



150 Years Later: the story of tea

11 August 2017, Colombo, Sri Lanka: In 2017, we celebrate 150 years of tea production in Sri Lanka. To mark this anniversary, several events and activities have been planned throughout the year in Sri Lanka and internationally, including a Global Tea Party, International Tea Convention and a charity auction organised by a variety of stakeholders such as the Ceylon Tea Traders Association, Sri Lanka Tea Board, Tourist Board and tea companies.

While there is much reported in the media around these events, the anniversary celebrations and the future of Ceylon tea, there is little to no mention whatsoever of the tea plantation workers without whose contribution the industry would not exist.

There has been a lot of research and advocacy for decades on the rights of tea plantation workers, life conditions, wages and hardships faced by the workers and their families. In comparison to other parts of Sri Lanka, poverty, nutrition, maternal and children's health statistics of plantation communities are poorer and further exacerbated by issues related to inadequate housing, alcoholism, gender based violence and unemployment especially among youth. Opinion polls conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives show that the community is badly impacted by the economy, have made serious cut backs in the household expenditure and feel little sense of empowerment as citizens of the country.

Groundviews, *Vikalpa* and *Maatram* have previously created new media stories, in all three languages across their respective platforms, that highlight the hardships faced by the tea plantation workers.

With the objective of creating more visibility and awareness and to ensure that key narratives do not remain invisible during this significant anniversary, CPA's civic media output over four weeks will be anchored to key issues facing the tea plantation workers to coincide with the 150-year anniversary celebrations in order to take advantage of the momentum gathered by the celebrations. As Sri Lanka strategises the future of the tea industry, it is critical that the official discussions and reflections seriously consider issues faced by the workers who sustain the industry. The output will focus on the change (or lack thereof) in the lives of the workers 150 years since the start the industry, including a plethora of issues faced by them and their families, challenges for the future, areas for reform and strengthening rights. Content will be in all three languages, through short-form video, photography, long-form journalism and other interactive media.