



ETP's Inaugural Tea Forum in Kenya

Event Report

in partnership with the Tea Board of
Kenya

17-18 October 2024 – Nairobi, Kenya



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Overview

Tea Forum 2024

The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP), in collaboration with the Tea Board of Kenya (TBK), co-hosted the inaugural Kenya Tea Forum on October 17 and 18 2024, at the Radisson Blu in Nairobi.

Our Kenya Tea Forum aimed to bring together stakeholders to discuss and collaborate on the sustainability challenges facing the Kenyan tea sector. This two-day event provided an opportunity for participants to engage in action-oriented discussions on several key topics, including:

- The future of certification.
- Improving livelihoods in the tea sector.
- Lessons from the private sector on women's safety and gender empowerment.
- The impact of policy on the tea industry.
- The value of industry-wide partnerships.

Attendees included government representatives, producer companies, civil society organisations, industry experts, and buyers from ETP's membership. Before the event, ETP's members were also invited to visit ETP's local [Global Low Carbon Tea](#) and [Our Tea, Our Voice](#) programmes.

About the hosts

The [Ethical Tea Partnership](#) (ETP) is an international membership organisation that aims to catalyse long-term, systemic change, to benefit everybody who works in tea – especially people in tea-producing regions. ETP leads the industry in addressing critical challenges in tea, including poverty, human rights protection, gender-based violence, deforestation, and access to essential services. These are supply chain issues, not value chain ones. By acting collectively, ETP and its membership are stronger and more effective than any individual action.

The [Tea Board of Kenya](#) (TBK) is a state corporation in the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development, established by Tea Act No. 23 of 2020, to develop, regulate and promote the tea sub-sector. TBK is governed by a Board of Directors, appointed by the Cabinet Secretary in charge of Agriculture and Livestock Development. Day-to-day operations are directed by the Chief Executive Officer.



Delegates at the
Kenya Tea Forum.

Welcomes



ETP's Kenya
Country Manager,
Mr Brian Ngwiri.

ETP's Kenya Country Manager, Mr Brian Ngwiri, facilitated the Forum. In his opening remarks, he emphasised that discussions would focus on practical, action-oriented dialogue and collaboration to address the challenges facing Kenya's tea sector.

In his opening address, Mr Willy Mutai, TBK's CEO, emphasised the critical role TBK plays in the tea sector. He highlighted Kenya's reliance on tea for income, employment, and foreign exchange. Mr Mutai stressed the importance of collaboration across the entire tea value chain to tackle key challenges, including pricing and the vulnerability of women and young people. He highlighted the value of partnerships in driving meaningful solutions and improving conditions in the sector.

Mr Tom Franks, Chair of ETP's Board, then welcomed delegates, emphasising the Forum's value in fostering collective action to address the challenges facing the tea industry. He framed the day's discussions by identifying three points to consider:

1. The industry must unite and speak with one voice to create an environment that enables the sector to thrive.
2. Consumers see the industry as "one tea," so any scandal risks driving them away; this makes it crucial to address issues collectively.
3. The industry must avoid fragmentation by ensuring we don't create too many competing standards, especially considering recent legislative changes.

The Future of Certification in Tea

ETP's Policy Manager, Mr Lewis Verrinder, facilitated this session, highlighting ETP's efforts to consult the industry on recommendations to improve certification in tea. Consulting firm NewForesight supported this research and was represented by Consultant, Mr. Joost Backer, who shared key findings and recommendations.

Mr Verrinder then facilitated a panel discussion with representation from:

- Ms Carol Mutuku, SASINI PLC's Deputy General Manager;
- Mr Julius Ng'ang'a, Rainforest Alliance's Senior Director, East & Southern Africa;
- Mr Frank Tanner, Taylors of Harrogate's Responsible Sourcing Manager;
- Mr Gareth Mead, LIPTON Teas and Infusions' Chief Communications & Sustainability Officer; and
- Mr Joseph Cameron Booth, Fairtrade Foundation's Senior Innovation and Partnership Development Manager.



“A key lesson is the shift from a binary pass/fail system to a continuous improvement model while simplifying certification and auditing processes.”

Mr Gareth Mead

Chief Communications & Sustainability Officer, LIPTON Teas and Infusions

Key takeaways

- Challenges include low trust in the reliability of existing schemes, high administrative and compliance costs, the subsequent risk of fragmentation of standards, and a need for clear alignment with evolving legislation.
- Some tea buyers require certification to support de-risking their supply chains and their Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD) efforts.
- Tea producers require reduced costs, streamlined standards and clearer market incentives, including improved market access and demand for certified tea.
- To ensure fairer value distribution across the supply chain, there is a need to calculate the true cost of sustainable production and meeting standards.
- The industry would appreciate operational improvements among standards organisations, including simplification of processes and documentation and greater alignment with local contexts.
- Greater transparency of audit data would support CSRD and HRDD efforts regarding risk identification and prioritisation. However, this will require a greater level of trust across the industry.
- Conduct regional consultations to align standards with local contexts, addressing unique challenges and incorporating local knowledge to make them more practical and relevant for producers, thereby enhancing adoption.

Achieving Fairer Pricing for Kenyan Tea

This session was facilitated by Mr Liberal Seburikoko, ETP's Regional Director, who thanked delegates for taking part in a pre-event survey to identify factors contributing to low tea prices and high production costs. The session featured a world café group discussion on the actions required to address these issues.

To set the scene, ETP's Interim Executive Director, Mr Martin Short, shared his reflections on the necessary steps for achieving fair value distribution across the tea supply chain, and the obstacles hindering progress.



“The issue goes beyond pricing; given that there is little – to no – correlation between the price a consumer pays and the value that farmers and workers get within the supply chain. Therefore, it is up to us to take real affirmative action.”

Mr. Martin Short
Interim Executive Director, ETP

Below right:
World café group
discussions..

Via the pre-event survey, delegates identified the following issues related to the **cost of production**:

- Labour costs.
- High energy costs.
- Financial burden of certification and compliance.
- High national and county-level taxes.

Ahead of the event, delegates had also identified these challenges related to **pricing**:

- Oversupply.
- Market dynamics (supply and demand, competitive landscape for pricing, lack of diversification and limited brand building).
- Quality.
- Government policy and regulation impacting costs of production and profitability.



In multi-stakeholder breakout groups, delegates then identified the following actions to achieve fairer pricing for Kenyan tea:

Quality

- Involve TBK, producers, and government to increase quality to fetch higher prices, and impose reliable limits on quantity.
- Set regulations for higher quality tea via regulatory bodies such as TBK, via certification bodies, and by pressure from buyers.

Compliance

- Given that tea is subject to multiple standards, a benchmarking process needs to take place to understand minimum compliance.

Price

- Address oversupply by reducing production and focusing on quality. This will stimulate demand and market expansion. It requires buy in from TBK, buyers and marketing associations.
- It is critical that government policy for price setting considers all stakeholders – including producers.

Cost of production

- Producers should address high energy costs by investing in more efficient infrastructure and upgrading machinery. The government should incentivise a switch to green energy sources.
- Given the high cost of taxes and inputs (namely fertiliser), expand subsidies to encompass large-scale farmers.
- Investments should be made in setting standards for fertilisers; Good Agricultural Practices; and knowledge sharing between large and small-scale producers, as well as with certification bodies.

Market

- Expand the export market beyond traditional players.

Local multistakeholder tea platform

- The platform should aim to collaborate on a few key issues and suggest actions to drive change. ETP is well positioned to convene this and bring key Kenyan stakeholders to the table, including buyers, producers, farmers, employees, and the government.



Delegates at the
Kenya Tea Forum.

Addressing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment in Tea: What does Shared Responsibility Look Like?

Ms Shivdi Singh, who previously led ETP's work on responsible business, introduced the session. ETP has commissioned research by Claire Lynch Consulting and Partner Africa into private sector learnings on addressing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) in tea. The study aims to explore producer companies' experiences in addressing SEAH issues in the workplace, identify unintended contributing factors, and provide actionable insights for producers, packers, and retailers to collaborate and prevent future incidents.

Claire Lynch Consulting's Founding Director, Ms Claire Lynch, opened the session with a presentation exploring how producers, tea manufacturers and NGOs can share responsibility for addressing sexual exploitation and harassment by taking collective action for systemic change.



“As actors in the supply chain, every stakeholder holds a proportional share of responsibility to ensure that human rights violations are mitigated and responded to appropriately.”

Ms. Claire Lynch
Founding Director, Claire Lynch Consulting

Ms Lynch then facilitated a panel discussion with representation from:

- Ms. Sylvia-Ten Den, LIPTON Teas and Infusions' Head of Africa Tea Plantations;
- Ms. Jane Terry Nyambura, THIRST – The International Roundtable for Sustainable Tea's Chairperson;
- Ms. Peris Ochieng, Twinings & Co's Senior Social Impact & Sustainability Manager for Africa; and
- Ms. Janet Ruto, Browns Plantations Kenya's Head of Welfare, Gender & Human Rights.



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“Sexual harassment is about power abuse, and to truly address it, we must be brave and embrace disruption. The industry must take a zero-tolerance approach to SEAH and power abuse.”

Ms. Sylvia-Ten Den

Head of Africa Tea Plantations, LIPTON Teas and Infusions



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“Poverty is a fundamental driver for women in the tea sector, and price cannot be dismissed. SEAH is a human rights issue, and we must all take action – without waiting for others. We must create visions that scare us a little and excite us a lot.”

Ms. Jane Terry Nyambura

Chairperson, THIRST



Claire Lynch
addresses delegates.



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“Ending SEAH requires a collective commitment to uphold dignity and respect for all, ensuring that every individual feels safe and valued. By working together, we can dismantle the structures that allow SEAH to persist, creating a culture of accountability and support. It takes a united front to foster environments where everyone can thrive without fear.”

Ms. Peris Ochieng

Senior Social Impact & Sustainability Manager for Africa, Twinings & Co



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“Action has taken too long; in 2024, we’re still discussing women’s rights. The time for change is now. Organisations must take meaningful action to prevent gender-based violence and SEAH, both in the workplace and at home. Women’s issues are not on the periphery anymore, women must be heard.”

Ms. Janet Ruto

Head of Welfare, Gender & Human Rights, Browns Plantations Kenya

The session identified the following actionable steps:

- Businesses must take the time to understand the impact of SEAH in an organisation as the ripples are felt beyond survivors. It is important for businesses to recognise the rightsholders that are impacted directly.
- ETP has a responsibility to share its research across the industry with a report that highlights how key stakeholders can advance the issue.

Keynote speech



Agriculture
Secretary Mr
Collins Marangu.

Agriculture Secretary Mr Collins Marangu spoke on behalf of Dr Andrew Karanja, Cabinet Secretary from the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr Marangu emphasised the need to focus on Kenya producing high-quality tea despite high production costs, recognising that this is largely caused by the expensive cost of power. He called for a neutral, trusted certification body and stronger partnerships between producers and growers to highlight the value of certification.

Mr Marangu recognised that most of the tea in Kenya is grown by smallholders. He addressed concerns from farmers, who view certification as a costly, externally imposed, European requirement. He noted that there is a need for small-scale farmers and other tea stakeholders to be involved when these activities are being conducted.

Lastly, he recognised the value of the Forum and thanked the hosts for fostering such a valuable discussion.

Building an Enabling Policy Landscape for Kenyan Tea

ETP's Kenya Country Manager, Mr Brian Ngwiri, facilitated this session, following ETP's recently completed review of policies that impact the tea industry in Kenya. Consulting firm Impactt supported this research and was represented by Consultant, Dr Yvonne Maingey-Muriuki. The presentation provided a backdrop for a panel discussion on the actions required to address the critical issues in tea.

The session was an opportunity for the Ministry of Agriculture to share information on the process underway to develop the National Tea Policy for Kenya.

Mr Ngwiri facilitated a panel discussion with representation from:

- Lindah Oluoch, Kenya Tea Growers Association's Chief Executive Officer;
- Mr David Ombalo, the Government of Kenya's Ministry of Agriculture Policy Analyst;
- Dr Yvonne Maingey-Muriuki, Impactt's Consultant; and
- Mr Dickson Sang representing the Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union.





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“Tea workers need support. We must ask ourselves: what small actions can make a difference? How can we influence wages? Government stakeholders must actively support and promote inclusion at every stage of the tea value chain.”

Mr. Dickson Sang

Kenya Plantation and Agricultural Workers Union



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“An enabling environment means creating conditions where every actor in the tea supply chain can unlock their potential and thrive through actionable policies, fair laws, and a system that inspires confidence.”

Mr David Ombalo

Policy Analyst, Government of Kenya’s Ministry of Agriculture



Delegates at the
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Collaborative Power: Driving Change Together

Day two of the Forum opened with a session highlighting how ETP's programmes in Kenya, delivered through diverse partnerships, drive systemic change and create a positive impact.

Ms Rashida Bhaiji, ETP's former Head of Programmes and Mr Peter Kangacha, ETP's Kenya Programme Manager, facilitated a panel discussion with representation from:

- Ms Annette Juma, representing German development agency GIZ;
- Mr Sudi Matara, Kenya Tea Development Agency Foundation's General Manager;
- Ms Susan Otieno, ActionAid International Kenya's Executive Director; and
- Ms Beccy Davies, the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's Economic Advisor, Women's Economic Empowerment Lead.





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“Women receive lower wages, and climate change exacerbates this, while lower yields increase domestic tensions and the time women spend on household tasks. These issues cannot be solved by any single stakeholder alone.”

Ms Beccy Davies

Economic Advisor, Women's Economic Empowerment Lead, Senior Economic Adviser and Team Leader, UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office



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“Cross-border partnerships and solutions are needed, as tea is an international crop; we must unite governments and the private sector from different tea-producing countries.”

Ms Annette Juma

GIZ



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“Individual organisations can't develop solutions alone; we must co-create with communities at the table, especially women. When designing partnerships, we should consider all Sustainable Development Goals, as issues are complex and interconnected.”

Ms Susan Otieno

Executive Director, ActionAid International Kenya



Ms Maureen Tanui, a tea plucker, addresses delegates.

This session concluded with first-hand insights from participants in ETP's [Empowering Tea Communities project in Kenya](#). Together with ActionAid, Taylors of Harrogate, Lavazza Professional, and the Kenya Tea Development Agency, this initiative is securing rights for people living and working in the smallholder tea sector – especially women and children.



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“The programme has helped me understand my rights, my children’s rights, and women’s land rights. Now, I’ve been trained to support women in my community, and I’m helping tackle issues like alcohol abuse and supporting teenage mothers to re-enter education.”

Ms Maureen Tanui

Tea plucker

The session identified the following actionable steps:

- Create a standardised method for measuring emissions and improving efficiencies, potentially through collaboration between governments and producers.
- Align policies with practical actions on the ground, ensuring that Kenya’s Tea Policy addresses the needs of farmers and workers. This is a shared responsibility for the government, private sector, and farming communities.

Working Towards Our Shared Vision

The closing session of our two-day forum, facilitated by Mr Liberal Seburikoko, ETP's Regional Director, saw delegates reviewing key issues and action points from Day 1 while incorporating valuable insights on partnerships shared on Day 2.

Delegates identified and prioritised the next steps that supply chain stakeholders should take to address the challenges discussed throughout the event.



Plenary: The Future of Certification in Tea

Agreed actions (in priority order):

- Reduce audit and implementation costs. Assigned to Rainforest Alliance, Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA), certification bodies, and TBK. ETP and its Global Tea Coalition of leading producers and packers can support with convening stakeholders.
- Collaboration between standards and frameworks.
- Benchmarking of all standards.
- Movement towards continuous improvement.
- Improved data sharing of audit results.
- Greater alignment with Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence legislation.

Plenary: Achieving Fairer Pricing in Kenyan Tea

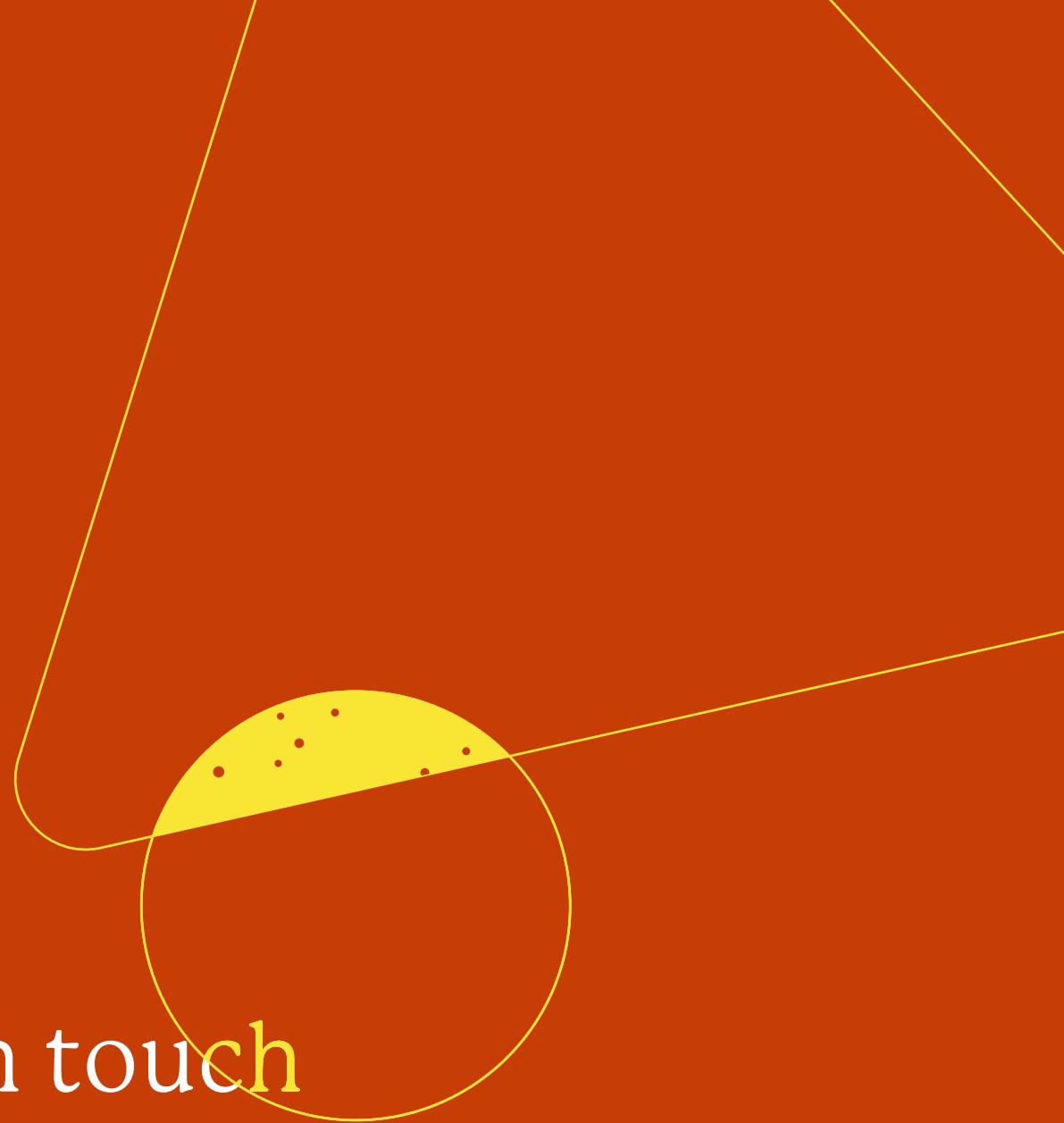
Agreed actions (in priority order):

- Establish regulations to support improvements in tea quality. Assigned to the Government of Kenya (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Trade, and TBK) and producers (KTDA and Kenya Tea Growers Association (KTGA), in consultation with buyers.
- Expand markets for tea consumption.
- Include all stakeholders in the development of government regulation.
- Set a minimum price for green leaf, but at a minimum standard.
- Set a cap for production volumes.
- Establish benchmarking for certification compliance.
- Invest in Good Agricultural Practices and support access to subsidised fertiliser.

Plenary: Building an Enabling Policy Landscape for Kenyan Tea

Agreed actions:

- Share ETP's policy review to support the finalisation of Kenya's Tea Policy.
- Improve alignment of various policies. Assigned to the Government of Kenya (TBK and Ministry of Agriculture), Trade Unions, KTDA, and KTGA.
- Lower taxes and levies, bring in green energy incentives and alternative revenue streams.
- Ensure implementation of policies that support women's representation at leadership level.
- Implement policies that incentivise using alternative sustainable energy sources.



Get in touch

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