

# DOTTING THE I'S AND CROSSING THE TS.

Building their Blending factory in Dar es Salaam, the fifth factory in the group, Rift Valley have expanded their Tea operations and in doing so, created new employment opportunities for the locals.



Currently, the company produces over 10,000 tons of Tea per year and is one of the two largest tea producers in Tanzania, operating three tea estates with factories in Southern Tanzania. Mufindi, Luponde and Kibena with smallholder factories in Ikanga, Lupembe.

**“The company has grown substantially over the last ten years,”** said Noel Lindsay Smith, Rift Valley Head of Tea, **“We produce a wide range of teas including black CTC tea, orthodox tea, green and organic tea. Additionally we also have a range of organic herbs.”**

During the substantial growth of the company over the last decade, Rift Valley Tea have implemented innovative changes in irrigation, harvesting technology and factory automation. Most notable is their focus on their employees.

## HAND PICKED

Rift Valley Tea employs 2,500 people and operates a number of social responsibility programmes aimed at uplifting its communities. Providing housing for employees at each estate and community centres for use by the staff and their families the company has made investing in its staff it's primary focus.

**“We also provide schools for employees’ children, including kindergarten, and primary schools up to the age of 14 years old,”** Noel says, **“And free medical care too.”**

Their approach to managing people extends beyond merely the company as Rift Valley have over the last twenty years developed a close working relationship with smallholder out-growers in the vicinity of its estate operations and factories.

In addition, the company provides transport, fertilizer at cost, credit, extension services and agronomic advice and this simple formula has seen exponential growth in smallholder production in the Rift Valley operational areas. For example, last year the total smallholder purchases reached 3,000 tons of made tea, returning nearly US\$1,500,000 to the local economy and representing over 30% of the company production!

## A LOOK BACK

Although Rift Valley tea was formed in 2013 the history of Rift Valley Tea is deeply rooted in the area and tea, the individual components

began with Mufindi Tea & Coffee Limited which was formed in 1958 who acquired Luponde tea plantations in 1987, Ndolela Farm in 1998, Kibena Tea Company Limited in 2008, Ikanga Tea Company Limited which was commissioned in 2012 and finally Rift valley Tea Solutions was formed in 2013.

Noel tells us that the **Itona estates** are located in the Mufindi district near Iringa and the tea here grows at an altitude of 1800m and produces tea from September to June. The estates are irrigated via a network of dams that allows extended production during the dry season in the mono-modal climate and the estates comprise of 900ha of tea of which 35% is clonal.

**“The tea is processed at a central factory, Itona, which is a conventional three line CTC factory with the capacity to process 4,200tons of Made tea per annum,”** he explains, **“There is a large out-grower scheme started in 1990 that supplies Itona factory with nearly 25% of its throughput. In 2009 out-growers supplied nearly 4,500tons of green leaf for processing, worth over Usd\$460,000 to the small holders.”**

All of the estates and the factory are Fairtrade accredited and certified Rain Forest Alliance and are registered by the Ethical Tea Partnership who governs and oversees the ethical planting, use of land and care of staff.

**Luponde Tea** estates are some of the highest in Tanzania, located at an altitude of 2200m. These pristine estates have been producing organic tea for over 20 years and are amongst the oldest organic tea producers in the world. The estates comprise of 735ha and process 1,400tons of tea per annum, 500tons of which is organic.

Production is between November and May, after which the temperatures drop and growth is very limited. More recently Luponde estates have diversified into a range of speciality products including orthodox tea and green tea in organic and conventional forms and organic herbs including peppermint, chamomile and lemon verbena.

#### **Kibena Tea Limited**

Tea Limited is a subsidiary of MTC, purchased in 2008, located in the Njombe district at an Altitude of 1700m ASL. The 730ha of clonal tea are fully irrigated and 100% machine harvested – the first in Africa. The estate has a modern, state of the art tea processing unit, capable of handling over 3,500tons of made tea per annum. Kibena has also been a strong supporter of small holder tea producers in the surrounding area purchasing over 4,500tons of green leaf per annum.

#### **Ikanga Tea Company Limited**

Ikanga is a new CTC, back tea Factory, constructed and opened in 2012 in the Lupembe area of the Njombe region. The project is specifically designed to purchase, process and market the smallholder tea grown in the area. There are over 2500ha of smallholder tea in the area supported by 5000farmers. The Factory is 75% owned by MTC and 25% of the shares have been offered to the newly formed Lupembe Tea Holders Trust (LTFT) smallholders. The factory provides extensive services to the smallholders to encourage growth and sustainability of the smallholder farmers supplying greenleaf to the factory.

#### **Ndolela**

Ndolela is a greenfield project located in the Ruvuma region of Tanzania at the base of Ndolela Mountain and on the Ruhuhu river at an altitude of 1200m. RVC own over 5400ha of land, which is planned to be developed into a 1200ha, state of the art tea plantation. A full feasibility study has been completed, and grid power will be arriving in 2015. The plantation will be fully irrigated, and the harvesting fully mechanised. The mature plantation will be capable of producing over 6,000tons of Made tea per annum.

#### **Rift Valley Tea Solutions**

And finally, Rift Valley Tea Solutions (RVTS) was set up in 2013 to create a tea trading and tea blending business in Dar es Salaam.

**“The tea trade internationally,”** Noel reveals, **“Is in a process of change whereby international buyers, are moving the responsibility of quality control from the traditional internal tasting methods, to the buyers’ responsibility. There is also a growing requirement by end users for blends, rather than straight estate teas for general use.”**

Rift Valley Tea Solutions have obtained bonded warehousing facilities and a new state of the art blending plant to blend tea from Tanzania and other African regional tea producers. To bolster this they have employed the services of a professional team with many years of experience in blending and international trading to enable the company to deliver tea to international customers to their exact standard and requirement.

**“Dar es Salaam has a good port with a substantial international shipping feed that can supply to all locations around the world,”** he tells us, **“It is ideally located as a hub, to import teas from leading African regional tea producers.”**

#### **DAR ES SALAAM'S NEW BLENDING FACILITY**

The new factory is ideally located in the industrial area of Dar es Salaam with good access to the ports. The factory is 2400m<sup>2</sup> in size, and

capable of blending over 70tons of tea per day or 16,000tons per annum. The area has been certified as an EPZ zone and is planned to become the centre of the Tanzanian tea export trade going forward, Noel tells us.

**“The plant will be beneficial to Tanzanian teas in particular as they make up 60% of the blend, and also regional teas from Land-locked tea producers,”** Noel explains, **“It will provide new market access to teas from Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique and Uganda, and other East African producers.”**

Raw, Straight-line teas of all grades can be blended with teas from multiple origins to produce blend standard recipes to cater for international buyers and packers all over the world. The buyers receive a consistent reliable tea, at the standard they require and producers benefit from a reliable market that they can supply that avoids the volatility of the auction centres, allowing them to hedge their teas.

**“The new company will employ 15 people initially, and this will increase as production lifts,”** he continues, **“Training in modern tea trade procedures, handling and supply chain are paramount and the new business opens up new possibilities and competitive advantages for the Tanzanian tea industry.”**

The new blending plant will be fully operational this month (February 2014) and the line, with its modern, highly automated blending unit is designed to give a consistent quality of product.

**“It is designed to meet Tanzanian and international hygiene and safety standards that include HACCAP, ISO 22,000, Fair-trade, Rain Forest Alliance and Ecocert,”** Noel tells us, **“The equipment is designed and built in India and is able to handle both traditional tea sacks and ‘big bags’ of 500kgs.”**

Tea is cleaned, and then blended in an Octagon tower arrangement, 24 times to ensure complete mixing it is then fed into two packing lines where it is digitally batch-weighed and discharged either into 65kg tea sacks or big 500kg bags.

**“The teas are then palletised via a vacuum lift to ensure efficiency and reduce employee fatigue and the process and blending room is serviced by a state of the art dust extraction system to give a dust free working environment.”**

There is a hygiene centre for employees and also a QA monitoring area that oversees the entire process.

**“Employee safety is as important as the tea itself,”** Noel concludes.

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