

# Success Story of Plantation Human Development Trust

By **Ceylon Today** - June 21, 2024 2:02am

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## By Lalin I. De Silva

The Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) is a tripartite organisation established to facilitate improving the lifestyles and enhance the safety and health of the plantation community through various social welfare programmes and projects. The three parties involved are the Government of Sri Lanka, Regional Plantation Companies and some major trade unions in the plantation sector. The government is represented by the Ministries of Plantations, Finance, Health and the State Ministry for Estate Housing and Community Empowerment. The PHDT, as the main service provider to the plantation worker community, has also expanded its services through various specialised sectors to improve and deliver these services more professionally.

Taking into consideration the Plantation Human Development Trust's excellence in providing sustainable development programmes and believing that the employees are their most valuable asset, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) entrusted the PHDT to implement, improve and promote the safety and health of workers. The ILO's flagship programme, 'Safety + Health for All,' contributes towards strengthening institutional capacities, enhancing social standards and applying Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) or Workplace Health and Safety (WHS). The PHDT has always endeavoured to conduct its activities with the integration of ILO technical capacities responsibly and ethically, adopting OSH best practices and processes that ensure long-term economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Another reason the ILO selected the Plantation Human Development Trust is their recognition of financial transparency, accountability, good governance and best accounting practices by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Sri Lanka and the South Asian Federation of Accountants.

The PHDT has a talented team who are unique and differ from any other capital within the organisation, playing a more complicated role in providing and serving the plantation community. The PHDT provides a wide range of services to the plantation worker

community, including improvements to housing and infrastructure, water and sanitation, health and childcare, social mobilisation and community development. The latest project on Occupational Safety and Health for plantation workers at the workplace involves practices, methods, tools, posture and processes that workers engage in daily operations, such as soil preparation, planting, cultivation, weeding, crop treatment, harvesting, transportation, storage of produce and production processes. These operations entail the use of a variety of tools, machines and chemicals. The 'Safety + Health for All' Project of the ILO is supported by the Government of Japan to enhance the safety and health conditions of plantation workers in South Asia.

## **Health programmes**

Since the formation of the PHDT nearly 32 years ago, it has catered to workers and their families through many health programmes to promote health, prevent diseases and encourage healthy lifestyles. Some of these programmes include maternal care, child development, child protection, early childcare and development activities, health education, nutrition awareness and for the estate executives to uplift contributing to the productivity and sustainability of the industry. To address the malnutrition issue in the estate sector, in collaboration with the Palm Foundation, they were able to initiate a few kitchens. Several other measures are currently underway to further improve and strengthen the safety and health of all plantation workers. Managing safety and health is an integral part of managing a business, and they need to conduct risk assessments to identify hazards and risks in their workplaces and put measures in place to effectively control them to ensure these hazards and risks cannot cause harm to workers.

The PHDT has understood the dire need and performed strategically and systematically to expand its operations, having streamlined and implemented an array of effective project meetings in the Badulla and Galle Districts. These meetings involved Regional Plantation Companies and the Tea Smallholders Society Farmers in the Galle District at Hiniduma. In Hiniduma, 3,257 farmers attended, representing 30 Tea Smallholder Societies. In Galle, 14 RPC plantation company estates, representing Elpitiya, Watawala, and Namunukula Plantations staff and workers and in Badulla, around 29 estates staff and workers from Malwatta Valley, Maskeliya and Agarapathana Plantations participated on behalf of their respective companies. (Journalist)

These efforts not only create a direct impact on the workforce but, also capacitate and empower these estates with OSH committees, allowing estates to function more proactively in relation to OSH challenges. Additionally, ILO and PHDT together develop the capacities of the OSH committees, creating effective social dialogue mechanisms at the estate level that address many future challenges faced by the workers, providing a valuable entry point for

both management and workers. The motive behind these meetings is to enhance productivity in the estate sector and improve the quality of work life for plantation workers.

Productivity and particularly labour productivity in Sri Lanka, is lower than that of other tea-growing countries. The findings of these meetings have both theoretical and practical implications. By implementing the strategies discussed at these project meetings, estate sector management can improve productivity. Enhancing productivity is essential for improving overall operational efficiency and profitability.

The Regional Plantation Companies and the Tea Smallholder Societies have provided their unstinting support to organise these project workshops. This is a commendable achievement for an organisation to reach in its journey as a trailblaser in the plantation industry and a dedicated corporate citizen. Their journey has always been challenging, yet inspiring and the PHDT is strongly positioned, financially and in terms of expertise, experience and other resources, to fuel economic development.

May the PHDT sustain its services to the planters with greater commitment and motivate all planters to look to professionalism in serving the plantation sector, which is vital for the survival and sustainable growth of this important forex earner for the national economy. Let us look to the future with the inspiring strength and vigour of the past and rise to fulfil the workers' needs in their march to progress and development. We congratulate the Director General, Lal Perera, his efficient assistants and the staff, and wish them continued success to go from strength to strength.

About the author:

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