Overview

For over 70 years, CARE has worked in the world’s poorest communities to ensure that rural farmers have the resources they need to feed their families and communities. CARE works in 94 countries with more than 80 million people worldwide through more than 1,000 projects, from emergency relief to early childhood education, to maternal and reproductive health. Programs focus on the poor and extreme poor, those who live on less than $1.25 a day, and have little access to markets, education, or decision-making. Through village savings groups that empower members to gain financial independence, or by providing drought-resistant seeds that better withstand extreme weather, or by working with private sector partners to help farmers reach markets, CARE’s projects empower women and men to be agents of change in their communities.

CARE’s work with coffee and tea producing smallholder farmers is implemented with the recognition that whilst most of the rural economy in the developing world relies on women, there is a huge gender gap that causes them to have access to only a fraction of the productive assets, inputs, training and information compared to men. CARE works globally to target agriculture value chains to influence norms, practices, procedures, and principles underpinning market systems and structures to support women’s ability to succeed and advance economically, and exercise their power to make and act on economic decisions, particularly (but not solely) when pursuing economic opportunities. Through financial inclusion, sustainable practice, working with existing structures and growing cooperatives and their capacity to engage with value chains, CARE supports small coffee and tea agribusinesses to become more productive.
Supporting Small-scale Coffee and Tea Growers Globally

In Laos, CARE works with coffee growing communities in Dak Cheung district, Sekong Province to increase income and improve nutrition for remote ethnic women and their communities, through inclusive and gender sensitive coffee value chain development. CARE works with ethnic minorities across 30 villages, including Mon-Khmer ethnic women and men. Two-thirds of these communities identified coffee as their main source of cash income. The program will empower them through strengthened technical and organizational capacities for improved productivity so that ethnic minority women benefit from increased income and profitability in the Arabica coffee value chain. CARE works in close collaboration with the private sector (Outspam and Pakson Highlands) who work in the Arabica coffee value chain and connects producers and private sector buyers to offer fair prices and raise the profile of women in the value chain.

In Myanmar, CARE managed the TEA project, which worked across the tea value chain to improve the business enabling environment for ex-opium farmers of Kokang. CARE increased access to credit, provided technical training and market information and improved the regulatory environment and built farmers’ understanding of taxation and export. TEA also worked with stakeholders to promote registration, branding and marketing, market analysis and understanding quality requirements, to facilitate the integration of tea growers into the tea value chains. Farmers’ incomes increased four-fold through the project’s duration.

Sri Lanka accounts for a third of all tea produced globally. 6.2% of the population live on plantations in the Central Province where Tamils of South Indian origin still make up a large proportion of tea plantation workers – the historical remnants of a brutal system of bonded labor. These communities perform badly across most development indicators with poor health and education conditions and plantation communities find themselves marginalized. Women are especially vulnerable, often face discrimination and are generally confined to the plucking of tea leaves. They work longer hours and more days in a year than men and often in difficult weather conditions. Gender-based violence is particularly high in the estates though rarely reported and social norms often excuse such behavior. Although historically marginalized, CARE is working with communities to facilitate their access to socioeconomic and political rights to upgrade their status as equal to the Citizens of Sri Lanka. The projects collectively benefit more than 465, 727 Tamil plantation workers, a large percentage of whom are women, to increase women’s access and rights in the workforce to increase human capital and household prosperity.
Annalechchamy thought the conditions that generations of workers had experienced before her were never going to change. Like many within the community, Annalechchamy had been deprived of even basic citizenship rights until the Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act was passed in 2003. She was afraid of even talking to the estate management, let alone negotiating workers’ rights. That was about to change.

'Including the Excluded', an initiative that works to improve the lives of the tea plantation workers, is implemented by CARE International in Sri Lanka and funded by the EU. Supported by the initiative, Annalechchamy received training in leadership and opportunities to participate in decision-making. She is now, step by step, working to overcome the parochial beliefs that discourage women from taking on positions of importance. She has also become one of the first female, community level trade union leaders.

“I started as a volunteer, but after I received training, I am no longer scared to talk with the estate management... I speak freely!”

- Annalechchamy - tea plantation Worker