



Report

6th Asia International Tea Summit

27 November 2025 at Lotus Tower, Colombo



2025



Tea Small Holdings Development Authority
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Solidaridad

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FOUNDATION

The Asia Tea Alliance (ATA), founded in 2019, unites Asian tea producers to tackle climate, market, and sustainability challenges, with a focus on smallholders. Through partnerships, innovation, and global standards, ATA promotes sustainable production, fair pricing, and resilient supply chains. Initiatives include policy alignment, carbon reduction, and scientific collaboration, aiming to create a more equitable, prosperous, and environmentally sustainable Asian tea industry.

Tea Smallholdings Development Authority – TSHDA is Sri Lanka's statutory body dedicated to the advancement of the tea smallholder sector. With a focus on extension services, land development support, and social empowerment, TSHDA works through a network of field officers and grassroots societies to improve productivity, sustainability, and livelihoods. In strategic partnership with projects like STaRR and RDALP, TSHDA champions rehabilitation, training, and organizational resilience—ensuring smallholders can thrive in an evolving tea industry.

Solidaridad is an international civil society organization dedicated to creating fair and sustainable supply chains. With over 55 years of experience, it works across more than 40 countries on five continents to improve livelihoods, promote environmental stewardship, and support inclusive economic development. Solidaridad partners with farmers, businesses, and governments to develop innovative solutions that make communities more resilient and production systems more sustainable.

Nucleus Foundation is a non-profit association working in development cooperation providing a range of services to partner agencies throughout the region. The Foundation was set up as the exit strategy of two longstanding German Development Cooperation (GIZ) projects under a Memorandum of Understanding with the former Ministry of Nation building and Estate Infrastructure Development and has been in operation since 2007.

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Asia Tea Alliance: Brewing a Sustainable Future

The Asia Tea Alliance (ATA), formed in April 2019, is a regional platform designed to amplify the collective voice of Asian tea producers globally. Asia, responsible for most of the world's tea production and consumption, has long faced challenges in having a unified representation in international tea sector governance. This has left the industry vulnerable to significant challenges including climate change, stagnant prices, high input costs, and supply-demand imbalances. These issues, compounded by high transaction costs and difficulties in fair price discovery, adversely affect the sector's social, economic, and environmental sustainability, complicating efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recognizing the complex and dynamic nature of the tea industry's challenges, the ATA aims to foster partnerships, innovation, and strategic adaptations to address these issues. One key aspect of the ATA is its inclusive membership, which extends to smallholder associations. Smallholders are essential to tea production but often face unique challenges like limited access to resources, market volatility, low productivity, and climate change impacts. By incorporating their voices, the ATA seeks to ensure their concerns are adequately represented.

The ATA's mission centers on promoting sustainable, efficient, and equitable tea production and trade across Asia. It strives to enhance working conditions while addressing environmental and economic challenges through collaboration, innovation, and adherence to international sustainability standards. The Alliance's action plan includes several key areas of focus:

Promoting Sustainable Consumption: ATA encourages global consumption of sustainably produced green and black tea through joint events and consumer education.

Legal and Policy Alignment: Collaborating with governments and regulatory bodies to create a supportive legal framework that aligns the tea industry's business objectives with public policies.

Carbon Reduction: The ATA aims to innovate in carbon production and reduction technologies, ensuring fair pricing for carbon offset initiatives, and capitalizing on sustainability opportunities, like carbon credits.

Scientific Collaboration: To tackle climate change, the ATA promotes Asia-wide scientific partnerships to develop resilient tea varieties through genetic improvement.

Comprehensive Support: The Alliance offers assistance to members and non-members in areas such as quality control, financial support, and market access across tea-producing countries, extending this support globally where relevant.

Solidaridad, as the neutral convenor of ATA, seeks transformational change in the tea community. One promising initiative involves exploring the potential for additional revenue streams through carbon-positive supply chains, which can secure fair pricing for small-scale growers. By addressing these multi-faceted issues, the ATA envisions a more resilient, sustainable, and prosperous tea industry that benefits all stakeholders.

Foreword

The Asia Tea Alliance, in collaboration with the Tea Smallholdings Development Authority, Solidaridad Asia, Nucleus Foundation and other partners, convened a landmark workshop focused on the future of the tea sector in Asia. The event brought together industry leaders, policymakers, researchers, and smallholder representatives to explore pathways towards a regenerative, resilient, and carbon-free tea industry.

The workshop provided a unique platform to share knowledge, showcase innovative approaches, and foster collaboration across countries and stakeholders. From in-depth technical sessions on regenerative agriculture, carbon management, and soil health, to discussions on market access, smallholder empowerment, and entrepreneurship, the program highlighted the diverse strategies shaping the transformation of tea production.

A key feature of the workshop was its emphasis on smallholders, who form the backbone of Asia's tea industry. Panel discussions and presentations illustrated practical experiences and innovative models from Sri Lanka, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, China and Indonesia, reinforcing the importance of collective action, policy support, and sustainable practices.

The event also celebrated excellence through the *Tea Reimagined Awards*, recognising achievements in productivity, sustainability, and innovation across both smallholders and medium-scale estates. The sessions and interactions underscored the importance of forging resilient value chains that balance economic growth, social development, and environmental stewardship.

This report documents the discussions, presentations, and outcomes of the workshop, serving as a reference and guide for policymakers, industry leaders, and researchers committed to shaping a sustainable future for the tea sector. It is our hope that the insights captured here will inspire continued collaboration and innovation across Asia's tea-producing communities.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all stakeholders who made this event possible. From the Ministry of Plantation and Community Infrastructure to national and regional tea associations, smallholder federations, and industry experts, the contributions and support of every partner were critical in ensuring the success of the workshop.

Dave Maurice

Director Nucleus Foundation, Head of 6th ATA Secretariat
November 2025, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Inaugural Session



1. Inaugural Session

1.1. Welcome and Introduction

Mr Dave Maurice, Nucleus Foundation, Head of 6th ATA Secretariat

Your Excellency Dewi Gustina Tobing, Mr. Nimal Udugampola, Dr. Shataduru Chattopadhyay, Convenor of the ATA, distinguished delegates from Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh, China, and India,

On behalf of the Organising Committee, I warmly welcome you to this event. This gathering represents the culmination of several initiatives we have planned over the past year. Cabinet approval was granted for three major events: the 100-year celebration of the TRI, the FAO IDGG meeting, and the ATA meeting, which coincides with the Asia Tea Summit.

Although the Honourable Minister was scheduled to attend, he has unfortunately sent his regrets due to an emergency caused by recent adverse weather conditions.

During this event, you will also have the opportunity to experience and appreciate teas from various countries. In addition, we have prepared a resource folder where all relevant documents will be uploaded for your reference.

1.2. Inaugural Address

Mr Nimal Udugampola, Chairman Asia Tea Alliance, Chairman – Tea Smallholdings Development Authority of Sri Lanka (TSHDA)

Your Excellency, esteemed members of the Tea Alliance, ladies and gentlemen, Ayubowan to all foreign delegates who have joined us today.

It is with a profound sense of honour that we gather here. To the outgoing Chairman and the team from India, please accept our deepest gratitude. We thank you for your commitment to the global tea community and for Sri Lanka, a country defined by our heritage and tea. To assume the Chairmanship is a privilege that we wholeheartedly accept. Our work will be guided by sustainability, equity, and digital transformation, ensuring a prosperous future for every tea smallholder and worker.

Asia is the global hub for tea cultivation, producing over 90 percent of the world's tea—from the ancient traditions of China to the distinctive varieties of Sri Lanka and India.

As Chairman of the TSHDA, I stand here today to emphasize that the small tea farmer is the heart of the industry. Across Asia, millions rely on a few acres of land to ensure the quality of tea. While the future is bright with opportunity, we face pressing challenges such as climate change and volatility in market prices. Addressing these issues requires a unified strategy.

Our strategy is built on four actionable pillars:

1. **Climate Change:** The ATA will foster efficient climate management, including soil preservation, water conservation, and other essential practices.
2. **Digital Equity:** We will aggressively pursue digital equity, including the use of digital tools and blockchain technology, to ensure quality and traceability.
3. **Market Expansion and Youth Engagement:** Innovation is our gateway. We must target non-traditional markets that highlight tea's health benefits and invest in tea-based industries to make them modern and attractive.
4. **Standard Harmonization and Fair Trade:** We must establish common, non-negotiable quality standards across all states, maintaining minimum standards and promoting fair prices that translate to better livelihoods.

This vision is particularly significant for Sri Lanka, where the government has set a clear target for the industry: 400,000 million kilograms of bulk tea by the year 2030, with 70 percent produced by smallholders. The Pivithuru Tea Initiative of the TSHDA is founded on a participatory approach, operationalized through the four pillars and three policy objectives of the Government of Sri Lanka:

1. Poverty alleviation
2. Clean Sri Lanka initiative
3. Digitalization

It is highly recommended that other nations examine the concept of Pivithuru. The success of this Chairmanship will be measured by the collective momentum and unified efforts of all members. I call upon all members to share and collaborate on technology and policy. The discussions will not be merely academic—they will be captured in the Colombo Declaration.

I extend my sincere thanks to the Secretariat, the Organising Committee, and our sponsors, who have made this event possible.

1.3. Address of Managing Director Solidaridad Asia

Dr Shatadru Chattopadhyay, Managing Director Solidaridad Asia, Convenor Asia Tea Alliance

Honourable Ambassador, Honourable Chairman of the ATA, respected guests and dignitaries from the ATA, and stakeholders from Sri Lanka,

We have had a fantastic meeting of the ATA. One point that everyone agrees on is that we need to regenerate our tea industry—regenerate our soil, water, and increase biodiversity. Sri Lanka has shown the way by moving rapidly into regenerative agriculture, involving both smallholders and larger companies.

Today, my speech is about regenerative agriculture. Every decade seems to bring a new definition of sustainability. We have gone through many concepts, and now we are moving toward regeneration. While organic standards are defined by national governments, regenerative agriculture currently has no universally accepted definition—every company is developing its own standards, creating a “wild west” of standards. How valid are these claims? At times, it feels as if I am setting the exam and scoring the tests myself.

A consumer survey reviewing some of the larger tea companies found that the concept of regenerative agriculture is often distorted. Older sustainability concepts are being repurposed as “plug-ins,” which causes confusion. Regenerative agriculture certifies the land, whereas the Rainforest Alliance is a tea standard—this creates a form of Gresham’s law, where weaker claims dominate the market, and genuine regeneration is pushed out.

So, how should regenerative agriculture look? It should:

- Focus on clear outcomes.
- Relate to the entire farm and involve farmers and producers inclusively.
- Include third-party auditing and transparency in certification.
- Maintain carbon integrity, ensuring that carbon credits benefit the producers.

Certification can be expensive. From a solutions perspective, audits must be cost-effective and affordable, shared across the supply chain. The solution is not for each company to define regenerative agriculture individually. The fastest way for regenerative agriculture to lose its way is for each company to create its own rules. Imagine playing a football game without a referee!

It is necessary to save our tea gardens, and we look forward to the ATA addressing these critical issues.

Finally, a short video on the Asia Tea Alliance was played, showing how smallholders are the backbone of the tea economy.

1.4. Address of Ambassador to Indonesia

H.E. Dewi Gustina Tobing – Ambassador of the Republic of Indonesia

Mr. Nimal Udugampola, Dr. Shataduru Chattopadhyay, Mr. Dave Maurice, distinguished delegation from Indonesia, esteemed guests, Ayubowan, Vanakkam, Assalamu Alaikum!

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the organisers. The theme, “*Tea Reimagine*,” captures the needs of the hour. Tea is more than a commodity—it is a cultural heritage, a source of hospitality for millions across Asia, which produces more than 80 percent of the world’s tea. From the distinctive teas of Sri Lanka, India, Japan, and Indonesia, Ceylon tea represents purity and leadership, ethical production, and climate adaptation.

Indonesia appreciates this role. Indonesia also has a long tradition of tea production, and our teas are renowned across Europe and the Middle East. In recent years, we have placed increasing emphasis on sustainability. Today’s summit provides an opportunity to explore new avenues of collaboration, strengthen capacity building, and foster regional cooperation.

One of the key points highlighted here is the important role of smallholders. The delegation from Indonesia will share their experiences and demonstrate Indonesia’s commitment to learning and sharing. As we all know, the global tea sector faces challenges such as climate adaptation, market changes, and sustainability. We must strengthen value chains to ensure the tea industry remains competitive.

The sustainability of our sector will depend on our ability to collaborate and ensure that our rich traditions continue to impact generations to come. May this summit spark new ideas, strengthen partnerships, and forge the path toward a more sustainable tea industry across Asia.





Technical Session



2. Technical Session - Tea Reimagined: Regenerative, Resilient and Carbon Free

Session Chair: Dr Shatadru Chattopadhyay, Convenor ATA

2.1. Reimagining Tea Plantations: Opportunities and Challenges in the Transition to Regenerative Agriculture

Dr Roshan Rajadurai, Sri Lanka Planters' Association

As I look around the hall, I realize that, as a planting fraternity, we have been practicing regenerative agriculture in various ways for many years. We have some fields that are over 100 years old and continue to yield crops. Our journey demonstrates that regenerative agriculture is the culmination of decades of effort and experience.

I firmly believe that, for us in the plantation fraternity—where so many people depend on our industry for their livelihoods—it is our responsibility to embrace regenerative practices to ensure that our industry remains sustainable for generations to come.

2.2. Industry Leadership and Collective Action for a Regenerative and Resilient Tea Sector

Mr Arijit Raha, Secretary General, Indian Tea Association (ITA)

I was asked to put together a presentation to highlight key issues affecting us at the operational level. We need to recognize that these are not activities separate from tea cultivation—mitigating climate change and maintaining biodiversity must be fully integrated into our work schedules.

When we look at tea as a climate solution, tea estates are not merely carbon neutral—they are net carbon absorbers, contributing positively to global warming mitigation. Unlike annual crops, tea plantations remain in continuous growth for over 50 years, providing uninterrupted carbon sequestration while preventing soil erosion.

What needs to be done in an operational context?

1. Biodiversity Protection
2. Soil Health Management
3. Water Conservation
4. Quality, Food Safety & Carbon / Renewable Energy Management

Regenerative agricultural practices offer a suitable pathway for:

- Enhancing soil structure and fertility
- Increasing water retention
- Boosting biodiversity
- Providing natural pest control
- Improving crop resilience against diseases

We also need to identify technology partners across the region to support these efforts.

Carbon solutions for tea include:

- Soil & Field: Composting, mulching, cover crops, biochar → High carbon storage
- Agroforestry: Shade tree integration → Very high carbon sequestration and biodiversity benefits
- Fertilizer Management: Organic/precision fertilization → Moderate N₂O reduction

- Renewable Energy & Factory Energy Solutions: Solar dryers, biomass gasifiers, solar PV → High CO₂ reduction

Early detection of issues is critical. When considering soil carbon, the question of additionality becomes central. According to global standards, additionality is a basic principle for carbon accounting. Biochar, for example, is a quantifiable input that can contribute measurable carbon credits.

We would like to develop a template for measuring additionality, tracking carbon accruals, and crystallizing the revenue generated from carbon credits. This will provide a clear framework for integrating carbon management into operational practices and ensuring tangible benefits for tea estates and stakeholders.

2.3. Building Resilience in the Tea Sector to Climate and Market Challenges

Dr Selvasundaram, Managing Partner of Encroft Biosolutions India Pvt. Ltd.

We are extremely happy and grateful to the organisers for this opportunity.

Regenerative agriculture aims to restore and improve soil health, which is critical to overcoming climate change and its impacts. Soil microbes play a natural and vital role in improving soil health and mitigating climate challenges. To be effective, we need to enhance the population of beneficial microbes, which must be restored by following the correct processes. There are technologies available to produce these beneficial microbes, including strains that can survive under specific conditions and be applied to the soil to address climatic challenges.

Increasing carbon content in the soil is also essential. Beneficial microbes feed on carbon, multiplying as carbon levels increase. In India, the government provides subsidies to support this practice. As soil carbon content rises, the population of beneficial microbes also grows, enhancing soil health further.

Another key area is beneficial fungi, such as *Mycorrhiza*, which have a symbiotic relationship with soil. Both technology and microbial populations play a critical role in maintaining soil health. Indigenous populations of these microbes can be multiplied and applied to the soil to improve its quality.

There are cultures available for greenhouses where different microbial species can be added to improve soil health. Additionally, applying silicone polymers can help crops overcome drought. These polymers form a web in the canopy, which can crush insects and assist with pest management. Trials conducted on tea plantations have shown that this technology effectively protects crops and improves resilience.

Such technologies not only enhance soil health but also protect the environment. We are actively working on developing new solutions to further strengthen regenerative agricultural practices and support sustainable tea cultivation.

2.4. Expanding Consumption and Market Access for Sustainable Tea

Mr Ma Ying, China Tea Marketing Association (CTMA)

We have worked with Solidaridad for 30 years. The video showed the mountains near Assam, where the tea plant originated. According to some scholars, the Bulong people live around the Himalayas. With the support of Solidaridad, we initiated a project in this region, which has been earmarked as a UNESCO World Heritage site and is supported by the Chinese government. This is the first UNESCO World Heritage site related to tea.

Dr. Shataduru completed a PhD with a dissertation focused on tea smallholders.

Earlier today, at the ATA meeting, a founding member provided a video message and appointed me as his special representative. With Solidaridad's support, we initiated a project for the Bulong people. They claim to be the first humans to cultivate tea. According to their legend, during a plague, the chief of their tribe discovered by chance that tea leaves could alleviate pain. Tea was thus cultivated initially as a medicinal herb.

Yunnan, in southwest China, is where tea gained recognition and became the national drink of China during the Tang dynasty in the 2nd century.

My key messages today are threefold:

1. Tea people are a big family.
2. Tea is not only agriculture but also culture: How can we make tea valued beyond the current price of \$2 per kilogram?
3. Market development and consumer awareness: Tea, after water, is the most important drink in the world.

Let us contextualize this commodity historically. Has anyone heard of the Opium War? Britain invaded China because of tea and trade routes. Donald Trump's tariff war has parallels to the Opium War: Britain, at the time, wanted to demonstrate its dominance in producing fabric and cleverly decided to sell opium to China. In the 1840s, the governor of Guangzhou burnt thousands of dollars' worth of opium.

The tea business today is still part of the legacy of the colonial trading system—tea priced at \$2 per kilogram. How can we change this? The answer lies in consumer markets and awareness. By increasing knowledge of tea's value as a cultural and historical commodity, we can elevate its economic and social worth.

2.5. The Garuda Mark: Empowering Indonesia's Smallholders and Reviving Tea Consumption

Ir. Harry Hendrarto, Indonesia Tea Board

I will continue the story from China to Indonesia. A video on Jetayu was shown earlier.

Tea consumption in Indonesia is increasing. With a population of 284 million people, it has become a huge market for tea. However, domestic production is declining, which is a cause for concern. We have come here in the hope of gaining better insights that will help us improve Indonesian tea once again. Our market is shrinking, and our consumers are often unaware of the quality and origin of the tea they drink.

That is why it is essential to ensure that the tea they consume is genuinely from Indonesia, grown by our smallholders and hand-picked with care. We draw inspiration from examples such as Darjeeling tea and the Lion Logo of Sri Lanka.

While Garuda is a larger symbol, it is constrained by being our national bird. Therefore, we have chosen Jetayu as our symbol—a representation of sacrifice, commitment, and pride. It reflects our national identity and the dedication of our tea growers.

We hope that, with the Jetayu symbol, everyone will recognize and value Indonesian tea. We are here to collaborate, especially to share ideas and best practices to strengthen our industry and promote sustainable growth

3. Question and Answer Session

Q: Nepal: Tea farmers are highly affected by climate change. One way of mitigation is increasing productivity. How is the market in terms of discernibility? China has technology to make speciality tea. How can we improve knowledge transfer? We have Chinese machines that are difficult to maintain. A question to Solidaridad: can we organise exchange programs with Sri Lanka (Lumbini)? If our farmers want to know more about smallholder farmers in Sri Lanka and China, how can we do so?

Dr. Roshan Rajadurai (Sri Lanka): Speaking for Sri Lanka, we are fortunately positioned. Our tea industry is small compared to India and China. As practitioners of regenerative agriculture, this is not new for us—it aligns with our standard practices. Our tea industry is highly certified, and we can leverage this advantage by specialising and promoting products as regenerative agriculture (Regenagri) tea. We have found some early successes with speciality tea, but it requires significant investment to offer it as a unique product.

Mr. Arijit Raha (India): In India, our tea is compliant with standards, ensuring safety and higher prices. However, today prices are not directly linked to sustainability because the consumer is often not conscious of these issues. Buyers and packers demand certification, which is why certification is gaining traction. For example, in Amsterdam, water costs more than tea—a disconnect exists somewhere in the value chain. Perhaps we are not reaching the consumers effectively.

Q: Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty: There are sustainable teas, specialised teas, and now regenerative teas. Do you think regenerative agriculture will boost the tea economy, enrich your soil, and increase prices?

Dr. Roshan Rajadurai (Sri Lanka): Our focus is to preserve and protect the tea bush while following standard practices. The next step is to leverage good practices for broader benefit. Unfortunately, in the tea world, producers often bear the cost of certification, which is a challenge.





Arrival of Chief Guest

4. Speech of Chief Guest

His Excellency Levan S. Dzhagaryan Ambassador of The Russian Federation

Dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for inviting me to this summit. It is a pleasure to be here among friendly countries. Although we produce tea, it is not enough to meet our domestic demand, as we consume a significant amount. We are the second-largest importer of Sri Lankan tea, and last year we imported 35,000 tonnes from Sri Lanka.

There are some difficulties due to the current sanctions, and we are therefore practicing the use of national currencies in our trade. I am also happy to see friends from India, especially as President Putin will soon visit India. He recently visited China as well, and earlier in May this year, the Chinese leader visited Moscow.

We are honoured and proud to have many friends, and I take this opportunity to wish you all the very best.

Chairman of ATA and Convenor presented a token of appreciation to the Ambassador.



5. Leveraging Opportunities in Carbon Markets and Ecosystem Services

Mr Gayan Ranasinghe, Control Union Sri Lanka

Thank you for giving Control Union this opportunity. There are three key takeaways from this presentation:

1. The global shift toward regenerative and low-carbon agriculture
2. The rising importance of carbon markets and ecosystem services
3. The opportunity for Sri Lanka's tea sector to lead this transition

Tea cultivation has long been a cornerstone of Sri Lanka's economy and culture. The sector is globally recognized for producing premium-quality Ceylon Tea and plays a vital role in exports and rural livelihoods. It consists of estates, smallholder farmers, factories, and a strong export network. Today, the industry is increasingly shifting toward sustainability—adopting regenerative practices, reducing carbon emissions, and aligning with global standards.

Under the European Green Deal, several new initiatives and regulations are emerging. Although these are European regulations, they influence global supply chains. Therefore, if we are supplying products to these markets, we must comply with these requirements. Several listed companies in Sri Lanka have already committed to emission-reduction pathways and net-zero targets by 2050. However, there are corporate emission thresholds we must remain aligned with; otherwise, achieving these targets becomes difficult.

The CDMS is one of the key initiatives and a trailblazer for carbon markets.

Globally, greenhouse gas programs—such as Verra and other voluntary carbon standards—are well established. In Sri Lanka, we also have our own crediting schemes, but there are opportunities to explore other frameworks as well, including Regenagri.

Regenagri specifically focuses on agricultural practices. In contrast, broader global programs assess emissions across the entire value chain. Because Regenagri is agriculture-focused, farmers themselves can benefit directly from participation.

In carbon markets, we generally talk about offsetting and insetting:

- Offsetting means purchasing carbon credits from external projects.
- Insetting means generating carbon credits *within* your own project or value chain. For example, if downstream buyers want to become carbon neutral, they can purchase credits from farmers or growers within the same chain.

Carbon credit mechanisms are typically regulated by governments or international agreements and require compliance with legally binding emission-reduction targets, often using a cap-and-trade system.

Key carbon market opportunities for tea growers include:

1. Soil Carbon Sequestration, achieved through:

- Cover cropping
- Reduced tillage
- Mulching
- Composting
- Replacing synthetic fertilizers with organic amendments
- Improved soil cover and residue retention

2. Agroforestry & Increased Tree Density, achieved through:

- Shade tree enrichment
- Introducing intercrop trees within tea blocks
- Boundary planting and hedgerows
- Small on-farm reforestation pockets

Before designing a carbon project, it is important to conduct a feasibility study.

For carbon credit certification, projects must be validated and verified by an accredited body (a VVB – Validation and Verification Body). After monitoring the project for a defined period, you can apply for verification. It is a two-step process:

1. Validation
2. Verification

If the project meets all Regenagri standards, carbon credits can be issued. The Regenagri standard outlines the required criteria.

It is advisable to hire a project consultant with prior experience to conduct:

- Financial analysis
- Common practice analysis
- Technical assessments

Under the Paris Agreement, a new mechanism called PACS – the Paris Agreement Crediting Scheme has also been introduced. In addition, standards under Verra and other global programs remain relevant.

Questions and Answers

Q: How many carbon standards have been approved for carbon credits? Is there any information on this? Have any tea companies in the world obtained carbon credits?

A: Several internationally recognized carbon standards exist, including Verra (VCS), Gold Standard, CDM, Regenagri, and others. Some tea companies have registered projects under Verra, but we still need to confirm whether they have successfully *generated* or *issued* carbon credits.

In Sri Lanka's case, most CDM projects to date have been in the renewable energy sector, not in agriculture or tea. So far, tea-related carbon credit projects are still in early stages globally, and issuance of credits is limited.

Q: For companies doing insetting, can carbon credits be traded only within the same value chain?

A: Yes. Under insetting, carbon credits can only be traded within the same value chain. Additionally, a minimum of two years of certification is generally required before applying for carbon credit issuance. For many registered companies, this process is still ongoing.

The Regenagri standard supports insetting — meaning any tea company purchasing tea from a participating farm or producer can buy insetting credits from within that system.

A variety of crediting schemes are available: Regenagri, Verra VCS and National schemes, such as the simplified mechanism by the Sri Lankan Ministry of Environment

However, as a standard, insetting credits cannot be sold outside the value chain. They must remain within the same supply chain ecosystem.

Tea Reimagined Awards



Tea Sm... ol... s Deve... t A... lity

Tea Reimagined Awards



6. Tea Reimagined Awards

Recognising Achievements in Regenerative, Resilient and Carbon-Free Tea

1. Asia Tea Alliance Smallholder Sustainability Leadership Award
Presented to
Tea Smallholdings Development Authority (TSHDA)
2. Asia Tea Alliance Sustainability Champion Award
Presented to
Hayleys Plantations
Kelani Valley PLC, Talawakelle Tea Estates PLC, Horana Plantations PLC
3. Asia Tea Alliance Innovation Award
Presented to
Aitken Spence - Asia International Tea Summit
Elpitiya Plantations PLC
4. Tea Reimagined Awards
Tea Alliance Regenerative Trailblazer Award
Presented to
Lumbini Tea Valley Ceylon
5. Asia Tea Alliance Media Leadership Award
Presented to
Mr. Nisthar Cassim
Editor / Chief Executive Officer, DailyFT
6. Asia Tea Alliance Regenerative Pioneer Award
Presented to
Halgolla Estate
Kelani Valley Plantations PLC
7. Asia Tea Alliance Regenerative Partnership Award
Presented to
Control Union Inspections (Pvt) Ltd
8. Asia Tea Alliance Social Impact Award
A Special Award
Presented to
Dr. Shatadru Chattopadhyay
In recognition of his outstanding contribution

Panel Discussion on Smallholders



Panelists from India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal & Bangladesh



7. Smallholders at the Heart of Regeneration

Moderator Mr. Krishan Wickramasinghe, General Manager, Tea Small Holdings Development Authority, Sri Lanka

7.1. Sri Lanka

Mr. Jagath Senarath Pathirana, Chair, Federation of Tea Smallholder Societies

Our goal is ambitious: to reach 300 million kilograms of tea produced by smallholders by 2030. To move confidently toward this target, we must define a clear and practical roadmap. Smallholders are organised as clusters under the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA), and we continue to serve voluntarily to strengthen these structures.

Over the past year we have reorganised our societies to improve governance, coordination, and accountability. In the coming year, we expect to see significant improvements as more smallholders adopt Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Our collective intention is to produce high-quality green leaf and elevate Ceylon Tea further on the global stage.

Youth Participation and Leadership Development One of the major challenges we face is the declining interest of youth in the tea sector. To address this, we introduced a new approach: engaging youth leaders within our societies as entrepreneurs. This model encourages young people to view tea cultivation not merely as traditional labour, but as a viable business opportunity.

During the reorganisation of our societies, we prioritised youth involvement and created pathways for leadership, innovation, and skill development. The TSHDA, TRI, and SLTB are jointly working to provide these young leaders with the necessary technical knowledge and modern tools to succeed.

By empowering youth and strengthening our organisational structures, we can ensure the future sustainability and growth of Sri Lanka's smallholder tea sector and move steadily towards our 2030 production targets.

7.2. India

Mr Bijoy Gopal Charkraborty, President, Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers Associations (CISTA)

We extend our sincere gratitude to Solidaridad, the Nucleus Foundation, and the TSHDA for their dedication and partnership. Despite our delayed arrival due to flight issues, we are deeply appreciative of the warm hospitality extended to us. I have attended more than 60 international meetings, and I am truly pleased to be part of this meaningful gathering.

India is the second-largest tea producer in the world, and small tea growers (STGs) now contribute over 54% of national tea production. Today, India is home to more than 300,000 small tea growers, most of whom cultivate less than one hectare of land.

Regenerating the tea sector requires an agile response to dynamic and evolving market demands. Our focus is on expanding orthodox, green, and speciality teas, fostering education and leadership, and empowering small farmers and rural families. Women continue to play a vital and influential role in cultivation and management across India's tea-growing regions.

Cooperatives and associations help build unity, representation, and collective strength. One of our key policy priorities is to ensure that STGs are fully integrated under the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare. Additionally, we advocate for reform of the Tea Board of India to improve

representation. At present, many board members are politically appointed, and only 1–2% come from the tea industry itself.

Small tea growers receive support through institutions such as NABARD, MSME schemes, and other government initiatives aimed at enhancing productivity, sustainability, and financial security.

Way Forward

- Promote organic certification and sustainable cultivation practices
- Encourage digital traceability systems for transparency and consumer confidence
- Strengthen local processing facilities to add value within producing regions
- Ensure fair prices and robust market linkages for small growers

Conclusion

Small tea growers are at the heart of regenerative transformation—revitalising ecology, strengthening rural economies, and fostering social well-being. They remain central to India's green, inclusive, and future-ready tea revolution.

7.3. Nepal

Rabin Rai, founder general secretary and Team Leader of the Central Tea Cooperative Federation Ltd. (CTCF)

Thank you for the opportunity to share Nepal's experience. Although we are a relatively small tea-producing nation, we are an emerging player with a strong foundation. Nearly 20,000 smallholder families contribute to about 50% of Nepal's total tea production. These smallholders are organised into cooperatives that collectively produce, farm, and market their tea. We continuously encourage family farmers to introduce and promote their teas in both domestic and international markets.

Climate change poses a significant threat to our growers. Just one month ago, in September, extreme rainfall and landslides severely affected several tea-growing regions, damaging plantations and livelihoods. We cultivate two main types of tea, and in recent years, insect damage has also increased, adding to production challenges.

Many of our farmers practise organic farming, and some are certified under the Rainforest Alliance (RA). Within our federation, we have established a youth subcommittee to encourage greater youth involvement. However, it remains a challenge, as young people are often reluctant to enter the tea sector. To address this, we are actively using social media and awareness programmes to attract youth and highlight opportunities within the industry.

For farmers who are not yet engaged in digital tools or modern technology, we provide training and capacity-building to improve their skills, resilience, and market access. A portion of Nepal's smallholder tea is now exported to various European countries, where farmers are able to secure better prices for their high-quality produce.

7.4. Bangladesh

M. Mustafizur Rahman, Managing Director, Duncan Brothers Bangladesh Ltd.

Smallholders in Bangladesh have undergone a significant transformation in recent years. Previously regarded as producers of low-quality tea, their status is rapidly improving. Outgrowers who once received 170 per kilogram are now receiving 220, reflecting both enhanced quality and greater market recognition. Despite this progress, the representation of farmers remains limited due to the relatively weak organisational structure of their associations. To address this, our

association is committed to integrating smallholders more effectively and supporting them to build stronger, more coherent systems of representation.

Youth participation remains a major concern. The younger generation is increasingly reluctant to join the tea sector, prompting us to explore innovative approaches to attract them. One such initiative is the establishment of vocational training centres within tea gardens, aimed at providing relevant skills and exposure. This model allows young people to engage in part-time freelance work while simultaneously participating in tea cultivation. Through upskilling and modernisation, we hope to create a more appealing pathway for youth to engage with the industry.

Looking ahead, we see strong potential for outgrowers to play a central role in Bangladesh's tea future. While many traditional plantation estates are aging, outgrower plantations tend to be newer and more productive. With better integration, improved systems, and sustained government support to enhance effectiveness and productivity, we believe that both quality and collaboration will continue to improve. Importantly, the sector needs to adopt a visionary outlook—setting clear targets for the next decade and working collectively towards them, rather than focusing solely on immediate challenges.

In terms of sustainability, we have gained some experience with regenerative agriculture through Rainforest Alliance certification. However, the cost of certification remains a barrier for many smallholders. While awareness of regenerative practices is growing, funding limitations continue to hinder widespread adoption. Strengthening financial support and increasing access to resources will be essential to expanding regenerative agriculture among small tea growers.

Questions and Answers

Q: Do you have experience with regenerative agriculture?

A: We have previously worked with Rainforest Alliance (RA) certification, but cost remains a challenge. Awareness of regenerative practices is increasing, yet funding constraints continue to limit widespread adoption.

7.5. Indonesia

Mr Nanang Christianto, leader of Faremer Association

We represent 35,000 members and are the largest farmer association in Indonesia. One of our flagship initiatives is LESTARI, the sustainable smallholder tea factories network. As a system, LESTARI can only purchase green leaf, and it has been designed as a comprehensive sustainability model. Developed through collaboration between Business Watch Indonesia, Solidaridad, and Paguyuban Tani Lestari, the initiative integrates the entire smallholder tea supply chain—from upstream production to downstream processing—to ensure that all smallholder members benefit equitably.

LESTARI has significantly strengthened the local economy by adding value at the community level and by ensuring consistency in both the quality and quantity of green leaf supplied from smallholder plantations. The network comprises 20 smallholder tea factories located across the Central and West Java Provinces. Each factory produces approximately 35 tons of dried tea per month, requiring around 120 tons of fresh leaf. In total, the network generates nearly 700 tons of dried tea monthly, utilising about 2,400 tons of fresh leaf sourced from its members. The initiative directly involves around 2,000 farmers and covers approximately 1,200 hectares of smallholder tea plantations.

Despite its achievements, the network faces several challenges. Post-harvest quality improvement remains a key priority, as current production is limited to dried green tea. There is

also a critical need to strengthen management systems and improve product standardisation across all participating factories. However, these challenges come with significant opportunities. Local tea consumption is growing, and there is strong potential to develop a collective brand that represents the network and enhances market visibility.

Overall, the LESTARI Smallholder Tea Factory Network exemplifies robust farmer-led collaboration, integrating plantations, people, and business. It elevates smallholders from field labourers to recognised suppliers of high-quality raw material and processed tea that support Indonesia's national tea industry. With its substantial production capacity and continued improvements in quality, the network has become one of the most important pillars of Indonesia's smallholder tea sector, strengthening competitiveness and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Questions and Answers

During the discussion, Mr. Weerasinghe, Chief Secretary of the Smallholder Federation, raised a question regarding the development of mini tea factories. He shared that during a visit to Kerala, India, the delegation observed the impressive progress made by smallholders operating mini factories and expressed interest in establishing similar facilities in Sri Lanka.

In response, the representative from India explained that their Vice President had established a highly successful mini factory, noting that Kerala—which once carried a negative reputation for poor-quality tea—has completely transformed its image. This turnaround was attributed to proactive leadership and strong government support. Today, Kerala boasts more than 10,000 mini factories, many of which are operated by women and are producing high-quality speciality teas. The speaker encouraged Sri Lankan smallholders to replicate this model, emphasising that it is both feasible and impactful. He also mentioned plans for an upcoming international tea conference, where experiences and best practices will be shared, and extended an invitation to Sri Lanka to witness firsthand the developments of Kerala's "green revolution."



Technical Sessions



8. Reimagining the Tea Landscape: Regenerative Pathways for Smallholders, Tea Villages and Medium Estates

Mr Chaminda Jayawardana, Managing Director, Lumbini Tea Valley

We are a family-owned company with 200 employees and a network of 1,800 smallholder farmers supplying tea to us. Remarkably, around 800 of these farmers have been with us throughout our 50-year journey, and this long-standing partnership has been a key factor in maintaining the high quality of tea that has built the Lumbini brand.

Two years ago, we began our journey into Regenagri, motivated by the urgent need to address climate change and to align our practices with Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). Regenagri is not merely a certification; it provides an opportunity to shape the future of sustainable tea cultivation. At the time, no other tea producer in Sri Lanka had embarked on a Regenagri journey. With the support of Control Union, we obtained our Regenagri certification last year.

We were also recognised by Solidaridad and Nucleus, who invited us to participate in their carbon insetting program, further enhancing our commitment to sustainable practices. Our future vision is to create a nature-friendly tea estate, leveraging our unique location adjacent to the Sinharaja rainforest to develop a microclimatic region within the Lumbini Tea Valley. Regenagri will play a central role in achieving this vision.

Moving forward, we aim to encourage all farmers to adopt GAP and sustainable practices. We also plan to implement an agro-tourism model, creating a platform for farmers to showcase and sell their products while educating visitors about sustainable tea cultivation. We are deeply grateful for the support we have received and are committed to building a resilient, environmentally responsible, and economically vibrant future for our tea community.

9. Resilient Roots: Strengthening the livelihoods of the tea Smallholders of Sri Lanka

Mr Saman Rathnayaka, Deputy General Manager Extension, Tea Smallholdings Development Authority, Sri Lanka

Tea smallholdings in Sri Lanka are defined as lands under 10 acres, and these small farms have historically faced declining production levels. Average yields have often fallen short of targets, prompting a renewed focus on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) to improve both quantity and quality. While the concept of Regenagri was not new to us, its application among smallholders had been limited. To address this, we implemented Regenagri practices across selected smallholder clusters and observed a 20% increase in yield, which laid the foundation for the Pivithuru initiative.

The objectives of the Pivithuru initiative are:

- Enhance the standard of green leaves supplied to factories
- Increase productivity and consistency of green leaf yield
- Promote GAPs, GMPs, and GI across participating smallholders and bought-leaf factories
- Strengthen collaboration between bought-leaf factories, tea smallholders, and TSHDA extension staff
- Elevate the income of smallholders and factories through guaranteed premium prices for pure Ceylon teas in both mass and niche markets
- Contribute to Sri Lanka's national vision of a "Thriving Nation: Beautiful Life" by fostering a resilient tea industry

Currently, the initiative is being piloted with seven factories across key tea-growing regions:

- Ratnapura: Sisiraba TF
- Uva: Aruna TF
- Kalutara: Aruna TF
- Kandy: Pallegama TF
- Kegalle: Broadlands TF (Society model)
- Matara: Nilgiri TF
- Nuwara Eliya: Broadlands TF
- Galle: Rekadahena TF

Through this initiative, farmers are now more closely connected to factories and better aligned with green leaf quality standards. Within 5–6 months, the pilot has already shown significant improvements in leaf standards, productivity, and awareness among farmers and factory staff. Strengthened farmer societies and trained cluster leaders ensure accountability in maintaining GAP-compliant plots and proper handling of leaves before they reach factories—addressing one of the key challenges of pre-harvest leaf damage.

The Pivithuru initiative incorporates a comprehensive monitoring system through a dedicated database, providing rewards to farmers for high-quality leaves. Extension staff and a federation comprising 1,400 societies oversee the clusters, ensuring continuous guidance and adherence to standards. This integrated model combines farmer training, cluster formation, cluster leader management, factory collaboration, GAP and GMP adoption, and structured monitoring, offering a scalable framework for nationwide implementation over the next five years. By focusing on standards, quality, and coordinated operations, the initiative ensures that smallholders benefit directly while producing high-quality raw materials for Sri Lanka's tea industry.

Questions and Answers

Q: What is the average quality of tea in the three monitored areas?

A: The average quality stands at approximately 35%, based on categories provided by the Tea Board. Quality is assessed using standards such as one bud and two leaves or one bud and three leaves. Samples are collected and counted, and smallholders are provided with these samples to use as a benchmark for maintaining quality in their own plantations.

Q: Is fertiliser scarcity an issue for smallholders?

A: Fertiliser supply is being managed effectively through government support. Fertiliser is distributed using a QR-code system, where allocations are based on the quantity of green leaf produced by each farmer. This ensures fair access and helps maintain productivity despite broader supply challenges.

Q: You had installed eight factories under the Tea Shakthi program. What is the current status of these factories?

A: The factories are still stabilising and are not yet in an ideal operational position. Efforts are ongoing to establish them as model factories, demonstrating best practices and providing guidance for other smallholder initiatives.

Q: Are there plans to brand and package smallholder tea?

A: Yes, smallholder factories and cooperatives have been restructured to empower farmers to become price setters rather than price takers. This includes plans to develop branding and packaging strategies that add value and strengthen smallholders' position in the market.

10. Reimagining Medium-Scale Estates: Pathways to Regenerative, Resilient, and Carbon-Free Growth

Mr Ruwan Jayasundara, Estate Owners Association of Galle and Kaluthara

A recent survey of medium-scale estates revealed that labour shortage remains the most pressing challenge, even though members have continued replanting over the past decade. High regional wages ensure that workers are paid fairly, but the severe scarcity of labour forces estates to seek cheaper and faster alternatives to survive. Unfortunately, these shortcuts often compromise long-term soil health, leaving topsoil exposed and vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Compounding this challenge is the issue of fertiliser quality. Imported fertilisers often contain foreign weed seeds, introducing aggressive species that disrupt ecosystems and create a cycle of ongoing management challenges. In response to these pressures, estates are exploring innovative solutions such as robotic mowers, which offer multiple benefits: addressing the labour gap by performing the work of many hands, improving soil health by cutting weeds without chemicals, and providing a carbon-free, electric alternative. However, current models are not yet adapted for the complex terrain of tea plantations, highlighting the need for dedicated R&D and field-specific technology adaptation.

Policy constraints further limit innovation. While replanting subsidies are essential, restrictive government guidelines often prevent experimentation with new planting methods or intercropping, stifling creativity and sustainable practices. Although some estates hold organic certifications, not all smallholders can access these programs. There is an urgent need for herbicide-free certification schemes, which would further improve product quality while remaining accessible to a broader range of producers.

To overcome these challenges, estates are calling for action on multiple fronts:

- **Policy makers:** Reform subsidies to encourage farmer-led innovation and support practical R&D. Weak institutional support currently hampers progress, as cited by 64% of members.
- **Buyers and brands:** Demand and offer fair pricing for herbicide-free certified teas, incentivising sustainable practices.
- **Investors:** Opportunities exist to fund technological innovation, such as robotic mowers, and other value addition projects through entities like Ceylon Estate Owners Pvt Ltd.

The commitment of members—84.1% actively engaged in sustainable practices—demonstrates the sector's dedication to safeguarding the soil and the future of tea cultivation. With modernization, practical technological solutions, and supportive policies, Sri Lanka's tea estates have the potential to compete globally while maintaining soil health, environmental sustainability, and economic viability.

11. Vote of Thanks

Mr Ranjan Boriah, Global Tea Lead, Solidaridad Asia

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Nucleus, Dave Maurice, and the entire team for organizing such a wonderful event and for their exceptionally warm hospitality. The sessions were engaging, insightful, and highly enriching, and we truly appreciated the care and attention with which every detail was managed. We have thoroughly enjoyed not only the program itself but also the generous hospitality extended to us throughout the event.



INDIA



INDONESIA



SRI LANKA

Tea Appreciation



CHINA



BANGLADESH



NEPAL