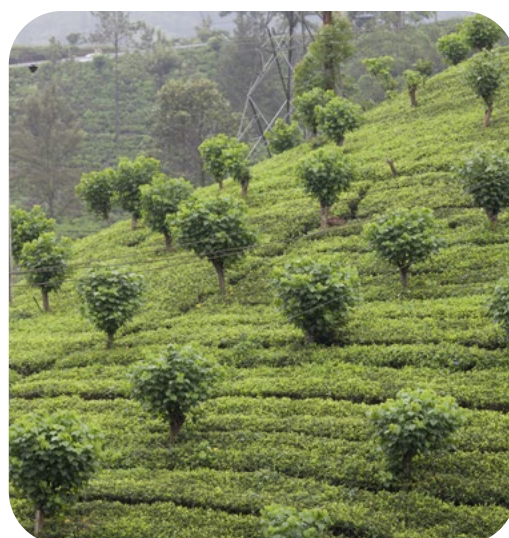
Introduction

Globally, women and young people have less access to opportunities than their male, adult counterparts. Women frequently face discriminatory norms, policies, and practices that prevent them from exercising and enjoying their rights.

In tea, they are severely underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions and mostly engage in the lowest paid and most labour-intensive jobs. Women are also less likely to have access or control over resources, or to be involved in decision-making processes in households and communities.

Similarly, young people living in tea producing regions often leave school early and have limited access to employment opportunities outside of the sector. Girls are particularly vulnerable and are at risk of several child protection issues, including abuse, school dropout, and child marriage. The unequal access to opportunities for women and young people in tea is a result of many structural and systemic inequalities, such as poverty, discrimination, and limited access to resources.

This paper outlines ETP's position on equal opportunities for women and young people in tea. It highlights some of the challenges they face and ETP's approach to catalysing change.



Terms and Definitions

Equal opportunities

Equal opportunities refer to the right to participate equally in all areas of life, including the workplace, education, and when accessing goods and services. This means that people are treated fairly and without discrimination and have equal access to the resources needed to achieve their full potential.

Empowerment

ETP defines empowerment as people having power and control over their own lives. It requires having equal access to resources and opportunities. Empowered individuals are more able to compete fairly in labour markets, participate in decision making, and live equally in society.

Gender equality

Gender equality means that a person's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on their gender. Achieving gender equality requires addressing systemic and institutional barriers such as social norms, cultural practices, and legislation. Gender equality is an important driver of sustainable development and contributes to making progress across all the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).¹

Young people

ETP defines young people as children and individuals transitioning from childhood to adulthood. While there is no set definition for young people, the term usually refers to those aged between 10 and 24 years old.² Young people play a vital role in shaping the future of society, but they are often marginalised and lack the skills and agency to participate meaningfully in society.

¹ <https://www.iisd.org/articles/gender-equality-and-sustainable-development>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/reports/youth-and-human-rights-report-united-nations-high-commissioner-human-rights>

Equality and Human Rights



Equality is at the core of all human rights. It is highlighted in Articles 1 and 2 of the [United Nations' Universal Declaration](#), which states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights", and that everyone is entitled to their rights and freedoms "without distinction of any kind."

Specific rights relevant to women and young people are enshrined in several international conventions, such as the [Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#). These include the right to:

- protection from violence and abuse;
- an equal education;
- equal employment opportunities and pay;
- equal property rights; and
- equal access to loans and other forms of financial credit.

ETP believes that equal opportunities are a key aspect of protecting human rights; it means that all individuals have the same chances to succeed, regardless of their age, identity, or status.

In addition to promoting human rights, our work on equality aligns with several international frameworks, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG5) and the International Labour Organisation's [Convention on Workplace Violence and Harassment \(C190\)](#).

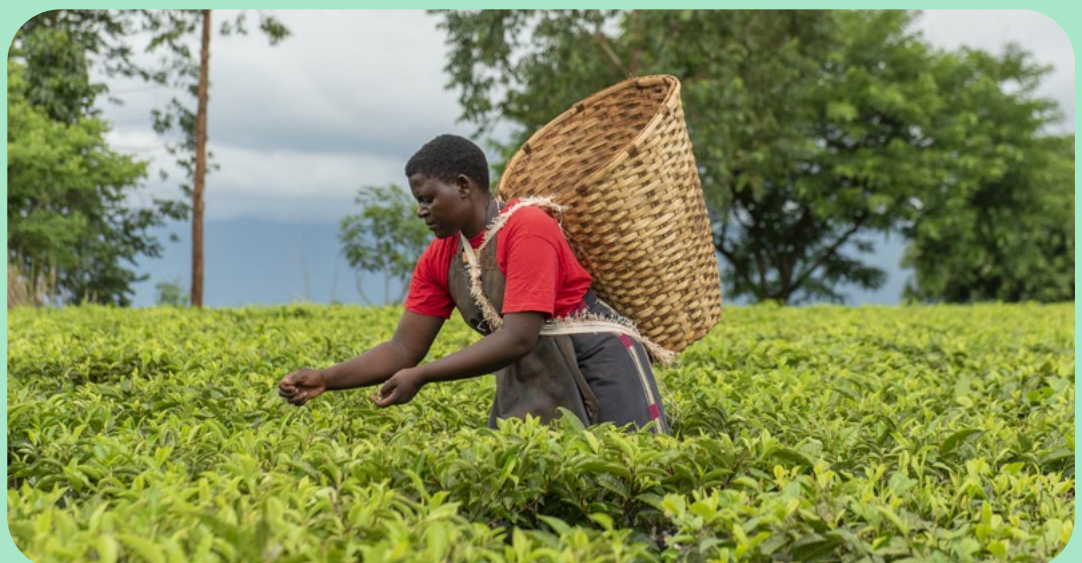
Challenges

Whilst tea relies heavily on a female workforce, women farmers and workers face unique challenges that prevent them from participating equally in many areas of life. Young people in tea producing regions encounter many of the same problems as women, and often lack the agency to improve their situation. Some of these issues are highlighted below.

Exploitation and violence

Exploitation and violence of any kind are unacceptable and can have lifelong effects on victims. It impacts physical and mental health and can limit access to opportunities and rights by causing an inability to work, a loss of wages, and a lack of participation in day-to-day activities. As women typically occupy the lowest paid positions in tea, and are often on seasonal contracts, they are more likely to experience economic insecurity and power imbalances that put them at a greater risk of violence.

Girls in rural tea growing areas are also vulnerable to exploitation and are at risk of several child protection issues. These include trafficking and child marriage, and can prevent girls accessing education, safety, and participation, and limit their opportunities and potential.



Employment and wages

Globally there is a small number of women in management and leadership positions in the tea industry. Women are typically excluded from higher paid and decision-making roles due to discriminatory social norms, or a lack of skills and confidence, often resulting from unequal access to education and training.

The traditional division of labour further prevents women from taking opportunities to learn and develop. In addition, female workers typically earn less than their male counterparts – often despite doing the same work – and are more likely to take up insecure, informal employment with low pay and poor working conditions.³

For young people, unemployment in tea producing areas is high and continues to grow as opportunities beyond tea are limited. Increased migration to urban areas and a perception that working in tea is a lower-status occupation has meant that fewer young people now wish to work on tea farms and estates. However, they often lack the education, skills, and training to pursue alternative career paths.

Division of labour

Women and girls in the tea industry bear a disproportionate responsibility to carry out unpaid care and domestic work, including cleaning, cooking, collecting firewood, and caring for family members.

Women subsidise these essential tasks through unpaid labour, meaning they experience greater workloads than men, and have less time and energy to invest in income generating activities, education, and opportunities to develop their skills and careers. This means that women are particularly vulnerable to poverty and its impacts.

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>

Decision making

Decision making is critical to women and young people being able to exercise their rights; it gives them agency in many areas of their lives, from managing their farms and household purchases, to deciding how to tackle community issues.

Women and young people are often excluded from making decisions that impact their lives. Discriminatory social norms mean they are less likely than men to participate in decision making in all areas of life, including in the workplace, the community, and at home.

Despite their valuable perspectives, young people in tea are excluded from decision making in their communities. Therefore policies, at both government and company level, often fail to reflect their needs.⁴

Access and control over resources

Women often have unequal access to and control over the resources and information needed to grow tea successfully. This includes agricultural inputs such as fertilisers, improved seeds and farming equipment, and training and extension services.

Several factors cause this, including difficulty accessing credit, social norms that exclude women, unpaid household responsibilities, a lack of education, and low literacy levels among women.

Limited access to information and resources can result in several negative impacts for women, including increased health and safety risks, lower tea yields and quality, and a greater risk of poverty.⁵



⁴ <https://www.fao.org/3/i3947e/i3947e.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2019/UN-Women-Policy-brief-11-The-gender-gap-in-agricultural-productivity-in-sub-Saharan-Africa-en.pdf>

Access to education

Achieving a decent education in rural tea producing areas can be difficult – they are usually remote and have limited infrastructure. Long journeys, travel costs, and insufficient transport options frequently prevent children from attending school. The problem is compounded by the high levels of poverty seen in rural areas, which can mean families cannot afford school fees. Social norms, expectations, and exploitative practices such as child marriage mean that girls are less likely to attend and complete secondary education than boys. Poor access to education reduces opportunities for women and young people, and contributes to gender inequality in society.

Land rights and credit

Access and control over land is fundamental to empowering women and young people. However, land rights and customs in tea-producing countries often mean that men inherit, own, and manage property. Without land rights, individuals cannot choose which crops to grow and usually have little collateral to help them access formal credit.⁶ This leaves them unable to make necessary investments to improve productivity, build resilience to climate change, or cover the essential needs of themselves or their families, such as education, healthcare, and food.

Land tenure is also a common requirement for joining farmer cooperatives. As a result, women can be excluded from participating and benefitting from the services that cooperatives offer.



Our Approach

ETP uses a [systems change approach](#) in all our work, including achieving equal opportunities for women and young people in tea. This is reflected in our [Strategy2030 and Theory of Change](#) and involves taking a holistic approach to tackle the deep-rooted and systemic causes of a problem, rather than solely addressing its symptoms.

Simply supporting women and young people by building their skills and knowledge is not enough to guarantee equal opportunities if systems continue to discriminate against them. This is why we seek to address systemic and structural inequalities in tandem with supporting individual empowerment. As part of this, we are committed to the following actions:

Supporting economic rights

Supporting women's economic rights and financial inclusion is vital to achieving a more equal tea sector. It contributes to women being able to pursue education and develop their skills, increases their productivity and profits, and reduces poverty for themselves and their families. It also helps challenge traditional gender roles and supports women to take control over decisions that affect their lives.

ETP's work supports women in tea producing areas by providing business and financial training. We also establish [community-based finance models](#) that help women to take more control over their finances, make investments, and reduce their household vulnerability.

However, we recognise that economic systems must also change for women to truly be able to exercise their rights. This is why we seek to influence government policy and pilot new business practices – such as [digitising wage payments](#) – that give women more control over their finances.

Strengthening awareness and access to rights

When women and young people are aware of their rights and empowered to exercise them, they can better participate in society, the economy, and politics. Crucially, it enables them to challenge discrimination and violence, advocate for better services, and seek remedy when their rights have been violated. We believe that in order to achieve equality, everyone must be responsible for understanding, respecting, and promoting the rights of women and young people, including men. If men are more informed about others' rights, they are more likely to recognise and call out inequality and contribute to safer, more equal communities.

Through our projects, we support farmers and tea workers (formal and informal) to understand and access rights, including the right to a positive working environment, freedom from violence, and essential services such as healthcare and education. We do this through tailored training on rights, and by establishing locally-led groups to mobilise communities to call out violations. We also work directly with women and young people on tea estates to ensure they have more agency over their lives and are involved in decision making regarding their rights.



Our flagship Plantation Community Empowerment Programme is a ground-breaking model that resolves issues and improves the living and working conditions on tea estates by bringing together communities and estate management through community forums. The project ensures that marginalised people's voices, including women's and young people's, are listened to and that they are directly involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

Working towards more inclusive leadership models

ETP believes women and young people must be meaningfully represented in leadership and decision making. When they are represented, they are more able to address issues and voice solutions to the unique challenges they face. For this to happen, leadership models must be inclusive and value their knowledge, skills, and experiences. Improving representation in leadership is also important for improving the economic status of women, as female leaders can act as role models, influence policies and decisions that affect women's economic opportunities, and create more inclusive workplaces.

We work with our partners to make leadership models more inclusive and more accountable. This involves both improving workplace policies and addressing the systemic barriers that prevent women and young people from taking on leadership roles, such as negative social norms, discriminatory attitudes, and violence and harassment. We also work directly with women and young people to support them in gaining the confidence and skills needed to achieve and maintain leadership positions.

Working with communities and local organisations

Women and young people have a deep understanding of local contexts and the social dynamics that shape attitudes towards them. This means they are best positioned to identify challenges and develop effective and sustainable solutions to the problems they face.

Because of this, an important feature of ETP's work is our community-led, participatory approach. We work directly with individuals, communities, and local organisations (including women's rights groups) when designing and implementing activities addressing inequality. Our approach involves community consultations and project design workshops, and supports farmers and workers with the resources required to lead decision making in their everyday lives.

Promoting Family-Friendly Policies

Family-Friendly Policies (FFPs) support and promote a healthy work-life balance for employees with family responsibilities. They include flexible work arrangements, paid parental and sick leave, childcare support, and fair wages. FFPs improve gender equality by acknowledging women's unpaid care responsibilities, and can lead to improved health and education outcomes for their children.

For instance, women often take time off work to care for children, which can negatively impact their careers and earning potential, perpetuating the gender pay gap and limiting the number of women occupying leadership positions. Policies such as flexible working arrangements and paid parental leave support women, and minimise this impact.

ETP works closely with tea estate and factory management, welfare officers, and government agencies to increase the implementation of FFPs in the tea sector. We seek to highlight the positive outcomes that FFPs and greater equality have for businesses, such as improvements in employee satisfaction, productivity, and retention.

Knowledge-building and influencing

Ensuring equal opportunities in tea requires a shift in attitudes from a number of stakeholders. We believe that developing awareness and a common understanding of issues will help encourage individuals and decision makers to act towards an equal tea industry.

We are committed to building our knowledge and raising awareness of the issues and impacts experienced by women and young people. This involves a range of activities, from working directly with men and boys to advance gender equality, to feeding into policy development at government and company level. We also develop informational resources, share learnings from our projects, and engage in meaningful dialogue to highlight the steps stakeholders can take to catalyse change.

Conclusion

Equality for women and young people is a critical requirement to achieve our vision of a thriving tea industry that is socially just and environmentally sustainable. Equal opportunities, such as access to resources, education, and jobs, enable women and young people to enjoy their rights and reach their full potential, whilst simultaneously benefitting the economy and society.

Achieving equality in the tea sector requires a diverse combination of stakeholders all working together to address deep-seated, interconnected, and systemic challenges. ETP is uniquely positioned to convene stakeholders, including influential tea companies, retailers, governments, and civil society organisations, to improve opportunities for women and young people in the tea sector. We will continue to promote industry-wide collaboration to address inequality, and use a participatory approach that puts communities, farmers, and workers at the centre of our work.



Resources

Base Code Guidance: Gender Equality (A) Gender and the Base Code. Ethical Trading Initiative, https://www.ethicaltrade.org/sites/default/files/shared_resources/Base%20code%20guidance%2C%20gender%20equality%2C%20Part%20A.pdf.

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Published April 2023

