

FAIRTRADE PREMIUM IMPACT



PRODUCER NAME: PHULBARI TEA ESTATE UNDER MCLEOD RUSSEL INDIA LTD (MRIL)

FLO ID : 18013

COUNTRY: INDIA

PRODUCT: TEA

FAIRTRADE CERTIFIED SINCE: 2007

SALES AND PRODUCTION:

PRODUCT VARIETY: Organic CTC, Black and Orthodox tea

ANNUAL PRODUCTION CAPACITY: 2200 MT

MAJOR COUNTRY OF EXPORT: COUNTRIES OF EXPORT: Europe, Middle East, Russia.

ABOUT THE PRODUCER ORGANIZATION:

Phulbari tea estate belongs to the expansive range of tea estates that come under the portfolio of the McLeod Russel India Ltd (MRIL) group of tea producers.

McLeod Russel began planting tea in India in 1869 and today is the largest tea producing company in the world. Part of the renowned Williamson Magor Group, the Company has forty- eight tea estates in the Assam Valley and five in the Dooars region of West Bengal, three factories in Vietnam, six estates in Uganda and the management control of the world renowned Gisovu estate in Rwanda, Africa.

Their widespread plantations, meticulous processes, art and science of blending, sustainable environmental practices and community initiatives have enabled them to strengthen their leadership in the global tea industry.

Every year, the estates produce more than 100 million kilograms of quality black tea which reaches millions of tea lovers worldwide. MRIL has a large presence in Assam and West Bengal and also has several tea estates in other countries.



Phulbari Tea Estate

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Phulbari, which translates to ‘Garden of flowers’, for reasons that seem to have been forgotten, is spread across a total area of 1298.66 Hectares in the region of Balipara in the Sonitpur district in the north of Assam.

Its actual tea plantations cover 881.32 hectares of the region’s landscape, across 3 divisions, namely Phulbari, Amaribari and Panipoota. The area falls in the in the subtropical climatic zone and therefore has a monsoon type of climate. The temperatures are moderate through the year but there is a marked humidity for most of the months.

The estate has a total of 1436 permanent workers and 1450 temporary.



Workers at the Phulbari Tea Estate

The nearest big city to Phulbari, is Tezpur, which is the district HQ of Sonitpur. Tezpur is nearly 200 km away from the international airport at Guwahati, Assam and it takes nearly 4.5 hours over roads that are not really in the best of condition. The emerald landscape of rural Assam however, makes the journey easier to bear. Tezpur also has sufficiently comfortable options for stay and one can also enjoy the local cuisine in the several restaurants that abound. Phulbari tea estate is around 20 km away and the 45 min drive is reasonably comfortable on roads that are flanked by rain washed verdant fields and tea plantations.



Road to Phulbari Tea Estate

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FULFILLING DREAMS IN PHULBARI !

FAIRTRADE PREMIUM COMMITTEE

The FPC at Phulbari consists of a total of 28 members from the workers and 2 non-voting members from the management. Since most of their workers are women, a sizeable section of the committee is represented by them.

The Fairtrade Premium process – Phulbari, like most of the other tea estates that benefit from Fairtrade premium, has put in place workable and viable processes to ensure an optimal and wise usage of the available funds. This results in highly advantageous outcomes and has a great impact on the development of their individual workers and the community as a whole. It has infused enthusiasm and hope in them, that the progress and improvement in their lives will be an ongoing activity.

Apart from the economic benefits, there has been a significant social impact too, with increased confidence levels, a discovery of inherent leadership abilities, a poise that enables interactions with outsiders and a capability of ideating and executing plans and ventures because of the empowerment that the system bestows.



Some of the FPC Members at a meeting

The annual procedure to decide on what projects to select, is conducted by the people and for the people, where the workers from each colony hold meetings to discuss their needs. Delegates of their individual constituencies then meet with the FPC members who in turn confer over the probable solutions during the FPC quarterly meetings. They then prepare a list of projects that they would like to see implemented.

The final approval then happens in the Annual General Body meeting. This is a workable methodology and takes place without undue hindrance and the favorable outcomes of earlier endeavors is proof of this.

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OUTCOME AND IMPACTS (2018-19)

Some of their key Fairtrade Premium projects have been introduced for the year 2018-19 and some have been ongoing from the past few years

- **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

Low Power Consumption Lights: Electricity bills are a burden on the worker and there was a need for installing energy efficient lighting systems in the worker's houses by opting for alternate solutions that were also environment friendly.

Fairtrade Premium funds were used to fix CFL bulbs (Compact fluorescent light bulbs) in all the worker's houses. These consume up to 75% less energy than the regular incandescent lamps. They also help to decrease the amount of greenhouse gas emissions in our atmosphere and thus help in countering some of the effects of global warming. A replacement of 1365 numbers of such bulbs has made a significant difference both economically and for the environment.

Proper Drainage Facilities: Overflowing and blocked drains breeding grounds for disease were a concern. The makeshift filthy clogged gutters alongside the workers residences were converted to a proper drainage system with the construction of RCC (concrete) drains with the help of Fairtrade Premium funds. The earlier Kachha (crude) drainage system was very unhygienic due to frequent blockage despite constant cleaning. This has helped to keep the environment clean and disease free and was a relief to the workers who now do not have to spend undue time and effort in cleaning, while also putting their health at risk.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Right to decent standard of Living: Most of the tea estate workers are women and they have the burden of housework as well as estate work on a daily basis. Using traditional equipment for cooking and not having access to modern kitchen appliances, made their lives even more difficult. Also there was a need to provide some basic level of comfort by providing them adequate storage for their possessions and some comfortable furniture. The ever- prevalent mosquito menace of these tropical regions had to be tackled to prevent dangerous mosquito borne diseases.

Iron beds and steel almirahs were provided in the homes of all workers. This has provided some basic comfort and convenience to the workers and their families who earlier had to sleep on the floor and had no proper storage facility for their clothes and other belongings.

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Wife and child of a tea worker

“Initially all our clothes used to get spoilt and moth eaten. Also we had no proper space for the safe keeping of our important papers. Even our money used to lie around and we were unable to safe guard it but now we can easily lock it away. I also find the cot very convenient while making my baby sleep”

To provide the home makers with some relief, Fairtrade Premium distributed filters to make purified water available and pressure cookers and chulhas (firewood stoves) to help in saving time while cooking. Mosquito nets were provided to all families, greatly reducing the incidence of malaria and other mosquito borne diseases.

Goat Fencing – The straying of goats and cattle into worker’s gardens was an issue, since they dirtied the place and also destroyed their vegetable and flower gardens. Fencing was a dire necessity. The fencing and gates have proved to be a big boon and now the workers are also growing hedges on them to improve the aesthetics. The entire colony of workers has been completely fenced.



Goat fencing and gate at the worker's house



“ In the past these goats were a real menace. They would come right in and chew up all that we had painstakingly planted. Cleaning up after them was also a big waste of time and the surroundings of our houses were always dirty with goat droppings. This fence is a huge relief and it also gives us a sense of security and mental comfort”- *Worker at the Tea Plantation*

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Salary Remittance for Teachers at Fairtrade Premium School: Saritha Kuldeep is the head teacher at the Amaribari Lower Primary school. This school had been built by Fairtrade Premium 10 years ago so that the children in the vicinity could easily attend classes.



Saritha Kuldeep - teacher at Amaribari school with the students



“This school has been built 10 years ago by Fairtrade Premium and my salary is also borne from the premium funds. We are glad that our children have access to education in the vicinity of their homes because it is very difficult to convince workers to send their children to schools that are at a distance because they are concerned about their safety and other factors like the weather etc”- says Saritha Kuldeep

Right to Quality Education: Though children were provided with basic amenities like schools, there was assistance required to equip the schools with some basic needs. Transport was also an issue for schools that were at a distance because it led to absenteeism due to weather conditions and also a hesitance on the part of some parents who were concerned about the safety of their children on the lonely rural trails.

Fairtrade has also provided computers and printers in one of their estate schools so that children can be exposed to IT education. Children of higher classes attend schools that are at a faraway distance. During bad weather, it is difficult to make it on time. Fairtrade Premium arranged for buses to transport these students by paying the monthly rental towards school bus. This has proved to be a huge boon and has made it easy to attend school regularly without being constrained by rain or shine

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Students find the bus to be a big boon



Fairtrade premium pays the bus rent

Parents are very comfortable knowing that their children are safe and children too have no excuse any more to play hookey. The buses are a big relief especially during the long seasons of rain. Being in the East, this region also gets dark quite early in the evenings and the children are better off being transported in a dedicated vehicle.

The FPC members also echo the management's thoughts by taking the courage to voice their opinions and also boldly bring up their own suggestions. For example many of them gave suggestions in unison regarding the school bus project saying -

“ We feel it is better to buy our own bus than pay a monthly rental. That way we can save money and also have the bus as an asset. The management guides us and makes sure that we wisely choose our projects. They are also in support of buying a bus in future”

Health Care and Medical Facilities: Medical care can be made more effective with the assistance of appropriate equipment. Patients had to be referred to hospitals in bigger cities for some of the tests.



Phulbari Central Hospital

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Tea estates are bound by law to provide basic medical facilities for their workers. Phulbari tea estate however, has gone several steps further and has the unique distinction of constructing one of the largest hospitals in that region, which is a blessing for their workforce as well as those of their sister tea estates. The Phulbari Central Hospital is a 135 bed facility and has a surgeon, an anesthesiologist, a gynaecologist and ENT specialist. It is equipped with a fully functional pathological laboratory and they even have provision for advanced treatments like surgeries ranging from gall stone removal to caesarian sections. All treatments are free with no limits, for the workers, staff and all their family members.

Fairtrade Premium funds were deployed to procure a Digital X Ray machine as well as an Ultrasound machine, both of which have made it hugely convenient for technicians, the doctors and the patients.



Gynaecologist at Phulbari Central Hospital



Ultrasound machine

As per then Gynaecologist at the hospital - "Now our patients who need ultrasound, especially the pregnant women, need not go to far off towns for their check up. This Ultrasound machine is truly a big asset for our hospital"



Sandeep the Radiographer

Sandeep the radiographer at the X Ray lab says "I have been working here since 1991. Initially we had the traditional 300 mA, X Ray machine but in September 2012, Fairtrade Premium gave us this Digital X Ray machine which is much faster, better quality, accurate and also more cost effective"

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Community Development Activities: Community activities being a very important part of Indian culture, there was a need to have venues like common halls which were adequate for organising social events like weddings, religious ceremonies and other programs. Fairtrade Premium has constructed a community hall as a venue for cultural and other celebrations and the workers feel a sense of ownership as they tend to its maintenance themselves and keep it spick and span. This venue is complete with a dais and is very convenient for them to conduct weddings, religious ceremonies, social events etc.



Workers cleaning the Phulbari community venue



Phulbari community venue

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Fairtrade Premium has positively impacted the lives of all the workers and there is great hope among them that it will provide continued support in future so that there will be continued progress, development and empowerment. They are now coming up with meaningful ideas of their own and also heeding suggestions from the management, since they know that they are being advised for their benefit. They are also getting adept at decision making and intelligently utilizing the funds.

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