

FAIRTRADE TEA: EARLY IMPACTS IN MALAWI



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**FAIRTRADE
FOUNDATION**

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This briefing paper is drawn from a research study exploring the impact that Fairtrade is having for three tea producing groups in Malawi. It is intended to benchmark the situation for the organisations, farmers, workers and wider community in the first year or two following certification and identify the initial impacts of Fairtrade. It is the first stage of a longer-term study to assess the difference that Fairtrade is making for these tea producers and to provide learnings about how the Fairtrade model can be improved to maximise its impact.

1. AT A GLANCE: TEA IN MALAWI

- The tea industry in Malawi dates from 1891
- Malawi is now the second largest tea producer in Africa after Kenya
- Tea production is currently estimated at 49,000 tonnes per year, on average
- Tea is produced by 21 factories (16 owned by UK-based companies and five by locally-owned enterprises)
- There are approximately 10,000 smallholder tea farmers in Malawi
- After tobacco, tea is the second biggest export earner for Malawi (some years third to sugar)
- Tea accounts for 8% of export earnings
- Tea is an important employer, with an estate labour force of 40,000-50,000 people at peak season
- Malawian tea is of good quality and has a sought-after red colour for blending
- It is exported to the UK (35%), South Africa (26%) and also to Kenya, USA and Canada, Japan, Pakistan and other countries in Europe
- As of February 2010, there are four Fairtrade certified tea producers in Malawi which comprise just over 9,800 small farmers and up to 2,600 workers.

Study methodology

This study was carried out by an independent research team from the Natural Resources Institute (NRI) and took place between May and September 2009. The research used a participatory livelihoods approach in which producer and worker organisations, their members, their families, their communities and the stakeholders who influence or interact with them are studied across organisational, economic, social, political, institutional and technical dimensions. The methodology comprised four components: review of relevant information; review of the perspectives of local, district and national-level stakeholders;

exploration of impact on the three organisations through meetings, workshops, focus group discussions, case studies and data collection; feedback meetings with the three organisations and with the Fairtrade Foundation. The producer organisations were selected as they were the only certified Malawian tea producers selling into the Fairtrade market at the time of study. The report provides a baseline that will be updated and compared with further research visits scheduled for 2010 and 2012 in order to get a picture of the impact that Fairtrade is having over a period of time.

2. ABOUT THE PRODUCER GROUPS

- **Satemwa Tea Estates Ltd** is a family-run business which grows 90 hectares of tea. It has its own factory with a permanent workforce of up to 2,600 who are the principal Fairtrade beneficiaries. Green leaf is also purchased from more than 170 smallholder farmers.
- **Sukambizi Association Trust** is the largest tea association in Malawi. It sells its green leaf to Lujeri Estates which processes and markets it including to Fairtrade markets.
- **Eastern Outgrowers Trust** is a small farmer organisation which sells its green leaf tea to Eastern Produce Malawi which processes and markets the made tea on their behalf including to Fairtrade buyers



	Satemwa	Sukambizi	Eastern Outgrowers
Type of organisation:	Hired labour plantation	Smallholder tea association	Smallholder tea organisation
Number of members/workers:	1,700-2,600 workers (lean-peak season)	5,700 members	3,250-3,500 members
Fairtrade certified in:	2007	September 2008	June 2007
First Fairtrade sales in:	December 2007	January 2009	November 2007
Green leaf sales by members:¹	n/a	6.5 million kg/year	5.6 million kg/year
Made tea produced:²	2.5 million kg/year	1.9 million kg/year	1.2 million kg/year
Proportion of tea sold under Fairtrade terms:	60% (2008)	37.5% (2009)	31.7% (2007-09)
Total amount of premium received (US\$):	698,000	375,000 ³	496,000
Date first premium received:	September 2008	May 2009	December 2007
Contract situation:	Processes own green leaf and purchases from nearby outgrowers	100% of green leaf sold to Lujeri Estates (five-year contract)	100% of green leaf sold to Eastern Produce Malawi (open-ended contract)

1. Green leaf is freshly picked tea prior to processing

2. Made tea is the final product after processing (oxidation and drying)

3. When the field research was carried out, premium expenditure had not yet begun. However projects have been identified and democratically decided by members and were due to get underway in late 2009.

3. THE MALAWIAN TEA INDUSTRY

Tea plants were first brought to Malawi from Kew Gardens, England in 1891 and the tea industry is now the second largest export earner for the country. The Malawian government is keen to see growth in the sector, recognising its potential for increased foreign exchange earnings, and would like to encourage smallholder production and also see more tea processed in-country. They would also like to improve the government contribution to the promotion, marketing and packaging of Malawian products including tea through the Malawian Export Promotion Council (MEPC). Malawian tea is well placed to compete on world markets due to its low incidence of pests, potentially good profit margins and the fact that it has a characteristic orange/red colour, much sought after by buyers and blenders. Prospects for the sector have improved through the consolidation of the industry, progressive development of superior cultivar teas, selective investment in irrigation, efficiency improvements, three relatively good production years since 2004 and the development of mutually beneficial relationships between the estates and smallholder producers.

The sector is well organised through the Tea Association of Malawi (TAML), an association of the country's major tea growing companies. The TAML has developed a set of practices and mechanisms for review relating to hired labour and smallholders that have significantly improved the terms and conditions on which the estate sector engages with both groups. The drive for higher standards in employment, contracting, environmental, social and other areas has been underway for several years and Fairtrade labelling is now adding to that impetus, with four relatively newly Fairtrade certified producers.⁴

One problem for smallholders is the lack of price incentive to increase quality to the level of estate tea. Financing for new growers has been identified as critical to smallholders for planting material, land preparation and fertiliser.⁵

Estates are the only value-chain actor currently offering credit to existing smallholder tea growers. Further limitations to smallholder growth in Malawi are:⁶

- Lack of a transparent, committed and efficient organisation to manage and coordinate activities of the sub-sector
- Acute need for a reliable supply of tea planting materials
- Need for a revolving fund for a production input support programme (given fertiliser costs rose much more steeply than price of tea during 2008/9)
- Intensity and reach of extension services to tea growers
- Insufficient capacity building and facilities for smallholder tea associations and their committees⁷
- Need for infrastructural development in smallholder tea areas, especially the road network
- Lack of attention to HIV/Aids and environmental conservation

3.1 Challenges for smallholders (Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers)

All the members of these smallholder farmers' organisations have small tea gardens as part of a diversified set of farming activities, with the majority owning less than 0.3ha of tea. The soils, climatic conditions and sloping ground of the area are very well suited to growing tea. Tea earnings represent up to 70% of smallholder income although farmers grow other crops including maize, cassava, pineapples, bananas and sugar cane for domestic consumption and sale to local markets. Maize is the main staple and households usually require six bags per family member per year. Most of that must be bought in using cash from tea sales rather than through subsistence-growing. Virtually all of these farmers receive no remittances from other family members to help support them.

4. The fourth Fairtrade certified group in Malawi is Mswadzi Association Ltd. They only began selling into the Fairtrade market after the research started and so were not included in the study.

5. Oliva M and Agar J, 2006. Credit supply and demand in the tea sector in Malawi. Food Secretariat Joint Task Force Technical Secretariat and USAID Deepening Malawi's Micro-finance Sector Project. Kadale Consultants, Malawi.

6. National Smallholder Tea Development Committee in collaboration with the Tea Association of Malawi, 2005. The Smallholder tea sub-sector in Malawi. New Strategy for Development. NSTDC and TAM, Malawi.

7. Capacity is most urgently needed in administration, business management, agronomy, production economics and post-harvest handling

The majority of the farmers live in houses with thatched rather than iron sheet roofs, around 99% of farmers have no electricity or running water to their homes and only 20% have bank accounts. Although over 90% of the children of these farmers are able to go to primary school, only 25% on average are in a position to continue on to secondary schooling.

The main challenge faced by households that rely solely on tea for their livelihood (food security and income) is that they receive much of their income at the time when food prices are highest. So even if they do make enough money during the peak tea growing season (December-May) much of it is spent on the purchase of food, leaving them with little or no income to meet other household needs. During the dry, off-peak season, little tea is harvested and sold and so farmers do not have enough income available to buy food even though maize prices are at their lowest. During this period farmers reported that they live 'a day at a time', hoping that tomorrow will take care of itself.

People used to rely on cassava in this area, but now the majority depend on tea. People were converted to believe in tea because they were told that they would reduce their poverty – but they have ended up perpetuating their poverty. Many people I know think of slashing their tea bushes and put back cassava. But doing so is like killing your own child since the little we earn, we get it from tea.

Mr. Fayson Tchale, Sukambizi Association Trust

The sentiments expressed by Fayson were common amongst many of the farmers. While people have benefited from growing tea, the majority believe they are still at subsistence levels as they barely produce enough tea to purchase food for the day.

3.2 Challenges for tea estate workers (Satemwa)

Workers at Satemwa come from the 14 villages located on and around the estate (approximately 50% of permanent employees live on the estate itself). Off-estate, only 40% of the workers' houses have iron roofs and only 20% have access to safe drinking water. There are eight primary schools and five secondary schools although around 45% of the workers' children drop out of primary schooling while only 30% continue with secondary education. This is in

part because of the low pass rates at primary level and also because the large family sizes put pressure on the ability of families to pay for secondary education. Many of the workers grow their own maize for household consumption but need to rely on their wages to buy the majority of what they consume. Around 60% of the households run out of food by December although tea and a meal are provided each day by the estate.

4. THE IMPACT OF FAIRTRADE SO FAR

4.1 Stronger, better-run farmers' organisations

Considerable organisational change, both structural and procedural, has led to greater democracy, transparency and accountability within the producer organisations because of the requirements of Fairtrade certification. This has given greater voice to smallholder tea producers both within their organisations and also through them to the national level. For both Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers, democratic premium committee structures are now in place to manage the Fairtrade premium, bringing together members and village chiefs. Regular meetings occur in which the majority of members participate and are consulted on premium project priorities and any other issues which are concerning them. In the case of Sukambizi in particular, the premium priorities identified closely reflected those of members, giving a strong sense of ownership over the projects.

4.2 A greater voice for workers on larger tea estates

For Satemwa estate workers, there is now a defined leadership structure in place, with a Joint Body (JB) managing the Fairtrade premium which was introduced in mid-2006 as one of the organisation's compliance measures to achieve Fairtrade certification. Its membership is drawn from across the workforce including security and junior health staff supported by management representatives. The JB is divided into sub-committees dealing with education, finance, water and health, food security and environment, and infrastructure projects. Satemwa also now implements a gender policy as part of its Fairtrade development plans which ensures that 50% of the JB is made up of female members.⁸

8. Both Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers have also implemented a gender policy with between 20-30% of decision-making posts on the premium committee occupied by women.

4.3 Empowering farmers and workers

Training and support has been provided by the Fairtrade system to producers for example in financial management, book keeping and budgeting. This has started the empowerment process for premium committee and JB members, enabling them to understand their function and roles. However more is needed because the farmers and workers have limited educational qualifications or experience in running such bodies. The Joint Body at Satemwa has been well supported by a Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) volunteer to identify and manage premium projects.⁹ Significant ongoing support has also been provided to Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers by the Lujeri and Eastern Produce Malawi estates respectively to ensure that the producer organisations are able to comply with Fairtrade standards. In future a proportion of the Fairtrade premium will be used to further develop human and infrastructural capacity so that in the long term the small farmer organisations can function more independently of the estates to which they sell their tea.

Throughout the discussions with the various categories of workers at Satemwa, they all noted a significant change in the way they were treated by management. They felt able to put forward their concerns to management with confidence. The combined effect of improvement in tea workers' conditions and voice (through participation in the JB) has resulted in greatly improved workforce motivation, increased demand for work at Satemwa and increased gender equality.

4.4 Increasing market access for small farmers

Fairtrade certification has facilitated access to markets previously unavailable to the farmers of Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers. The direct trading relationship between them and their respective estates is a good one, borne of mutual benefit – assured, guaranteed markets supported by long-term contracts and source of credits/inputs for the farmers and a reliable source of green leaf for the estate factories which are keen to retain 'their' smallholders to boost their overall output of processed tea. However the effort put in by the estates goes beyond hard-nosed capitalism and also

represents a genuine commitment to the social and economic development of the smallholder sector.

4.5 Improving working conditions and wages

Satemwa had a good record on its treatment of labour before certification but a combination of the need to comply with Fairtrade standards and funds from the Fairtrade premium has improved things further. For example, regulations on spraying, overtime and maternity leave have all improved due to certification compliance. Now sprayer operators must not handle chemicals for more than four hours per day; more protective clothing has been purchased for workers handling chemicals; and overtime has been capped at 60 hours per month.¹⁰ These measures have contributed to a general improvement in the health and safety standards for the workforce while education (for children and adults) and healthcare have improved due to the Fairtrade premium (see section 4.7 for more details).

So far, 600 workers at Satemwa have been provided with mini solar panels. The workers said that these had greatly contributed to their net household income since they no longer had to buy paraffin which was a substantial cost to their monthly expenditure especially for those with young children who woke at night to breastfeed and attend to their children's needs. The panel can take up to two bulbs and also charges radios and phones. This is an indirect improvement on the wage of the workers (saving an average of MK600 per worker per month on batteries, paraffin and mobile phone charging fees, equivalent to two days wages for the average plucker). These panels will eventually be provided to all workers on the estate.



Using the mini solar panels at Satemwa © Anette Kay

9. The VSO volunteer was on a nine-month contract until October 2009. The government stopped Satemwa working with VSO because it is a non-profit organisation. VSO is appealing this decision.

10. Fairtrade standards require overtime to be capped at 48 hours per month although exceptions can be applied for in the case of 'duty work' or when workers are 'on call'.

Box 1: Adult education classes at Satemwa

The adult education programme, initiated by the Joint Body and supported by the Fairtrade premium and Satemwa Tea Estates Ltd, is reported to be the largest in Malawi.

There are 550 adult pupils, aged between 18 and 80, of which approximately 60% are women. Classes are open to workers, their spouses and near relatives and cover the primary curriculum plus English and life skills. They are run five days per week from 4.30-6.30pm.

The Fairtrade premium funds are vital to cover the costs of around MK105,000 per month (£400) which comprise a supplement to the government teachers' salaries for these additional lessons and the necessary teaching materials. The project builds on the significant work already done by Satemwa Tea Estates Ltd and the schools are hosted in the main Satemwa School built by the estate and in a government primary school in the Sambankhanga area.

The classes finally took off because of the complementary micro-solar project also funded by the Fairtrade premium which enables the classes to run into the darkness hours after work allowing more people to attend.

Some workers are now preparing to sit their Standard 8 exams, and there are 70-year-olds learning to read for the first time. Parents are also allowing their children to stay in school now they understand its importance for themselves, and workers are finishing the education they were denied as children. The standard of English has improved across the estate, leading to increased confidence, better record keeping, higher motivation and promotions.

Most of us dropped out of school without knowing how to read and write. We are happy that the company through the Joint Body has introduced adult literacy classes to enable us to upgrade our knowledge. A Satemwa tea plucker



Box 2: Rucussana Negow's story



Rucussana is one of four children. She is 17 and has two younger sisters aged 14 and 12. Both their parents died in 2004 and since then they have been staying with their elder brother who has three children of his own. Rucussana is currently in Form 2 but could have been in Form 4 by now.

She passed her Standard 8 Examinations in 2006 but did not have the money to go to secondary school. Her brother, who sells okra at Thyolo market, makes very little money to feed a family of eight. In 2007, she started Form 1 at Mpinji Community Day Secondary School following a promise by the Social Welfare Department in the Ministry of Women and Child Development that they would support her. However, she was later told that the Social Welfare Department did not in fact have the budget.

Through the school, she was introduced to the Joint Body at Satemwa which, following consultations and interviews, agreed to support her instead. Using the Fairtrade premium, her school fees for four terms have been paid and she will be supported until she completes Form 4. 'Fairtrade has really assisted me because otherwise I would just be staying at home. It has kept me in school,' she said, adding that she would like to go for a nursing course after secondary school.

4.6 Supporting smallholder farmers

Members of both Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers have opted to spend a proportion of their Fairtrade premium on activities and inputs that will help them improve their tea quality, yield and efficiency and which have previously been identified as key to smallholder development (see page 3). These include:

- Fertiliser subsidies to members
- Tea plant provision and development of tea nurseries
- Revolving credit fund
- Farm inputs
- Construction and renovation of leaf weighing sheds/offices for members
- Tractors

4.7 Promoting social development

4.7.1 Educational improvement

As previously mentioned, the education of farmers' and workers' children, while good at primary level, falls away considerably by secondary school age. All of the farmers and workers interviewed expressed a desire to see the situation for their children improve in the future. Through the Fairtrade premium some initial steps towards this have been taken

including:

- Provision of 135 school desks for Satemwa primary school
- Construction of classroom blocks at three local primary schools which also benefits the wider community
- Adult education classes initially for over 500 Satemwa workers with the aim of expanding into surrounding communities (See Box 1)
- Provision of bursaries for 60 students drawn from workers' families and the wider community to attend secondary school (See Box 2)

4.7.2 Health-related improvements

A number of health care-linked projects have also been initiated with the Fairtrade premium including:

- Provision of mosquito nets and anti-malarial drugs at reduced cost to workers
- Construction of a maternity wing and two ambulance garages at Thyolo and Muloza hospitals which also benefits the wider community
- Provision of piped clean water to Satemwa and surrounding communities through the drilling of 11 boreholes

Since I was born and now I have four children, the first time to drink clean water is from this borehole that the Joint Body has brought to us! We have only been surviving by the grace of God because we have been sharing the same water with our animals! lament from one lady in Mbeluko village, Thyolo

4.7.3 Wider community impacts

The producer organisations have also used the Fairtrade premium for other initiatives which, like those mentioned already, benefit the community more generally including:

- Improvements to a number of local roads
- Building of seven footbridges to improve access to schools and the workplace
- Construction of a community hall

5. CHALLENGES FOR FAIRTRADE

It is clear that Fairtrade has raised hopes in the farming communities and within the workforce concerning their socio-economic development. Although still at an early stage, benefits of Fairtrade in the Malawian tea sector are beginning to emerge. However:

- The two smallholder producer organisations studied are still fragile, with the farmers still dependent on their respective Estates. The capacity building support from the Fairtrade labelling system to date has helped, but should only be seen as a start. The organisations will require considerable additional support and capacity strengthening before they are able to operate independently of the estates. Further

professional support and facilities in administration, financial management, information management, communications and technical project management for both the premium committees and also the JB at the Fairtrade certified estate is needed so that they can make further progress in empowering workers and members.

This will also ultimately enable the smallholder organisations to assume more control over the trading process. To this end, in February 2010, FLO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) to work together to provide capacity building support to smallholder tea producers across the world, including Malawi.¹¹

- Producers would like to see the Fairtrade standards being made less restrictive and more appropriate to the local context. Managers at Satemwa in particular felt that greater flexibility in the interpretation of standards would be helpful. For example the Fairtrade standard requires overtime to be limited to 12 hours per week. However, Malawi experiences sharp spikes in production during the rainy season and green leaf tea needs to be plucked and processed within hours to avoid perishing. Satemwa management felt that compliance with the overtime standards was problematic and could damage production. Workers also expressed their desire for the extra overtime hours during peak periods for the extra income that it brings. It is important for the Fairtrade system to ensure the correct balance between safeguarding conditions for workers without placing too high a burden on estates.



Tea nursery at Eastern Outgrowers © Anette Kay

11. The ETP is an alliance of 20 tea companies working together to improve the sustainability of the tea sector.

- Costs of certification for producers are perceived as a barrier. The producer organisations felt that without the sort of external support and funding that Sukambizi and Eastern Outgrowers have enjoyed from their respective estates these could be obstacles to other disadvantaged small holder producers being able to access Fairtrade.¹² Although FLO administer a certification fund specifically to assist with producer certification fees, the Fairtrade system needs to continue to ensure that certification fees are not a perceived or actual barrier to participation of the most disadvantaged producers.

- At the time of fieldwork (mid-2009), Satemwa, Lujeri and Eastern Produce Malawi were concerned about a dip in sales to Fairtrade markets which naturally raises their concerns about the long-term sustainability of the market. Some expressed concerns that the size of the Fairtrade premium was too high and may put off potential buyers.

What we would like to plead with Fairtrade however is that they have started something and raised some hopes. So they must not disappear into thin air and leave farmers in suspense. Quote from management of Eastern Produce Malawi

However such views, while understandable, perhaps do not take account of exceptional sales in 2007/2008 for Malawian tea due to

windfall gains resulting from the civil unrest in Kenya which hit tea production and caused the overnight doubling of tea prices in that country. Such perspectives are important to better understand market demand in an increasingly global economy. To this end, FLO have recently introduced a Global Product Management function on core Fairtrade commodities (coffee, tea, cotton, cocoa, bananas, sugar) as a means of helping producers build more effective and sustainable relationships with traders through improved information and understanding of market needs and trends. In February 2010, FLO also launched a review of the tea standard and pricing model in order to ensure that the Fairtrade model continues to evolve in line with the tea industry and needs of producers. It is due to complete its work in September 2010.¹³

The Fairtrade Foundation is also making tea a major focus in its public awareness activities through 2010 to encourage more consumers to opt for Fairtrade tea thus creating demand from tea companies that in turn will drive increased Fairtrade tea sales and Fairtrade premium returns to producers. In this way it is hoped that the sustainability of Fairtrade tea can be assured for producers and that they can continue to share in the overall growth in the Fairtrade market.



Weighing green leaf tea at Sukambizi © Anette Kay

12. For example Sukambizi's FLO certification fees of approximately US\$7800 are equivalent to 2% of the Fairtrade premium payment that they have received to date. There were also one-off costs for establishing the Sukambizi Association Trust of approximately US\$16,000 equivalent to an additional 5% of the premium received

13. For further details please contact Lee Byers, FLO Global Product Manager for tea at l.byers@fairtrade.net

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that even just one to two years following Fairtrade certification (a very short time-frame, particularly in economic development terms) there have been some positive impacts for all three tea producer organisations. Some of these have come as a result of Fairtrade certification and the application of the standards themselves, such as improvements in the democratic functioning of smallholder farmer organisations, and the improvement of working conditions on the certified estate.

The most immediate tangible benefits however have been driven by the access to 'new' Fairtrade markets and the resulting Fairtrade premiums at a time when extenuating circumstances in Kenyan tea markets brought windfall sales volumes to Malawi. It is therefore important to manage future expectations, recognising that market conditions in 2007/08 were exceptionally favourable. Thus future sales volumes and Fairtrade premium payments, though potentially more modest, nevertheless still have the potential to bring substantive long-term benefits to farmers, workers and their communities.

The significant sums of Fairtrade premium that the three organisations have received (cumulatively almost US\$1.6 million between late 2007 and 2009) are starting to translate into projects that benefit the short- and longer-term livelihoods of both individual farmers and

workers, their organisations, and their communities. Whilst not all monies have yet been spent, substantive progress has already been made through the delivery of water bore holes, medical care and related infrastructure, schooling and bursaries, adult literacy programmes, solar lighting, bridge and road improvements and farm inputs amongst other things.

Looking to the future, these initial gains need to be consolidated by attaining closer trading relationships between producers and key markets to help sustain tea sales and Fairtrade premium returns in order to drive further sustainable developmental impact in coming years. This remains a major challenge in countries like Malawi, where financial and technical resources are limited in comparison with more developed tea producers in the region.

Recognising the scale of the challenges faced by producers, and with a desire to act upon learnings from other impact research to date, FLO have established a number of programmes of work to help facilitate producer participation in Fairtrade. This includes the establishment of a Product Advisory Council for tea with both producer and trader representatives, which will consider some of the challenges facing tea producers in Malawi and elsewhere, while a recently established Global Product Management function for tea will help reconcile global supply and demand patterns to the benefit of trading partners and ultimately Fairtrade producers.



Workers at Satemwa on their way to adult literacy classes © Anette Kay

This briefing paper is taken from the report 'Longitudinal Impact Assessment Study of Fairtrade Certified Tea Producers and Workers in Malawi' by Barry Pound and Alex Phiri (NRI) for the Fairtrade Foundation.

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