

Small Tea Growers in India Awaits a Positive Reply from the Minister of Commerce and Industry

By Labourfile News Service



On the occasion of 12th International Tea Day (ITD) scores of small tea grower societies who engage in collective leaf trade in Assam and other tea growing states have written a joint letter to the Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of Commerce and Industry demanding fair price for their produce by strong and participatory enforcement of Price Sharing formula, ensuring better price for better quality of leaf supplied, and making certified organic manure and pesticides available to them.

Bijoy Gopal Chakraborty, President, Confederation of Indian Small tea grower Associations (CISTA), endorsing the demands of the small tea

grower collectives, says, “government of India must extend crop insurance scheme to all small growers without any delay and extend universal social security and health coverage for the workers working in their gardens.”

According to the Tea Board of India, in 2015-16, small farmers contributed 33.85% or 417.42 million kgs of 1233.14 million kgs tea produced in India. In 1999 small growers’ contribution was only 1.16% of the total production. Bijit Basumatari of All Bodoland Small Tea Growers Association says, “the financial allocation of the Tea Board of India are not in proportion to STG’s contribution; greater share even now goes to the estate segment”.

The joint letter urges the Minister to ensure that the declared subsidies to small growers including leaf collection shed, leaf weighing machine, leaf carrying bag, pruning machine, plucking machine, irrigation equipment and computer are not reaching deserving small grower societies.

J John, Executive Director, Centre for Education and Communication (CEC), New Delhi says, “it is high time that we recognise that small tea sector contributes to employment generation in the rural areas, uplifting hundreds of thousands of people from poverty and preventing distress migration.” He recalled that many are now an empowered lot, and “are willing to move up the value chains

Echoing this sentiment, Ajit Giri of Rangagora Tea Development Society, Tinsukia says, “we are willing to set up our own manufacturing unit, but there are no clear policy directions from government.”

Kukhol Boro of Rwdwmsha Small Grower Society, Udalguri added, “manufacturing tea at source will improve quality, but we face obstacles at every stage of setting up a manufacturing unit by small growers.”

The joint letter has sought policy directives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry that facilitate collectives of small growers having 100 acres of land, quality leaves, and compliance to Plant Protection Code to set up

factories to manufacture chemical free / organic green specialty tea and market their products.