

YOUTH AND DECENT WORK IN THE TEA SECTOR: MAPPING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Youth employment and decent work in the tea sector are examined, particularly in the context of sustainable development. Tea, while contributing to global livelihoods and economies, is often criticized for exploitative labour practices, especially among young workers. Using a multidimensional lens, this study examines factors like working conditions, wages, access to education, and technology.

According to the research, young tea workers face challenges such as limited access to education and skills development, poor working conditions, and low wages. Additionally, challenges related to gender inequality, lack of social security, and limited access to healthcare are explored. However, the research highlights opportunities to promote decent work for youth in the tea sector. A few examples are: Education and training investments, technological advancements, sustainable practices, empowerment of young workers, and stakeholder collaboration.

Youth, decent work, and sustainable development in the tea sector are complex relationships. The finding provides policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders with valuable insights into challenges and opportunities for young tea workers.

KEYWORDS: *Challenges, Decent Work, Education, Gender Equality, Health,, Sustainable Development, Social Security, Tea Sector, Youth.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The tea sector, renowned for its economic significance and cultural resonance, stands as a cornerstone of global agriculture. As the demand for tea continues to surge, this industry plays a pivotal role in shaping economies and livelihoods across the globe (Smith & Brown, 2020). Amidst this economic tapestry, the engagement of youth in the tea sector emerges as a critical determinant, influencing not only the industry's vibrancy but also contributing to broader socio-economic development.

The youth, constituting a substantial demographic force, find themselves at the intersection of opportunity and challenge within the tea sector. Their participation in various facets of tea cultivation, processing, and distribution not only addresses labour demands but also holds the potential to infuse innovation and dynamism into an age-old industry (Jones, 2018).

Understanding the complexities of youth employment in the tea sector becomes paramount for unravelling the sector's impact on economic development and fostering sustainable practices.

However, the commendable contributions of the tea sector are accompanied by a spectrum of challenges, particularly concerning the nature of work available to the youth. Exploitative labour practices, substandard working conditions, and limited access to education and training pose significant threats to the well-being and development of young workers in tea plantations (ILO, 2021). These challenges not only compromise the immediate welfare of the youth but also cast shadows on the long-term sustainability of the tea industry.

This research article, titled "Youth and Decent Work in the Tea Sector: Mapping Opportunities and Challenges for Sustainable Development," embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between youth employment and decent work within the tea sector. Employing a multi-dimensional lens, the study aims to identify and analyse the opportunities and challenges faced by young workers, with a broader goal of contributing to the discourse on sustainable development in the tea industry.

Through empirical data and literature synthesis, this research seeks to provide insights that inform policies and practices, fostering an environment where youth in the tea sector can not only find gainful employment but also contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development of the industry.

1.1. Significance of the tea Sector and Youth Employment

The tea sector contributes significantly to global economic growth. In developing countries, where tea cultivation is a major source of income and foreign exchange (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2023), the industry contributes significantly to national economies. Moreover, the tea sector provides essential jobs for rural communities, especially for women and youth. In many tea-producing countries, young people represent a significant portion of the workforce, contributing to their household incomes and supporting their families' well-being (Sharma & Roy, 2020).

Investing in decent work for youth in the tea sector is crucial for promoting sustainable development. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), decent work includes fair wages, safe and healthy working conditions, social security, and the right to freedom of association. Ensuring these standards for young tea workers not only contributes to their economic empowerment and social inclusion but also fosters a more sustainable and equitable tea industry.

1.2. Concerns about Exploitative Labour Practices and Young Workers

Despite its economic significance, the tea industry has faced criticism for its exploitative labour practices, particularly concerning the working conditions of young workers. Young tea workers often work long hours, face dangerous working conditions, and lack access to education and training (Raychaudhuri & Sengupta, 2021). These exploitative practices not only violate young workers' rights and jeopardize their health and safety but also hinder their future opportunities and contribute to a cycle of poverty within their communities.

Moreover, young tea workers are often particularly vulnerable to gender inequality and discrimination. They may face unequal pay, limited access to leadership positions, and increased exposure to harassment and abuse (Sharma & Roy, 2020). Addressing these issues requires a

multi-pronged approach that involves strengthening labour law enforcement, promoting gender equality initiatives, and empowering young workers to advocate for their rights.

The concerns surrounding exploitative labour practices highlight the urgent need for research investigating the challenges and opportunities surrounding youth employment and decent work in the tea sector. This research aims to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of this complex issue and provide valuable insights for policymakers, industry leaders, and stakeholders to work towards a more sustainable and equitable future for young tea workers.

1.3. Objectives of the Research

1. To identify key challenges in youth employment within the tea sector
2. To explore opportunities for enhancing decent work for young tea workers
3. To understand how youth, decent work, and sustainable development are interconnected

1.4 Research Questions

1. What are the challenges faced by young workers in the tea sector?
2. What opportunities exist for promoting decent work for youth in the tea industry?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual framework: Decent work, sustainable development, and youth employment

The exploration of youth employment within the context of decent work and sustainable development necessitates a conceptual framework that integrates key constructs central to this study. This literature review elucidates the interplay between decent work, sustainable development, and youth employment, providing a foundation for understanding the complexities inherent in the tea sector.

2.1.1. Decent Work

(ILO, 1999) Decent work entails productive and gainful employment that respects workers' fundamental rights, social protection, and social dialogue. Decent work extends beyond economic considerations, emphasizing the importance of working conditions, job security, and equality in the workplace. Studies by Green, Maynard, and Crankshaw (2016) and Chen, Vanek, and Carr (2004) underscore the transformative potential of decent work, linking it to improved well-being, poverty reduction, and overall societal progress.

In the context of the tea sector, the application of the decent work framework becomes imperative, given the historical concerns surrounding exploitative labour practices. Decent work principles serve as a lens through which to assess the quality of employment opportunities available to the youth in tea plantations.

2.1.2. Sustainable Development

According to the Brundtland Report (1987), sustainable development is development that meets current needs without compromising future needs. Within the tea sector, sustainable development extends beyond economic considerations to encompass social and environmental dimensions. Studies by Lele and Kurien (1992) and Oviedo, Capello, and Barros (2019) emphasize the importance of sustainable practices in the tea industry for long-term viability.

The integration of sustainable development within the conceptual framework acknowledges the interconnectedness of economic progress, social equity, and environmental stewardship. Examining youth employment through this lens enables a comprehensive understanding of how employment practices impact not only the immediate workforce but also the broader ecosystem and future generations.

2.1.3. Youth Employment

Youth employment, a critical component of demographic dynamics, is often a catalyst for economic development. However, challenges persist, as evidenced by studies such as that of Kabeer and Natali (2013) and Munro and Welford (2018), highlighting issues of access to education, skills development, and gender disparities in youth employment. In the tea sector, the youth encounter unique challenges related to working conditions, access to education, and gender equality.

Understanding the nuances of youth employment within the tea sector requires an exploration of these challenges through the broader conceptual framework of decent work and sustainable development. This integrative approach illuminates the interconnectedness of these concepts, underscoring the need for holistic strategies that address the diverse facets of youth employment in the tea industry.

In conclusion, the conceptual framework comprising decent work, sustainable development, and youth employment forms the theoretical backbone of this research. As we delve into mapping opportunities and challenges in the tea sector, this framework guides the exploration of how fostering decent work practices contributes to sustainable development, particularly concerning the youth labour force.

2.2. Existing research on youth and decent work in the tea sector

The exploration of youth employment and decent work within the tea sector has been a subject of considerable research, illuminating the intricate dynamics and challenges faced by young workers in this critical industry.

2.2.1 Challenges Faced by Youth in the Tea Sector

Several studies have underscored the formidable challenges encountered by youth employed in tea plantations. Gupta and Dasgupta (2016) highlighted the prevalence of substandard working conditions, meagre wages, and limited access to education and training opportunities for young tea workers in India. Similarly, the global nature of these challenges is elucidated by Zhang, Dai, and Xu (2019), revealing disparities in working conditions across various tea-producing regions.

Gender-specific challenges within the tea sector have been a focal point of investigation. Kaur and Kesar (2017) conducted research shedding light on the unique difficulties faced by young female workers, including issues of discrimination, reproductive health support, and unequal access to educational and training opportunities. This body of research collectively contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges that young workers confront within the tea sector.

2.2.2 Opportunities for Improving Decent Work for Youth

Concurrently, existing research has identified opportunities for advancing decent work for youth within the tea industry. Educational and skill development initiatives have emerged as key

strategies. Bhattacharya, Singh, and Sen (2018) demonstrated the positive impact of educational programs on the employability and well-being of young tea workers in Sri Lanka. Innovations in sustainable agricultural practices and technology adoption have also been explored by Smith and Jones (2019), showcasing how these advancements can lead to improved working conditions and increased opportunities for youth in the tea sector.

The importance of stakeholder collaboration in fostering decent work opportunities for youth has also been a focal point. Rahman, Mamun, and Hossain (2021) emphasized the need for partnerships between government, industry, and civil society organizations to create an enabling environment for youth employment and promote ethical labour practices in the tea sector.

2.2.3 Gaps in Existing Literature and the Rationale for the Current Study

Despite the valuable insights provided by existing research, a comprehensive synthesis of the opportunities and challenges faced by youth in the tea sector, particularly within the framework of sustainable development, remains limited. This current research aims to address these gaps by offering a nuanced mapping of the landscape, contributing to a holistic understanding that informs policy and practice interventions for the betterment of young workers in the tea industry.

In conclusion, the existing body of research on youth and decent work in the tea sector provides a robust foundation for the current study. By building upon the identified challenges and opportunities, this research aims to contribute a nuanced perspective that advances our understanding of how sustainable development principles can guide the promotion of decent work for youth in the global tea industry.

2.3. Key challenges and opportunities identified in previous studies

The examination of youth and decent work in the tea sector has revealed a spectrum of challenges and opportunities, offering a nuanced understanding of the complexities shaping this critical intersection within the industry.

2.3.1 Challenges Faced by Youth in the Tea Sector

Existing studies, such as Gupta and Dasgupta (2016) and Lee and Kim (2020), consistently highlight the persistent challenges associated with substandard working conditions and inadequate wages for young workers in the tea sector. These challenges not only compromise the immediate well-being of the youth but also contribute to systemic issues within the industry.

The limited access to education and skill development opportunities for young workers emerges as a pervasive challenge. Research by Bhattacharya, Singh, and Sen (2018) and Zhang, Dai, and Xu (2019) underscores the need for targeted interventions to enhance the employability of youth in the tea sector.

Gender Inequality: Kaur and Kesar (2017) highlight gender-specific challenges faced by young female workers in tea plantations, including discrimination, reproductive health disparities, and unequal access to educational and training opportunities.

2.3.2 Opportunities for Improving Decent Work for Youth

Investments in Education and Training: Initiatives focusing on educational interventions and skill development programs have been identified as key strategies to enhance the employability and well-being of young tea workers. Bhattacharya et al. (2018) emphasizes the positive impact of educational programs on socio-economic status and empowerment.

Technological Advancements: According to Smith and Jones (2019), technological advancements in sustainable agriculture can improve working conditions, efficiency, and productivity in the tea industry.

Sustainable Practices: The adoption of sustainable agricultural practices emerges as an opportunity to not only improve environmental outcomes but also create opportunities for decent work, especially in areas like organic tea production and agroecology (Smith & Jones, 2019).

Empowering Young Workers: Rahman et al. (2021) emphasize the role of empowering young workers through worker organizations and advocacy for their rights, which can contribute to improved working conditions and wages.

In conclusion, the synthesis of challenges and opportunities identified in existing research provides a robust foundation for the current study. By mapping these intricacies within the tea sector, this research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding that informs strategic interventions for sustainable development and the promotion of decent work for youth in the global tea industry.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Youth and decent work in the tea sector are studied using a qualitative methodologies approach, combining primary and secondary data collection and analysis techniques. This approach allows for the collection of both first-hand data (e.g., wages, working hours) and contextual information (e.g., experiences, perceptions) to paint a more nuanced picture of the issue.

3.2. Sampling Strategy and Data Collection Methods

3.2.1. Qualitative Data Collection

Sampling: Purposive sampling is used to select participants who could provide in-depth information about their experiences as young tea workers. This included key informants such as young tea workers themselves, industry representatives, and members of civil society organizations working on youth and labour issues.

Data collection: Participants were interviewed individually to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to decent work in the tea industry. Additionally, focus group discussions were organized with groups of young tea workers to facilitate collective brainstorming and sharing of perspectives.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

3.3.1. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis: A thematic analysis approach will be used to identify recurring themes and patterns in the qualitative data. This will involve coding the transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions, identifying relevant themes, and analysing their interrelationships.

Discourse analysis: This technique will be used to analyse the ways in which young tea workers and other stakeholders discuss and understand the issues of decent work and youth employment. This will shed light on the power dynamics and underlying ideologies that shape the tea industry and its workforce.

Checklist matrix: It is a valuable method for conducting research by facilitating systematic data collection, analysis, and interpretation. By ensuring consistency and organization, it contributes to the rigor and reliability of research findings.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

Data collection was conducted with informed consent of all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality are maintained throughout the research process. Ethical clearance was sought from the relevant institutional review board before commencing the study.

4. Findings

Check List Matrix	
Profile of young tea workers and their working conditions	Demographics, Education, Employment Status, Income, Working Hours, Living Conditions, Health and Safety, Social Welfare, Gender Disparities, Training Opportunities, Community Engagement, Sustainability Practices, Youth Empowerment Programs
Challenges faced by young tea workers	Low Wages, Limited Educational Opportunities, Seasonal and Contractual Employment, Extended Working Hours, Substandard Living Conditions, Inadequate Health and Safety Measures, Lack of Social Welfare Benefits, Gender-Based Discrimination, Insufficient Training Opportunities, Limited Community Engagement, Inadequate Sustainability Practices, Absence of Youth Empowerment Programs, Unequal Access to Career Advancement, Occupational Hazards and Exposure to Chemicals, Poor Health Coverage
Opportunities for promoting decent work for youth	Invest in education and training/ Develop apprenticeship and mentorship programs/ Promote entrepreneurship and access to finance/ Improve access to information and communication technologies (ICT)/ Strengthen social protection systems/ Promote decent work practices within the tea industry/ Empower young tea workers through collective bargaining and representation/ Invest in research and development/ Promote sustainable tea production practices/ Strengthen collaboration between stakeholders

4.1 Profile of young tea workers and their working conditions

The dataset gathered reflects a diverse age range, with a significant proportion of young workers (18-30 years). Gender diversity is evident, with both male and female representation. Education levels vary, highlighting a mix of educational backgrounds, including high school, college, and dropout cases. Employment status varies from seasonal and contractual workers to permanent staff, indicating a range of job security. Monthly incomes are generally low, with potential disparities between genders. Working hours exceed standard limits for some workers, potentially impacting their well-being. Living conditions vary, with concerns about housing, sanitation, and shared living spaces. Health and safety issues are prevalent, including inadequate safety gear and training, and exposure to occupational hazards. Limited access to social welfare, healthcare, and social security is observed. Gender disparities and discrimination persist, affecting opportunities and treatment. Training opportunities are scarce, hindering skill development and career advancement. Community engagement is limited, potentially impacting social and economic empowerment. Sustainability practices and environmental concerns in the sector need

improvement. Youth empowerment programs are lacking, highlighting a need for initiatives promoting meaningful involvement.

Thus, the researchers provide a snapshot of the key findings related to the profile and working conditions of young tea workers based on the case study and focus group discussion. It highlights both challenges and opportunities for sustainable development in the sector.

4.2. Challenges faced by young tea workers:

Young tea workers face challenges related to receiving wages below minimum standards, contributing to financial instability. Access to education is limited, affecting their overall skill development and career prospects. Job insecurity due to seasonal and contractual employment arrangements poses a significant challenge. The necessity to work long hours, often exceeding legal limits, leads to fatigue and impacts overall well-being. Poor housing quality and inadequate amenities contribute to challenging living conditions. Insufficient safety measures expose workers to occupational hazards and health risks. Limited access to social security and healthcare benefits leaves workers vulnerable. Women workers face discrimination, adding an additional layer of challenges and inequities. Scarce training programs hinder skill development and career advancement. Workers have limited participation in decision-making processes, affecting social and economic empowerment. The sector faces challenges in implementing sustainable practices, impacting long-term viability. Lack of initiatives promoting youth empowerment and meaningful involvement in the tea industry. Opportunities for career growth are not evenly distributed among young tea workers. Workers are exposed to occupational hazards, including exposure to pesticides and other chemicals. Limited access to health coverage further exacerbates health-related challenges. Thus, this research provides a concise overview of the challenges faced by young tea workers.

4.3. Opportunities for promoting decent work for youth:

Provide young people with relevant skills and knowledge to improve their employability and access better jobs. Upskilling young tea workers can increase their productivity, earning potential, and bargaining power, leading to improved working conditions.

Connect experienced workers with young people to provide on-the-job training and career guidance. Apprenticeships can combine practical experience with theoretical knowledge, fostering a skilled workforce and promoting knowledge transfer.

Support young people in starting their own businesses in the tea sector or related industries. Entrepreneurship can provide young people with greater control over their work and income, offering autonomy and improved working conditions.

Equip young tea workers with digital skills and tools to enhance their connectivity and access to opportunities. ICT literacy can empower young people to connect with markets, access information and resources, and participate in decision-making processes.

Ensure access to healthcare, pensions, and other social security benefits for young tea workers. Social safety nets provide peace of mind and protection against economic shocks, contributing to overall well-being and improved working conditions.

Implement fair wages, safe working conditions, and ensure compliance with labour laws. Fair labour practices create a more sustainable and ethical tea industry, attracting and retaining young talent by offering decent work opportunities.

Encourage the formation of unions and worker associations to give young people a voice in the workplace. Collective bargaining rights allow young workers to negotiate for better working conditions and address grievances effectively.

Support research initiatives to explore new technologies, improve productivity, and create new opportunities in the tea sector. Innovative solutions can contribute to a more efficient and sustainable tea industry, leading to better working conditions and job prospects for young people.

Develop green jobs for youth and support environmentally friendly practices throughout the tea supply chain. Sustainable practices contribute to a healthier environment and can lead to the creation of new jobs in areas like renewable energy and resource management.

Encourage cooperation between governments, tea companies, NGOs, and young workers to create a more conducive environment for decent work. Young tea workers face a number of challenges and opportunities that can be addressed through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The article highlights several promising opportunities to promote decent work for young tea workers. By investing in education, skills development, promoting entrepreneurship, improving social protection, and ensuring fair labour practices, stakeholders can contribute to a more sustainable and equitable tea industry that provides young people with decent work opportunities and a brighter future.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings and Contribution to Existing Knowledge

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the profile, working conditions, and challenges faced by young tea workers, contributing significantly to the existing knowledge base on this topic. The research highlights the prevalence of precarious work arrangements, low wages, and limited access to social security benefits among young tea workers. This adds to existing literature that emphasizes the vulnerability and marginalization of young workers in the informal sector across various industries.

Furthermore, the study identified opportunities for promoting decent work for young tea workers, including investments in education and training, entrepreneurship support, and strengthening social protection systems. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions about interventions and strategies needed to improve working conditions and livelihood opportunities for young people in the tea sector.

5.2 Comparison of Findings with Previous Research

Our findings are consistent with previous research on young workers in the informal sector, which has documented similar challenges such as low wages, precarious employment, limited social protection, and lack of access to skills development opportunities. In an ILO study, young workers are disproportionately employed in informal jobs, often at low wages with poor working conditions (ILO, 2018).

However, our research offers a more nuanced understanding of the specific challenges faced by young tea workers. By focusing on a specific industry and drawing upon detailed qualitative data, we provide a deeper insight into the working realities of young people in this sector. This adds to the existing body of research by highlighting the unique context and challenges faced by young tea workers and the opportunities for improvement within this specific industry.

5.3 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is subject to certain limitations. The research primarily focused on young tea workers in India, limiting its generalizability to other countries or regions with different contexts and labour market dynamics. Additionally, the study relies on qualitative data, which while valuable for understanding individual experiences and perspectives, may not be representative of the entire population of young tea workers.

Future research could address these limitations by conducting comparative studies across different countries and regions to understand the varying experiences of young tea workers. Additionally, quantitative research methods could be used to collect data from a larger sample size, allowing for more statistically representative results. Furthermore, research could explore the role of technology in improving working conditions and promoting decent work for young tea workers, particularly in the context of digitalization and automation within the tea industry.

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the working realities of young tea workers and highlights opportunities for promoting decent work in the industry. Building upon existing knowledge and addressing the study's limitations, future research can further contribute to improving the lives and livelihoods of young tea workers, ensuring a more sustainable and equitable future for the tea sector.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Key Conclusions Drawn from the Research Findings

In conclusion, our research on “Youth and Decent Work in the Tea Sector” has illuminated critical aspects of the challenges and opportunities faced by young tea workers. The key conclusions drawn from our findings underscore the urgency of addressing issues such as low wages, limited educational access, and precarious employment conditions. Simultaneously, the identification of opportunities like skill development programs and diversified employment avenues provides a foundation for positive change.

Our study highlights the gender-based discrimination, inadequate sustainability practices, and the absence of youth empowerment programs specific to the tea sector. These conclusions emphasize the need for targeted interventions to create a more equitable, sustainable, and empowering work environment for young individuals in the tea industry.

6.2. Recommendations for Policymakers, Industry Leaders, and Stakeholders:

For Policymakers:

1. Implement and enforce policies that ensure fair wages, especially for seasonal and contractual workers.
2. Develop and support education and training programs to enhance the skills of young tea workers.
3. Enact gender-inclusive policies and initiatives to address discrimination and promote gender equality.

For Industry Leaders:

1. Diversify employment opportunities within the tea sector to provide stability and career growth.

2. Invest in sustainable agriculture practices to ensure the long-term viability of the tea industry.
3. Establish mentorship programs and career advancement opportunities for young workers.

For Stakeholders:

1. Collaborate with NGOs and government agencies to amplify the impact of social welfare and healthcare initiatives.
2. Engage in community participation and decision-making processes to empower young workers.
3. Advocate for policy reforms that prioritize the well-being of young individuals in the tea sector.

6.3. Implications for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals:

The implications of our research for achieving sustainable development goals(SDGs) are profound. Addressing the identified challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities in the tea sector aligns with multiple SDGs. Specifically:

SDG 1 (No Poverty): Fair wages and diversified employment opportunities contribute to poverty alleviation among young tea workers.

SDG 4 (Quality Education): Educational and training initiatives enhance the skills and knowledge of young individuals in the tea sector.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality): Gender-inclusive policies and the eradication of discrimination contribute to gender equality.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth): Implementation of our recommendations promotes decent work and economic growth within the tea industry.

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality): Creating a more equitable work environment reduces inequalities among young tea workers.

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): Investment in sustainable agriculture practices aligns with responsible production and consumption.

In summary, our research not only identifies challenges and opportunities but also provides actionable recommendations for stakeholders to contribute to the accomplishment of key SDGs. By prioritizing the well-being and empowerment of young workers in the tea sector, we can foster a more sustainable and equitable future for the industry and its workforce.

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