

1 June 2018

On 31 May 2018, the University of Sheffield released their Global Business of Forced Labour study. This research argues that ethical certification schemes are largely ineffective in combatting labour exploitation and forced labour in tea and cocoa supply chains. **trustea**, an Indian domestic sustainability standard for tea, is mentioned as one of these certification schemes.

The **trustea** multistakeholder program committee takes the findings of this study very seriously, and is aware that certification is only one way to address certain issues. **trustea** was developed for the Indian tea industry, and is based on the Indian legal framework for the tea industry.

Launched in July 2013, **trustea** follows an approach that focuses on continuous improvement – where mandatory criteria to be adopted in the first year are aligned with the laws of the land. Contained in the **trustea** audit protocol are the so-called ‘System Assurance Audits’, which are independent non-programmed re-audits. Every year, a random sample of verified producers is selected for this specific spot audit. These System Assurance Audits serve to continually strengthen the **trustea** code and ensure ongoing compliance to the code by producers.

In Assam and other parts of India, the effective implementation of certification standards is an ongoing challenge. However, we believe that certification is a first step and can be used as an effective tool towards a more sustainable Indian tea industry. It is crucial though that any standard is part of a more holistic approach to further improve the Indian tea sector, through for example collaborations with more stakeholders including Government.

To ensure the continuous improvement of the standard and therefore the Indian tea sector, we have commissioned third-party research on the impact of **trustea** verification. We are building on the initial findings and commit to an ongoing effort to make a real difference to peoples lives’ in tea communities in India as well as in shaping the sustainability agenda for the tea industry in a collaborative and non-competitive space.