



UNILEVER RESPONSE TO BHRC: BBC DOCUMENTARY ON SEXUAL ABUSE ON KERICHO TEA ESTATES

6th March 2023

We were deeply shocked by the horrific abuse that the BBC found during its investigation into sexual and gender based violence on the Kericho tea estates. Every woman working in the tea supply chain should be free to work safe from fear and intimidation.

Unilever no longer owns any tea estates, and we welcome the immediate action by the new owners, Lipton Teas and Infusions, who have suspended staff identified by the BBC and publicly committed to a full and independent investigation.

We are determined to understand why the extensive measures we put in place during our ownership and management of these tea estates failed to prevent this abuse. We hope that the Lipton Tea and Infusions' investigation, as well as any inquiries carried out by Kenyan authorities, will tell us exactly what happened, as well as when and why these systems did not work.

Over the last decade, we have worked very hard to stop the serious issues of sexual and gender-based violence against women that were highlighted by SOMO and the Kenya Human Rights Commission in 2010 and 2011. The measures we introduced, after wide consultation with tea pickers, also adopted recommendations of an independent ombudsman's report in full. They included:

- Compulsory training, regular awareness raising campaigns and events, strengthened reporting and grievance mechanisms.
- Improved village lighting, safe places for women to breastfeed, and day care centres.
- Enhanced liaison with local communities and police forces.
- A safety programme for women, boys, and girls, as well as survivor support including counselling, grievance handling and monitoring.
- Plantation committees with welfare, business integrity, security and legal teams to take a holistic approach, share lessons and tackle the root causes of abuse.
- Compulsory sexual and gender-based violence and sexual harassment modular training for contractors.
- A partnership with UN Women that reviewed the women's safety programme and advised on behaviour and social norms change interventions¹.
- Mentoring women and girls to encourage them to seek leadership positions.
- Supporting a [Gender Empowerment Platform](#) in Kenya where tea companies and civil society could collaborate to address gender discrimination and violence.

More detail about the work we carried out is available online in the [UN Women 2019 Guide to support the implementation of the Global Women's Safety Framework in Rural Spaces](#).

We would like to reiterate our shock and disappointment at seeing such blatant disregard for the policies and practices that we introduced to protect women in Kericho and to stress our full commitment to learn from the investigations. We will continue our efforts to eradicate sexual and gender-based violence from our value chains.

More details of our related policies and work in this area are available on our website at www.unilever.com in our [2021 Human Rights Progress Report](#) and in our [Responsible Partner Policy](#).

¹ UN Women and Unilever announced the partnership in 2016 to develop an evidence-based and human rights-based intervention programme to inform the development of a Global Framework on Women's Safety to be implemented across Unilever's supply chain in the tea industry.