

# Tea Sustainability Awards 2017

## Eastern Produce Malawi Social Initiative

### Where Women's Welfare and Happiness meets Social, Environmental and Economic Impact!

#### The Initiative

Eastern Produce Malawi (EPM) embraced and implemented a Diversity, Inclusion and Women's Welfare policy in March 2017 to further demonstrate its commitment to providing equal opportunities to all its employees irrespective of gender. With this policy in place EPM aims at bringing women to the same level with men by encouraging women to participate and operate even in positions traditionally dominated by men. Implementation of this policy is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal number 5 the aim of which is to achieve gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The full initiative is women-only driven and is highly supported by the Directors and Management of EPM

#### Objectives

The main objective of the initiative is to fully integrate women into each and every level of business operation within EPM. The policy ensures diversification of the EPM's focus areas to include and take care of the welfare of all female employees as we believe that happiness, productivity and commitment go hand in hand with a safe and conducive work environment.

As a result of focusing on the welfare of women within the company and the setup and culture of the Malawian society, in which women are the main caretakers of the family, this initiative also has a positive impact on the families and communities around EPM.

#### Impact

Although the initiative has only been running for five months since its implementation there has already been some significant impacts noted, including the following

##### 1. Establishment of Women Welfare Committees

Each estate has formed a Diversity, Inclusion and Women's Welfare Committee (in short WWC), resulting in a total of 21 Estate WWC's and one Group WWC has been formed consisting of the chairladies of the Estate WWC's. The WWC's promote personal dignity, self-esteem and equal opportunities for all by bringing up and resolving women related issues from bottom-up and by communicating feedback on new initiatives and encouraging all female employees top-down

##### 2. Policy Implementation

The implementation of the initiative, creating awareness amongst everyone and specifically the continuous support and assistance of management to recognize and resolve the women's welfare issues has created a feeling of recognition, safety and happiness amongst the female employees.

Women feel supported by EPM in that they are employed and provide financial support to their families, while at the same time they are able to look after their children (which in Malawi is seen as the task of the woman within the household).

The company has always ensured that women are considered for any position, including senior management positions although EPM has not received many applications from women. The company has engaged a number of women in senior and middle management positions. To reach gender equality, a request was put forward by the Group WWC to the Directors in June 2017 to highly consider female employees in new job openings and communication to management on this has already taken place. EPM sees this as the next step to creating a diverse and inclusive work culture and improving productivity and commitment of their workforce.

### **3. Women Welfare Committee Meetings**

On estate level the WWC's have been organizing women only field meetings at their convenient time and location and have absorbed and resolved several women's welfare issues, just to mention a few:

- Breast feeding shelters have been built where nursing mothers express milk or breastfeed their babies twice during working hours over and above the normal breaks
- Female tea pluckers are prioritized during the last weighing round to ensure their safe home getting before dusk.
- Security has highly improved during other instances where (female) employees travel home in the dark and on known problematic and/or dangerous routes.
- Crèches are being built at each estate to ensure that toddlers have a safe and conducive environment to go to while their mothers are at work.
- Pregnant women are given lighter duties and are encouraged to go for antenatal check-ups at the district hospitals by notifying the estate nurse/clinic one day in advance.
- Women access family planning methods and advice from all Eastern Produce Malawi estate clinics
- "Under 5 clinics" take place at least once a month at all Eastern Produce Malawi estate clinics during which vaccinations for both mothers and babies are done, HIV testing and counseling is available and health education on any relevant topic takes place.

Eastern Produce Malawi is convinced that as the word of this initiative and the outcome spreads through the communities and the economic progress of the families where women work is seen, more women will be joining and become committed and hard working employees. This will again benefit the families and communities around Eastern Produce Malawi as well as the company itself.

### **Innovation**

This initiative has become a success through the fact that:

- Women who are already employed by Eastern Produce Malawi are allowed to set up this initiative all by themselves, without any intervention of men and external companies on what to do and how to resolve issues. This has created a feeling of recognition amongst the female employees of Eastern Produce Malawi and has created a feeling of connectivity between the female employees of Eastern Produce Malawi.
- Awareness was created throughout all layers of employees of the company.
- Directors and Management of Eastern Produce Malawi support the initiative and get involved in sorting out the women's welfare issues as and where necessary.

- The approach during the full implementation of this initiative has been to take small steps at a time and without using too many resources. This approach has ensured that male employees have not felt endangered and can support this initiative as well.

### Replication

Replication of the Eastern Produce Malawi's initiative on Diversity, Inclusion and Women's Welfare is possible in any company. The most critical factors for replication to become a success are:

- An already existing, small female workforce within the company and positive assertiveness (no abuse of the opportunity given) amongst this existing workforce.
- These individuals having the capability of implementing the initiative by putting a team/family/community improvement and encouragement as their goal rather than any individual gains and at the same time having knowledge of and a good insight in the cultural obstacles to be defeated.
- A highly supportive Management team (Directors included) who support diversification and inclusion of female employees and understand the positive impact this will have to the company.



**Photo 1 Group WWC**