

“Problems and Prospects of Small Tea Growers: A Case Study in Digboi Region, Assam”

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ABSTRACT: The small tea growers are an important and integral part of the tea industry of Assam. The abundance of uplands, availability of proven agro-technologically skilled labour, established and assured green leaf market, advantages of a long-term plantation crop is comparison to the other seasonal agricultural crops, blessings of suitable soil, climate were some of the factors that encouraged the small and marginal farmers as well as the unemployed to take up tea plantation in Assam. The growth of this sector was phenomenal as it assumed a form of a socio-economic revolution within a short period and served as a vehicle of social transformation in the state. It led to the establishment of a large number of tea factories in small-scale industrial sector, which also opened up employment opportunities in the tea estate of this Region Small Tea Growing Sector in Digboi Region has immense potential from the points providing employment, generating revenue and social status. It can be a lucrative profession and can play a vital role in improving the socio-economic condition of the economically backward area. The finding of the study reveals that the small tea growers are facing different problems related to getting benefits from supporting organization, availability of finance, sustaining production, processing and marketing of tea leaves, etc so, a new study on problems and prospects of small tea growers: a case study in Digboi Region is taken for investigation.

KEYWORDS: Agricultural crops, encouraged, marketing, organization, plantation, potential, processing, production, small tea growers, socio-economic revolution, tea factories, uplands.

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I. INTRODUCTION :

The concept of small tea cultivation came into existing when Kenya (1950's) had decided to produce tea for export. The experiment taken by Kenya(1950's) succeeded and a modern trend of small tea holders or growers arise in developing and developed countries to produce cash crop like tea since then there has been a steady shift in tea cultivation from big plantation to small holdings (CDPA, 2008). Today in most of the tea producing countries like Indonesia, Kenya, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, or Vietnam small tea cultivation significantly contributes to the country's total tea production along with the large estates. In many ways tea cultivation is very attractive as tea provides long and sustainable income for a long period with comparatively less investment and underutilized lands, gives long time employment opportunities. The concept of small tea cultivation in home stead gardens and unutilized land along with other crops sell the green leaf to the existing big factories for enhancing farm income was initiated during the seventies by the then Janata Government in Assam, Encouraged by the Government. Patronage a few farmers of erstwhile Sivasagar district initiated tea cultivation in their high land ranging from 0.13 hectare to 3 hectare. During the end of eighties the department of Tea Husbandry of Assam Agriculture Industry surveyed the possibility of growing tea in small scale and Advisory Cell was established to promote small scale tea cultivation by providing technical know-how. In the meanwhile, the formation of all Assam Tea Growers Association during 1987 was another landmark for extension of small Tea Cultivation in Assam. In 1991, the Tea Board of India approved the proposal of the Agriculture University to provide financial support to the Advisory cell of the Department of Tea Husbandry and Technology and the cell was reconstituted as “Small Tea Growers Advisory Programme” to the broad mandate. Apart from self-Employment the cultivation of tea has opened a wide vista of business opportunities by providing not only indirect employment but also creating a sound base for farm income. In a nutshell tea cultivation could act as a catalyst for the overall economic changes in the rural scenario of Assam especially in tea growing districts. The Small holdings are spread over all the districts; however concentration is in the five upper Assam districts viz. Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

- I. To study the growth of small tea growers in respect to area, production and productivity of tea.
- II. To study the different problems faced by the small tea growers in the Region
- III. To find out the various prospects of small tea growers in small tea plantation in the Digboi Region

III. METHODOLOGY:

Following section of the paper briefs the study location, data requirement, data sources and method of data collection, sample frame and tools of analysis.

3.1 Study Location: Digboi is situated at about 150 meters height above the mean sea level having a location within 95°36' E -95°39' E and 27°23' N -27°26' N. The National Highway No. 38 connects the Digboi with the rest of the neighbouring areas. Tinsukia is the headquarter of Tinsukia district located at a distance of 36 k.m. north of Digboi. Digboi is one of the leading tea and oil producing centres in Assam. The surrounding tea gardens and agriculture contribute to the local economy. Present study is conducted among the small tea growers in Digboi region of Tinsukia District. The region has covered by 9 square kms with 20 revenue and forest villages. There are 70 Small tea growers in and around the Digboi Region.

3.2 Data Requirement: This empirical attempt requires variety of statistical information from primary and secondary sources. Basic information like structure of village economy including cropping, nature of land ownership, land use pattern; social conditions of the households including literacy, etc as secondary data are required for the study. These information's are collected from Village Administrative Office and Village Panchayat Office, and district and state profile is collected from electronic sources, published by district administration. Primary data like demographic profile of households, education, occupation, income, social and cultural information, tea cultivation, problems of small tea growers – resource, production, and marketing, etc. are collected from the sample farm households.

3.3 Method of Primary Data Collection: Primary data is collected with the help of survey schedule exclusively prepared for the study. Questions regarding various quantitative and qualitative data mentioned above are included in the survey schedule.

3.4 Sample Frame

3.4.1 Sampling Design and size: In the study area, there were 70 no's small tea growers in the study area. 25 small tea growers have been selected for the study which was 35 percent of the total small tea growers from them one person from each small tea growers have been randomly selected for the study. Hence, the total numbers of respondents have been 25.

3.4.2 Method and Tools of Study: The study follows descriptive and analytical methods. Collected data is analysed with the help of statistical tools like bi-variate table, diagrammatical representation, percentages and averages.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION:

4.1 Origin of Tea in Digboi : In 1823, the British first discovered tea plants in Sadiya and the first tea plantation was started in Chabua near Tinsukia in 1882. The role of Singpho tribe in discovery of tea in Assam and early development of tea industry in the state is most significant. The discovery of wild tea in Assam was because of the Singpho tribe, and there are records of their tea drinking habit, knowledge of medicinal properties and indigenous method of preparation. Singpho chief, Beesa Gaum, first showed a wild growing tea plant to Robert Bruce in 1823. Singpho is a tribe who lived intermixed with the Khantis the country watered by the Burhi Dihing, the Noa Dihing and Tengpani near Margherita subdivision. Digboi town located in the extreme eastern part of Assam and N.E. India is a town basically developed due to power resource point of petroleum in the area. It is the first Oil Town in India that started to grow in and has been growing since 1883. A Small thatched structure was erected and christened "Oil well no.1" or "Discovery" This discovery came on the heels of industrial development of Digboi. From that time starting with a humble railway station Digboi is also known by iconic tea plantation.

Climate of Digboi is cool monsoon moderately hot and humid. Relative humidity varies from 64-90% and temperature 5.5° to 36.8° C between winter and summer at maximum range. Rainfall is 1.66 cm on average in a year. The town stand on the surface of old alluvial acidic soil underlying by geological formations which is suitable for tea cultivation.

4.2 Definition of Small Tea Growers (STGs):- “A small tea grower, as defined by the Tea Board of India, is one whose holding does not exceed ten hectares.” (Reddy and Bhowmik, 1989: 145). The Government of Assam considers only those growers as small tea growers with a maximum tea holding size at 30 bighas (4.0 hectare). (Neog, 2009:13)

4.3 Profile of the sample household: In this section of analysis, profile of the sample households like background of the sample farmers, education and age group of the respondents, subsidiary occupation of the sample households, and size of the sample households are carried out. These may be useful in understanding of conditions, problems and prospects of small tea growers of the study area, which are analysed in the following sections.

4.3.1 Education of the Respondents: Table 4.1 provides details on education of the respondents. Among the sample farmers, there are no any illiterate growers in the region, 4 per cent studied up to primary school level, 56 per cent studied up to high school level, 32 per cent studied up to higher secondary level. Only 8 per cent of the respondents studied up to college level. The data show that 100 percentage of the respondents are literates.

Table 4.1 Education of the Respondents

Educational Status	Total Small Tea Growers	Total % of STG
Illiterates	0	0%
Primary	1	4%
High School	14	56%
Higher Secondary	8	32%
College and Others	2	08%
Total	25	100%

Source: Field Survey

4.3.2 Age Distribution of STGs: This table shows that the highest number of respondents, that is, 44 percentage belongs to the age group of 51-60. The lowest number of respondent belongs to the age group of 21-30, which consist of only one respondent.

Table 4.2 Age Distribution of STGs

Sl.no	Age group	Small Tea Growers	Total % of STG
1	21-30	1	4%
2	31-40	4	16%
3	41-50	9	36%
4	51-60	11	44%
5	61-70	0	0%
	Total	100	100%

Source:Field survey

4.3.3 Social Background: Table 4.3 presents data on community of the sample households. It is very interesting to note that 72 per cent of the farmers belong to backward castes, and sixteen per cent of farmers come from General caste, only 12% are schedule tribe and there are no any schedule caste growers are seen in this region.

Table 4.3 Community of the Sample Households

Community	Total Small Tea Growers	Total % of STG
General	4	16%
S.C	0	0%
S.T	3	12%
OBC	18	72%
Total	25	100%

Source: Field survey

4.3.4 Size of Sample Households: Size of households of sample farmers is distributed unevenly. Their Household size varies between 0-2 and above 8. four per cent of the farmers have relatively very smaller sized households (0-2 persons), 36 per cent of the households have 5-6 household members, 24 per cent of the households have 3-4 member households, 20 per cent of the households have above 8 member households, 16 per cent have more than 7- 8 member households. Details on size of households are presented in **Table 4.3**

Table 4.4 Size of the Sample Households

Size of the household	Total Small Tea Growers	Total % of STG
0-2	1	4%
3-4	6	24%
5-6	9	36%
7-8	4	16%
Above 8	5	20%
Total	25	100

Source:Field survey

4.3.5 Subsidiary Occupation: Income from other crops of the households only 8 numbers are found and presented in Table 4.5 Mean income of the households is Rs.29 ,800 annually. It varies minimum 5,000 to 1,00000 annually

Table 4.5 Income from other crops

Income	STG	Total Number of STG	Number of STG (%)
Total Income	2,38500	8	32%
Mean Income	29,812.5		
Minimum	5,000		
Maximum	1,00000		

Source:Field survey

4.4 Land holding: This section of the analysis presents the land holding details of the sample households.

4.4.1 Size and Scatter of Land: Sample farmers have their own land generally in one place. However, some of the farmers have lands in two places and three places 23 farmers have their agricultural land in single place. Details on land scatter are presented in **Table 4.6**

Table 4.6 Number of Location of Land Holding

STGs	One	Two	Three	Total
No of Land	23	1	1	25

Source:Field survey

4.4.2 Age Group of Bushes: The amounts of production of tea depend upon the different of age group. Following table shows that 56.5 % bushes are falls less than 5 to 10 years of age group. Only 11.2% are falls under 10 to 30 years, which we have seen that maximum no. of gardens are newly developed.

Table 4.7 Age Group of Bushes

Age group	No of Bighas	Total %
Below 5yrs	72	32.3%
5 to 10 yrs	126	56.5%
10 to 30 yrs	25	11.2%
Above 30	Nil	Nil
Total	223	100%

Source:Field survey

4.4.3 Utilization of Total Land: Area under tea cultivation is not uniform for all farmers. It varies narrowly between 2 bigha to 30 bigha. The facts show that 8 farmers are engaged in other type of cultivation. Land

ownership influence the area under tea cultivation to some extent only. Details of such area under tea cultivation are presented in **Table 4.8**

Table 4.8 Utilization of Total Land

Land ->	Area under tea	Area under other crops	Area Lying Fellow	Total
Areas in Bigha ->	232.5	18.5	27.5	278.5
% to total ->	83.5%	6.64%	9.9%	100%

Source:Field survey

4.5 Production of Tea : Farmers cultivate teas of different types like China tea, TV 21,22,26 tea Tinali 17 etc. The area under cultivation, production, cost of cultivation total profitability for these varieties presented and analysed jointly. Such details are provided in **Table 4.9** Profitability of tea is always good for the farmers. However, the rate of profitability is differs among the different type of farm ownership. Farmers with own land holding, get a higher amount of profit, when compared to other groups.

4.6 Sale and Profit Annually : Farmers are cultivating not only tea crop, but also other crops like paddy and vegetables of different kinds. In this juncture, sample farmers are asked to report the comparative profitability of tea crop and non-tea crops. 17 numbers of farmer, they produce only tea. They reported that tea is the only profitable crop. Details are presented in **Table 4.9**

Table 4.9 Yield, Sale and Profitable Crop

Sl.No	Particulars	STGs	Minimum	Maximum
1.	Total production in kgs	3,41,300	4,500	45,000
2.	Average Yield (per bigha in kg)	1387.5	1,200	1,500
3.	Average Sale Price (per kg)	15.00	14.00	17.00
4.	Gross Income per bigha(Rs.)	20,820.00	18,000	22,500
5.	Total cost per bigha(Rs.)	14525.00	12,000	18,200
6.	Net Income per bigha (Rs.)	6295.00	2,800	9,000

Source:Field survey

4.7 Problem of small tea growers: Though the small tea plantation sector now occupies an important space in the economy of Assam, the sector is not free from the problems. The problem of small tea growers have been taken into consideration and based on five categories of problems for discussion and analysis. They are: (i) Marketing problem (ii) Financial problem (iii) Technical, Managerial and Educational problem (iv) Lack of Irrigation Facility (v) Labour problem

4.7.1 Marketing problem: All the small tea growers sell their green leaf ether to nearby big gardens or to bought leaf factories and average price varies only from Rs. 15.00 to Rs. 17.00 for depending upon the quality. They face problems in selling green leaf at reasonable price. As evident from the study the price of green leaf is fluctuating gradually. The factory owners buy on first come first served basis or at competitive price and growers had to be at the receiving end. The reasons identified are lack of tea processing factory, competition from other big gardens/ growers selling green leaf through agents, poor support from government etc. **The table 4.10** as depicted below shows the marketing factors of STGs of Digboi Region. Marketing of tea is another problem for the small tea growers. Major sources of marketing green tea leaves are small tea factories, cooperative factories and agents.

Table 4.10 Marketing Aspect

	Categories	No of Growers	
		Yes	No
		1.	Satisfaction price of tea quality

2.	Credit facilities to STGs for buy fertilizer and other chemicals from market	0	25
3.	Medium of sale of green leaf Through Agent	20	05
4.	Medium of sale of green leaf Through Directly	05	20
5.	Small Tea Growers awareness of Government Scheme	0	25

Source:Field survey

Farmers are asked to report various kinds of marketing problems they faced during the marketing of their green tea leaves. The problems reported by the small tea growers are less price, frequent price changes, difficulty in weighing method, difficulty in standardization and lack of proper transport facilities, long distance for marketing, etc. small tea growers with proper scientific and technical back up.

4.7.2 Financial problem: Whatever growth the small tea cultivation has, it entirely depends upon private initiative of individual growers. Institutional finance to this sector is very less. Lack ownership of land, non-registration of tea gardens etc., the institutional finance and help from Tea Board of India are not enjoyed by the small tea growers, which hinder the growth of this sector. Out of the farmers visited no small tea growers had availed of loan from banks. All others raised plantation with their own funds.. Many of them did not approach banks for loan with the apprehension that they will have to waste their time running after banks without any effective results. It was learnt that most of the tea growers did not have patta land. Further, in many cases title was not clear which was a handicap in obtaining loan. The growth of small tea sector has slowed down as account of limited availability of further suitable land as major portion of the land has already been put under cultivation. Further as most of the plantations are 5 to 10 yrs old, there is hardly any possibility of rejuvenation or replantation. Requirement of loans for such operations may arise after another 5-6 years.

In analyzing the questionnaires collected and data received from the Tea Boards records it is revealed that most of the small tea growers have not got any financial help from the Tea Board and other financial institution. The factors identified are lack of registration, poor communication link, lack of having periodic patta, lack of education etc. table 4.10 shown below reflects clearly the awareness factors of STGs of the Region

Table 4.11 Financial Support

	Capital	No of Growers	
		Yes	No
1	Physical capital (hired)	0	25
2	Physical capital (own)	25	0
3.	Working capital	0	25
4	Subsidiary from tea board	0	25
5	Bank Loan	0	25

Source:Field survey

4.7.3 Technical, Managerial and Educational Issues: It is found that most of the small tea growers are not technically sound or lack of proper knowledge in the field of tea cultivating. These unskilled cultivators are facing problems in certain areas like- pest management, menuring, darning etc. that is most essential knowledge for the growth and development of this sector. Looking into the technical problems of the small tea growers, the Tea Board of India, Tea Research Authority and corporate tea producers should take the responsibility to train different aspect of tea cultivation to the small tea growers. This will improve the technical knowledge of the cultivators.

Table 4.12 Maintenance cost for tea cultivation

Sl no	Resources	Minimum	Maximum
1	Male labour (per day)	110.00 (per day)	210.00 (per day)
2	Female labour (per day)	100.00 (per day)	120,00 (per day)
3	Saplins planted	4500.00 (current year)	5000.00 (current year)
4	Manures and Fertilizer	1500.00(current year)	2000.00(current year)

5	Pesticide	1200.00(current year)	1400.00(current year)
6	Distance from factory	3.8 kms	10 kms
7	Irrigation	Nil	

Source:Field survey

4.7.4 Lack of Irrigation Facility: The Small tea growers are face the problem of lack of irrigation facilities, One hectare standing mature tea plants requires about 10,000 liters of water per day which is equivalent to 2.5mm rainfall. Tea plants also need water after pruning which is generally done during the months of December and January. This period is generally dry in Assam, receives a few showers of retreating monsoon, eventually fruitful for the growth of tea plants after pruning. However, erratic nature of rainfall in recent times, particularly during the Non-monsoon period, forces the growers to make arrangements for irrigation infrastructure. Considering the size of the holding, however it is uneconomical to make provisioning of irrigation infrastructure. Drawing water from the nearby water bodies, river and extraction of ground water is expensive for the small growers.

4.7.5 Labour problem: Small tea Gardens do not come under the preview of the plantation Labour Act. on ground of size. On account of limitations of found, they are unable to provide living quarters and all the facilities provided by the large tea estates to the employed labourers. Ideally, a smallholding of about 2 bighas can be run by the family members; however, considering the large size of the plantation, the growers seek the service of hired laborers. Moreover there is demand for additional hands during the peak seasons as the yield of matured tea bushes increases. Generally, the ex-tea garden workers and the casual workers engaged in tea estates are the main source of labour to work in the small tea gardens, along with a segment of daily wage earners from the respective villages. In analyzing the data received from the personal interview, it is found that the crisis of labour supply is apparent during the festival period of Durga puja and Holi. The hangover of the festivals continues for long leading to absenteeism and subsequent wastage of the leaves. Moreover, availability of relativity remunerative jobs in other non-farm sectors has also created crisis in the supply of labour to works in plantations. In areas of labour shortage, it is seen that the growers offer gifts as well as monetary bonus to the workers during festivals to ensure their availability.

4.7.6 Debit problem: Financing for production activities is essential in all sectors. In agriculture, it is important to get loan because farmers have only seasonal income. No one farmers get loan for tea cultivation from ay sources. Only 1 farmer has applied for loan.

4.8 Organisational efforts of small tea growers: Unorganization of farmers in production, marketing, receipt of input is essential for successful carrying out agricultural activities. Tea is cultivated in some clusters. So, forming organization and participation in organization is easy task for tea growers. **Table 4.13** shows the organizational membership of the tea growers. From the table it is understood that they have no adequate knowledge on organizational functions. However, number of farmers get membership is only 15 out of 25.Tea farmers get benefits from the organizational membership by the means of getting reasonable price, easy availability of production techniques, marketing information, lowering marketing costs, etc.

Table 4.13 Particulars on Availability of Organisation

Sl.No	Particulars	Small Tea Growers		
		Yes	No	Total
1.	Organisational Membership	15	10	25

Source:Field survey

4.9 Prospects of the tea growers: Prospects of the tea growers are assessed by the willingness of tea growers to continue the occupation in a heartfelt manner. 23 out of 25 sample farmers willing to continue the tea cultivation work in the future also. Only two farmers reluctant to continue the cultivation work in the future.

Table 4.14 Willingness and Unwilling to Continue Tea Cultivation

Sl.No	Particulars	Small Tea Growers
1.	Willingness to Continue Tea Cultivation	23
2.	Unwillingness to Continue Tea Cultivation	2
3.	Experience in Tea Cultivation	3yrs to20 yrs

Source:Field survey

Farmers' experience in tea cultivation is an important factor in success of tea cultivation. Thus the researcher interested in such aspect. Details of the experience of farmers in tea cultivation are presented in Table 4.14. Out of 25 farmers, 6 cultivate tea traditionally, and remaining 19 have the experience of 3 to 20 years in the tea cultivation.

Main reasons suggested by the farmers to continue the tea cultivation are suitability of tea crop, profitability, lack of knowledge on cultivation of other crops. Reasons for not continuing the tea growing work in the future are plan to take other jobs, less profitability in growing tea, higher maintenance cost and labour shortage.

V. FINDINGS:

The major findings of the study on the basis of analysis and discussions provide suggestions to improve the conditions of small tea growers, and makes concluding remarks for the study.

Aim of the present study is to understand the problems faced by the small tea growers in general in respect to area, production and productivity in the Region. Specific objectives of the study are to observe socio-economic background of the small tea growers to understand the nature of land ownership of small tea growers, to assess the differences in the profitability of small tea growers, to examine the financial and marketing problems faced by small tea growers of different categories and to suggest measures to improve the conditions of small tea growers. In order to fulfil the objectives specified above, the study collected relevant information 25 select small tea growers from Digboi Region of Tinsukia district. Collected data area analysed with appropriate techniques. Following are main observations from the study:

1. Among the sample farmers, there are no any illiterate growers in the region.
2. 72 per cent of the farmers belong to backward castes, and sixteen per cent of farmers come from General caste, only 12% are schedule tribe.
3. All the small tea growers sell their green leaf ether to nearby big gardens or to bought leaf factories and average price varies only from Rs. 15.00 to Rs. 17.00 for depending upon the quality.
4. Sample farmers have their own land generally in one place. Area under tea cultivation is not uniform for all farmers. It varies narrowly between 2 bighas to 30 bighas.
5. Farmers cultivate teas of different types like China tea, TV 21,22,26 tea Tinali 17 etc.
6. Farmers with tea land holding get a higher amount of profit when compared to other crops.
7. Out of 25 farmers, 6 cultivate tea traditionally, and remaining 19 have the experience of 3 to 20 years in the tea cultivation.
8. Farmers are asked to report the major problems related to tea cultivation. According to the farmers, higher rate of manure and pesticide, fragmented land holding, long distance of tea plantation from the factory are the major problems in tea cultivation.
9. From the analysis it is understood that most of the small tea growers use family labour to a larger extent.
10. Labour related problems in tea cultivation are higher wages, need to pay additional kind payments, lack of availability of enough number of labour for tea cultivation, improper supply of labour at a point of time.
11. Marketing of tea is another problem for the small tea growers. Major sources of marketing green tea leaves are small tea factories, cooperative factories and agents. Major marketing problems reported by the small tea growers are less price, frequent price changes, difficulty in weighing method, difficulty in standardization and lack of proper transport facilities.
12. Financing for production activities is essential in all sectors. In agriculture, it is important to get loan because farmers have only seasonal income. No one get loan for tea cultivation from any sources. Only 1 farmer has applied for loan. All of these farmers belong own land category.
13. It is understood that all the 25 sample farmers, irrespective of nature of land holding, have the adequate knowledge on organizational functions of tea growers union. However, number of farmers get membership is only 15 out of 25. Tea farmers get benefits from the organizational membership by the means of getting reasonable price, easy availability of production techniques, marketing information, lowering marketing costs, etc.
14. Prospects of the tea growers are assessed by the willingness of tea growers to continue the occupation in a heartfelt manner. 23 out of 25 sample farmers willing to continue the tea cultivation work in the future also. Only 2 farmers reluctant to continue the cultivation work in the future.
15. Main reasons suggested by the farmers to continue the tea cultivation are suitability of tea crop, profitability, lack of knowledge on cultivation of other crops. Reasons for not continuing the tea growing work in the future are plan to take other jobs, less profitability in growing tea, higher maintenance in land and labour shortage.

VI. SUGGESTIONS:

In order to remove these limitations the following suggestions have drawn for improving the position of small tea growers:

- i) In case of Marketing, the All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASIGA) can set up co- operative from of cultivation and a standard for production of green leaf for proper price, Government can come to rescue the small tea grower with a minimum support price concept, which is applicable with other agricultural products.
- ii) The integration of small tea grower’s area wise under a single management to synchronize farm activities to the tune of market requirement.
- iii) Setting up of multi point advisory centers at different locations is essential to encourage small tea growers with proper scientific and technical back up.
- iv) Creating better awareness among small tea growers about the credit facilities, subsidies and other functional schemes of the Tea Board.
- v) Government may strengthen the mechanism for price fixation for the small tea growers.
- vi) The small tea growers may take up organic tea cultivation in a later stage after gaining experience in tea cultivation for year
- vii) There is a need to frame Government policies for allotment of land pattas to those farmers taking up tree plantation on government /quasi government lands to enable the farmers to register with Tea Board.
- viii) Facilitating term loan/working capital loan for expanding existing gardens and creating better awareness among small tea growers about the credit facilities, subsidies and other functional schemes of the Tea Board.

VII. CONCLUSIONS:

Tea is the most widely consumed drink in the world. 3.5 billion cups of Tea is consumed daily, across the world. The medicinal use of tea was known long before it was used as a beverage. Tea is one of the most important non alcoholic drinks and is popular due to its stimulating property. In India tea is the main beverage for each an every household. The study on problems and prospects of Small Tea Growers in Digboi Region helps to identify the reasons of choosing tea cultivation at Digboi. The study also revealed problems faced by tea growers at Digboi Region. The various problems faced by tea growers such as lack of co-operation, unavailability of loans, lack of transportation facilities. The study also brought out some suggestions as to how the production of tea by small tea growers has to be improved. Small Tea growers should bring down the cost production and improving the worker's productivity through various reforms. It is suggested to introduce some promotional campaigns so as to make people aware of the quality of Indian tea abroad and Value added products can also be marketed in International markets.

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