

SGD Club Berlin

I was born in Darjeeling, the home of the Darjeeling tea industry, founded on the platform of Colonialism.

Amongst the oppressive system of governance, the colonial system is possibly the most exploitative. The intent is to appropriate trade opportunities and in the process the subduers impose their cultural, economic and religious practices on the subjugated. While autocrats control every aspect of life of the civil society, the colonists alter the cultural fabric of society. This impacts the identity of the populace.

On the tea estates in India, the present day workers are descendants of the people who were brought in as slaves and lived at a subsistence level with bare minimum being provided to them in kind. Coming into the business of growing tea, my goal was to balm the hurt caused through the prevalent system of governance and bring back a sense of self-belief and self-respect and create an environment of hope. This took working on many fronts and through many years.

Social & Cultural

- 1) Education, to my mind, is the best gift that one can get; education empowers one to make informed life choices. Darjeeling is ahead in literacy levels but the state of Assam still lags in this basic requirement. In Darjeeling, the company provides primary education and further the children have access to higher education in the nearby towns. Also, a good structure of roads makes it easy for the students to travel to the schools in the towns close-by. In Assam, we have plans to improve provision for education at the estates and thereby restore a sense of self-esteem.
- 2) Secondly, we have created an environment of self-expression through communication and interaction, such that they can actively participate in the development of their communities. They are being supported and encouraged to promote and preserve their culture through social activities like folk dance, music and Practicing of their rituals.
- 3) In 1994, our estate was the first to be registered in the Fair-Trade Register. In the Fair-Trade Committee, workers are given absolute rights to decide on Fairtrade Projects, changing the hierarchy in favour of the workers.
- 4) In 1997, we started the Income Augmentation Programme (IAP) to facilitate additional income generation opportunities to supplement what they earned from the estate. Under this, the workers and their families cultivate ginger and turmeric in their homesteads to be marketed by the

management on a profit sharing basis. This is to encourage the entrepreneurial skills in the workforce and through this develop a sense of independence.

Darjeeling Organic Tea Estates Pvt Ltd (DOTEPL) is the only company to have the workers' farms certified organic.

5) Under the "Infant Nutrition Programme" fresh milk is given free of charge to infants to have a healthy upcoming generation.

Climate Change

The colonial system is employed for trade benefits and a callous method is employed to mine the territory. In the tea industry too farming was undertaken with no respect for the eco-system of the land. Chemicals used to enhance production left the soil defiled and the environment polluted. To reverse the damage we adopted Organic agriculture and bring health back to the farms and its people.

2030 Agenda Setting

Our Company envisions a new model of housing for the workers. A plan under which a land trust will be created to hold land transferred by the company, to be used for making housing colonies for the workers. These are proposed to be secure gated communities with all the daily amenities available within. The communities will be provided with potable water, proper sanitation, continuous supply of electricity through renewable sources; hydro energy in Darjeeling and solar in Assam. The houses will be given to the workers at a very nominal rent. This will create a sense of security among the workers who have been landless over generations.

Sustainable Development Goals

1. No Poverty

We work with an ethical agriculture model that provides the employees at the tea estates, job security along with housing facility such that their standard of living is adequate.

2. Zero Hunger

Employees of DOTEPL are assured of income above the minimum set by the Government. Therefore, they are able to effectively take care of the nutrition requirement of their families.

3. Good Health & Wellbeing

One of the most important mottos of Organic Bio-Dynamic agriculture is to ensure good health and wellbeing of society. Being Organic & Bio-Dynamic ensures a pollution free and clean environment, which has resulted in the reduction of dermal, optical, peptic and respiratory diseases.

4. Quality Education

We at DOTEPL believe that Education is the pillar of civilization; the company runs 36 schools at its plantations, which provide quality primary education to the children of the employees for free. Education includes sports, cultural activities and computer training. DOTEPL offers scholarship to meritorious students, from the employees' families, to pursue higher education.

5. Gender Equality

At DOTEPL, there is no gender discrimination across functions. The workforce at the estates is positive in favour of women with 56% being women employees. The remuneration is based on work and is free of any gender bias.

6. Clean Water & Sanitation

DOTEPL ensures clean water supply and as we follow Organic practices, there is no grey water generation.

7. Affordable & Clean Energy

DOTEPL was amongst the first to set up Micro Hydro Projects at its plantations without diverting or mining water. By 2025, DOTEPL aspires to produce 100% of its tea using renewable energy. Our mid-term goal is to supply green energy to the employees to meet their domestic requirements.

8. Decent Work & Economic Growth

DOTEPL provides vocational training to the members of the employees' families for skill development and thereby prepares them for self-reliance

9. Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure

DOTEPL collaborates with leading Education and Research Centers like Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) to develop technology for energy efficient and high out-put machines.

10. **Reduced Inequalities**

DOTEPL does not indiscriminate on caste, creed or religion and endeavours to sincerely provide equal opportunities to all.

11. **Sustainable Cities & Communities**

DOTEPL ensures free potable water, effective sewage, garbage collection and recycling of waste materials for its communities. In a medium to long term, it envisages gated communities for its employees, where most of the everyday needs of the people are met.

12. **Responsible Consumption & Production**

DOTEPL practices Biodynamic agriculture, a system that advocates self-sufficiency with minimum use of off-farm inputs, judicious use of all inputs and reuse and recycle of resources wherever possible. The DOTEPL farms make their own compost and agricultural inputs; crop residues and waste is composted. For the most part packing material is reused and recycled.

Teas produced by the Bio Dynamic method are environment sensitive and clean products.

13. **Climate Action**

DOTEPL by virtue of its Bio-Dynamic agricultural production sequesters substantial C in the soil. The sequestered value overruns the value of emissions by many folds. All the employees at the farms cook with LPG. DOTEPL focuses on reducing consumption of fossil fuel and is working towards producing 100% of its tea with renewable energy by 2025. We aim to reduce the use of plastic and work with only compostable plastic in the future.

14. **Life Below water**

As Bio Dynamic practices are followed on the farms, DOTEPL never discharges any grey water. This protects the natural water bodies within its territory. It ensures healthy aqua life. Water bodies are never filled, favouring aquatic life.

15. **Life On Land**

The DOTEPL farms have a vibrant and healthy ecological balance with well conserved indigenous species of plants and animals.

16. **Peace, Justice and Institutions**

DOTEPL ensures workers' representation and participation in decision making process. The workers' rights are well represented and protected through Workers' Unions.

17. **Partnerships for the Goals**

To realize the set goals, partnering with the workers is essential. The workers are given cows that give them milk; the dung and cow urine is bought by the company for making farm inputs. Not only does it make available an essential farm input, this creates additional income for the workers as well. As a policy of no chemical use, the company gets the homesteads of the workers certified organic. It would not be possible to meet the set objectives without such collaboration.