

7/ Link with the geographical area

7.1/ Specificities of the product

Tea cultivation in Sri Lanka succeeded that of coffee which was introduced to the then British colony of Ceylon in the 1840s. A blight, also called the coffee rust, showed first signs in 1869 and subsequently wiped out the coffee production in the span of a decade¹. Witnessing the devastating effects of the coffee rust, coffee planters soon started looking for an alternative commercial crop. After years of experimental cultivation and processing of tea at the border of his coffee estate of Loolecandera near Kandy and attempts to match the know-how of Assam tea planters, the Scottish planter James Taylor established the first commercial tea plantation in 1867. He was the first planter in Ceylon to succeed with tea but he was not the first to try. Though records are scant, there is evidence that the cultivation of tea plants imported from China was attempted as early as 1824². Tea presented numerous advantages. Tea bushes are well-suited to tropical climate and hilly topography of the island and public and private existing infrastructure, initially geared to the requirements of the coffee enterprise, could be adapted rapidly to serve the needs of tea. By the end of the century, the emerging tea industry soon surpassed all successes of its coffee predecessor in terms of export volumes, revenues and area under cultivation³/ Historical reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’

7.2/ Current reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’

The reputation of ‘Ceylon tea’ still reaches far beyond the borders of Sri Lanka. The name of this global product is recognised and promoted in all parts of the world thanks to the constant efforts of the Sri Lanka Tea Board to take part in global events. The 150 years of the ‘Ceylon tea’ industry was celebrated in 2017. This milestone showed the historical reputation that ‘Ceylon tea’ has upheld for decades and Sri Lanka’s key role as a global tea supplier.

‘Ceylon tea’ is renowned for a combination of sensory and cultural traits that distinguish it from other teas. In December 2024, the independent tea website *Sally Tea Cups* described the “*global acclaim*”¹ associated with ‘Ceylon tea’ noting its ‘*distinct aromas and flavor profiles*’ that “*set it apart from other teas like those from China and India*”. In January 2025, *Heal with Tea*² referred to its “*renown*” for a “*fresh and robust taste*”, calling it a “*unique choice among teas*” that has “*earned global recognition*” for its “*distinct flavour and unmistakable aroma*”. In May 2025, Ricardo R. Matos writing for *The Tea World* explained “*why Sri Lanka’s Teas are among the world’s finest*”, attributing their reputation to “*generations of careful cultivation and artisanal processing*’ and ‘*celebrated for their bright, brisk character, golden color, and lively arom*’³.

‘Ceylon tea’ is also deeply embedded in cultural traditions. In Sri Lanka, offering a freshly brewed cup to visitors is a customary gesture of hospitality. Internationally, it is integrated into diverse tea cultures: in the United Kingdom, it is a traditional choice for afternoon tea; in Russia, its full flavour and bright colour make it ideal for samovar service; in Chile, it is “*one of the essentials on any Chilean table [...] among the favorites when it comes to choosing which to drink*” (translated from Spanish, October 2023), particularly associated with *la once*, the daily tea-and-bread meal.⁴⁵⁶ Its international recognition is further evidenced by Sri Lanka’s

¹ Sally Tea Cups | *How Sri Lanka Became a Tea Powerhouse*, 16 December 2024. <https://sallyteacups.org/sri-lanka-tea-history/>. Consulted the 04/03/2025

² Heal with Tea | *Ceylon Tea – Benefits, Side Effects and Nutrition Facts*, 29 January 2025. <https://healwithtea.com/ceylon-tea/>. Consulted the 04/03/2025

³ Matos, R.R. | *Why Sri Lanka’s Teas Are Among the World’s Finest*, *The Tea World*, 14 May 2025. <https://teatheworld.com/blog/ceylon-tea-why-sri-lankas-teas-are-among-the-worlds-finest/>. Consulted the 11/08/2025

⁴Tasha Marks | *The tea-rific history of Victorian afternoon tea*, *British Museum Blog*, 14 August 2020. <https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/tea-rific-history-victorian-afternoon-tea>. Consulted the 11/08/2025

⁵ David Hill | *Russian-Style Tea: How to Use a Samovar*, *Europe Up Close*, 13 September 2010. <https://europeupclose.com/article/russian-style-tea-how-to-use-a-samovar/> consulted the 11/08/2025

longstanding participation at UNESCO’s International Tea Day: “Sri Lanka proudly showcased its iconic Ceylon Tea [...] marking the fourth consecutive year of participation in the prestigious global event”⁷ (June 2025).

Beyond its sensory appeal, ‘Ceylon tea’ is also valued for ingredients such as antioxidants, polyphenols, sodium, proteins and carbohydrates.

This sustained reputation has been recognised in international competitions over the past 5 years, with ‘Ceylon tea’ being awarded several prizes:

Name of the competition	Year	Award title
Global Tea Championship	2019	(Spring Hot) Ceylon Open – Lumbini Tea Valley (Pvt) Ltd – Sinharaja Wiry Tips – Gold Medal
Global Tea Championship	2017	Ceylon Open – Lumbini Tea Estate (pvt) Ltd – Sinharaja Wiry Tips – Gold Medal
Global Tea Championship	2017	Ceylon low grown – Lumbini Tea Estate (Pvt) td – Lumbini Tea Valley Tippy Eve – Gold Medal
AVPA	2022	Thés monovariétaux - Diplôme Gourmet – Ceylon Black Pearl – Kaley Tea
Great Taste Awards	2024	The Island of Tea - Special Pure Ceylon Black Tea - 100g Loose Leaf Tea
Great Taste Awards	2024	The Island of Tea Gold - Pure Ceylon Black Tea - 100g Loose Leaf Tea

In addition, tea-based tourism is a key asset for the island’s tourism industry, further contributing to its distinct reputation as a travel destination. Images of tea fields and tea-related landscapes are frequently featured on the covers of travel guides, alongside other iconic attractions. Notably, the 10th English edition of *Lonely Planet* (2006) for the destination Sri Lanka showcased a tea plucking woman on its cover, while the 10th French edition (2021) highlighted the Odyssey Blue Train traversing lush tea plantations. Ceylon Tea is the most purchased souvenir among tourists, with 53.1% of visitors taking it home—ranking above handicrafts and accessories (Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2019).

Furthermore, the *Pekoe Trail*, a 300-kilometer-long walking route that winds through the highlands and tea estates from Kandy to Nuwara Eliya, pays homage to one of the grades of Ceylon tea. This initiative has garnered international recognition, winning the *Best Wider World Tourism Project 2023* award from the British Guild of Travel Writers and earning a spot in *National Geographic’s* “Top 20 Travel Experiences” for 2024 and *Time’s* “World’s Greatest Places 2025”.

⁶ Chef & Hotel Coffee & Tea | “En Chile el té de Sri Lanka se consume desde hace más de 50 años”, *Chef & Hotel Coffee&Tea*, 5 October 2023. <https://chefandhotel.cl/coffeetea/en-chile-el-te-de-sri-lanka-se-consume-desde-hace-mas-de-50-anos/>. Consulted the 11/08/2025

⁷ Lanka News Web | *Sri Lanka Highlights Ceylon Tea at UNESCO’s International Tea Day in Paris*, *Lanka News Web*, 27 June 2025. <https://lankanewsweb.net/archives/94684/sri-lanka-highlights-ceylon-tea-at-unescos-international-tea-day-in-paris/>. Consulted the 11/08/2025

7.3/ Specificities of the geographical area

7.3.1/ Specificities of the Natural Factors

The quality of 'Ceylon tea' relies on the geography of the delimited geographical area of 'Ceylon tea'. The climate, soil and topography specificities of the delimited geographical area gives 'Ceylon tea' both physical and organoleptic recognisable characteristics.

Located on a tropical island (between 5° 55' to 9° 51' North latitude and between 79° 42' to 81° 53' East longitude) 'Ceylon tea' cultivation extends over an altitude gradient ranging from sea level up to high altitudes (above 1200 meters). In the tea sector, it is therefore common to refer first to 'Ceylon tea' growing area by their altitude, namely: the "low country" (ranging from sea level to 600m), "mid country" (600m to 1200m) and "up country" (above 1200m).

The agro-climatic specificities of 'Ceylon tea' are defined by an important diversity in climate in the tea growing areas. This is a signification feature in the wet and intermediate zones of Sri Lanka. The rainfall pattern is distinctly seasonal with two pics. More specifically, rainfalls are paced by the South-West monsoon from May to September, and the North-East monsoon from December to February, followed by inter-monsoonal rains covering the whole island (March-April and October-November). The central mountains act as a divider between those two annual climatic events, which results in different periods of rainfall on either side of the mountains. The amount of rainfall and its distributions are the most important factors that affect the productivity of tea. The number of rainless days in the wet zone is very small compared to the total number of rainy days in a year. In addition, the agro-climatic conditions of the delimited geographical area offer good exposition to solar radiation. The mean annual sunshine duration in the wet zone ranges from 4.9 to 6.4 hours per day depending on the location.

The above-mentioned criteria, combined with soil conditions, terrain and land use pattern, defines 46 Agro-Ecological Regions (AERs) for the whole of Sri Lanka (see Map of agro-ecological regions of Sri Lanka (Panabokke and Kannangara, 1975), of which 25 are found to be particularly suitable for 'Ceylon tea' production. Today, tea grows in 25 AERs, each experiencing variations from one to another (see Map in the section "Geographical area" above).

The complex topography, combined with changing weather patterns over the span of a year, generate favourable conditions for tea cultivation resulting in year-round production. It also creates a diversity of tea growing conditions, which in turn is responsible for the complex taste of 'Ceylon tea'.

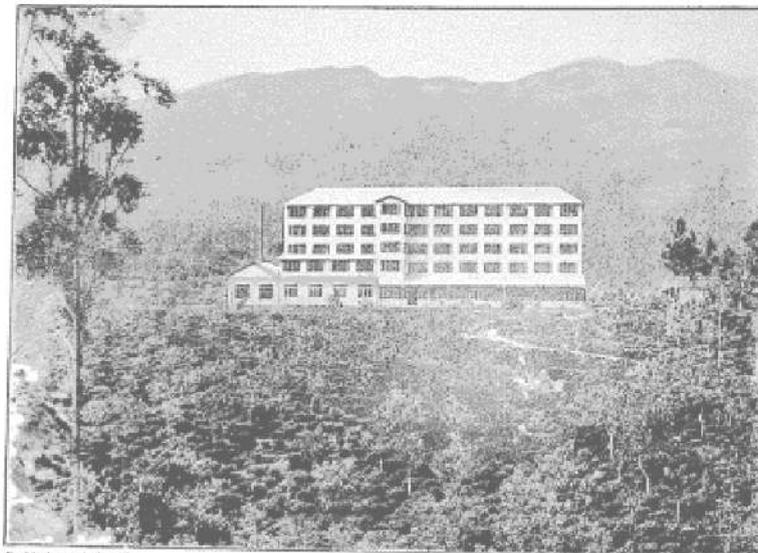
7.3.2/ Specificities of the Human Factors

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the great reputation of 'Ceylon tea' has been built thanks to the continuous efforts of people who, over the years, have developed specific know-how oriented towards quality production at each stage of product processing: plucking, tea manufacturing, auctioning, tea blending and flavouring.

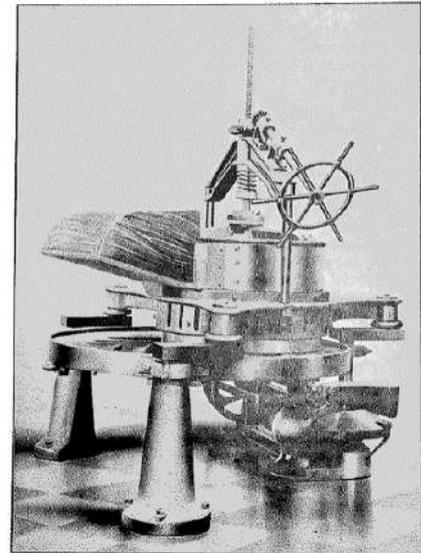
Plucking - Most of 'Ceylon tea' is harvested or plucked manually. The particular know-how of tea pluckers allows them to select the best leaves to produce quality 'Ceylon tea'. The tea pluckers master different types of plucking techniques to identify the good leaves to be plucked, foster the productivity of the tea bush and support the maintenance of the tea bushes.

Tea manufacture - The quality of 'Ceylon tea' is the result of a dense network of tea factories, which gradually developed a tea manufacturing process to optimize natural, agronomic, logistic and economic conditions. When tea bushes replaced dying coffee plants, tea factories were built on-site to allow processing of raw leaves, in order to maintain their freshness and quality. From then, tea planters started to develop the art of 'Ceylon tea' manufacture. Through shared experience, they developed the principles of the industrialized manufacturing process for 'Ceylon tea', adapted to climatic conditions, newly acclimatized tea plants and

market requirements (e.g. withering time depending on relative humidity and the quality of the tea leaves, number of rolling revolutions, ideal firing temperature, etc.). Even though technological innovations are constantly springing up in the tea sector, the main manufacturing principles defined in the first half of the 20th century (e.g. “Tea manufacture – its theory and practice in Ceylon” by HJ Moppett 1922 (2nd edition in 1931)), remain accurate today. The tea factories’ machineries are today a patrimonial heritage of the 150-year-old knowledge of craftsmen. The ‘Ceylon tea’ craft is also followed and adapted to a small scale by artisanal manufacturers who produce ‘Ceylon tea’ using a combination of machines and manual techniques.



By kind permission of
A CEYLON TEA FACTORY. *Mounts. The Colombo Commercial Co., Ltd.*



By kind permission of
A SINGLE ACTION TEA ROLLER. *Mounts. The Colombo Commercial Co., Ltd.*

Source: H.J. Moppett, 1922

Then ‘Ceylon tea’ manufacture principles have been consolidated by the Tea Research Institute of Ceylon (TRI), notably through a series of Monographs on Tea production in Ceylon. The N°4 deals with “Tea manufacture in Ceylon”, by the technologist E L. Keegel published in its second edition in 1958, and still counts as a major reference for today’s TRI (cf. TRI Handbook on Tea).

The quality officer of the tea factory is instrumental in ensuring that the manufacturing process is thoroughly executed. He/she is also the holder of the fine knowledge of tea manufacturing. They adapt the duration of the sensitive steps of withering and fermentation/oxidation of the tea leaves depending on the climatic conditions of the day. A rainy day can lengthen the withering time, whereas hot sunny weather speeds up the fermentation/oxidation of the rolled leaves. The quality officer is a tributary of the ‘Ceylon tea’ planter’s and manufacturers’ traditional experience in maintaining and evaluating the quality of the made tea. This know-how further stretches out to an extensive list of grades of ‘Ceylon tea’ manufacturers and other industry stakeholders to identify and adhere.

Colombo Auction – The auction system can be considered as part of the cultural heritage that showcases the ‘Ceylon tea’ quality and contributes to its truthful recognition. Tea auctions were first introduced in Colombo in 1883, on the premises of Somerville & Co., a Colombo merchant house, on the basis of those conducted at Mincing Lane in London.

By the turn of the century, most of the estates were owned by joint-stock companies, either listed in sterling or in rupee. Shareholders of those companies were British, often far from the plantations. The management in the estates was delegated to ‘management companies’ or ‘agency houses’, which handled the cultivation, processing and sale of tea. In Colombo, the agency houses employed teams of expert tea-tasters to sample and report on the quality of each estate’s produce before it was put up for auction in Colombo or London. The brokers and buyers, too, had their tasters, and it was tasters from both sides who attended the auctions. Once established, the structure of the ‘tea trade’ was little altered. Overseen by trade associations such as the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (est. 1839) and the Colombo Tea Traders’ Association (est. 1894), it continued to function with little change in operational procedure, management style or ownership structure

throughout the colonial period and was British-dominated⁸⁶. The Colombo tea auction in Sri Lanka now operates as an online platform; the first historical online auction was successfully conducted on 4 April 2020. The bidding process is similar to the physical system - transparency is maintained throughout similar to the original auction process - contributing to steer up the best price for the best quality.

Tea Blending and Flavouring – The specificity of ‘Ceylon tea’ is evident in the wide range of tastes and flavours derived from the diversity of the agro-ecological regions in which it is found. As a result, the ‘Ceylon tea’ sector has developed recognised know-how in terms of tea identification and blending, to obtain the desired appearance, qualities and aromatic notes in the final beverage. Tea tasters have an important role in factories and brokers and exporters’ houses. They are specifically trained for quality assessment. Experienced tea tasters can identify defects, their origin and consequently advise the manufacturer regarding over or under firing, over or under fermentation/oxidation, over or under withering, etc. They are also trained to recognise the special regional characters of ‘Ceylon tea’ as well as the wide range of grades. Therefore, like tea factory quality officers, tea tasters are defenders of an origin and taste that make the quality of ‘Ceylon tea’ special.

Blends of teas from Sri Lanka and flavouring in Sri Lanka are important features of ‘Ceylon tea’ exporters’ specific know-how. As described earlier, blending of teas from Sri Lanka and flavouring is traditionally done in Sri Lanka to produce ‘Ceylon tea’. It is a currently established practice to flavour the tea. Flavour like bergamot is ancient, whereas botanicals is more recent. Exporters tend to respond to customers’ requests for a specific taste, smell and appearance (colour and shape) of the tea. Exporters build standards, which act as references to respond to those requirements. Blending of teas from Sri Lanka and flavouring therefore fall into a tradition of tailor-made teas, which vary from customer to customer, and from one market to another.

Blend sheets are testimonies of those practices and are a mandatory document, which must be submitted to the SLTB prior to export. A blend sheet lists the various teas from Sri Lanka that are mixed together, along with flavours and their respective quantity. It is part of the exporter’s expertise to decide which grades can be blended and in which proportion, to replicate a specific, custom-made tea. Blending of teas from Sri Lanka and flavouring are important indicators of quality control of ‘Ceylon tea’ and encapsulate the knowledge that ‘Ceylon tea’ exporters have of their markets, which in turn justify that these two steps must take place in Sri Lanka.

At present, the Sri Lanka tea industry involves more than 397,233 smallholdings (2005) and 328 tea estates (293 in RPCs & 35 in States) (MPI, 2018); 1,596 registered tea leaf dealers; 782 active registered factories; 8 registered tea brokers; 386 registered tea exporters and 189 registered packers (Sri Lanka Tea Board (SLTB, 2022)).

7.3.3/How the specificities of the geographical area influence those of the product (causal link)

The combination of climate, topography and the human knowledge of blending of teas from Sri Lanka give all colours of Ceylon tea their distinctive aromatic profiles. Black tea is characterized by prominent woody and bakery aromas, tinted with malted, jaggery and sandalwood notes, while Ceylon green and white teas display vegetal and marine aromas.

⁸ History of Ceylon Tea | Sri Lanka Tea Board. <https://www.srilankateaboard.lk/ceylon-tea/history-of-ceylon-tea/>. Consulted the 04/03/2024

8/ Evidence that the product originates in the defined geographical area

Traceability of the 'Ceylon tea' is ensured by two mechanisms defined in the Tea Control Act.

- All operators involved in the tea value chain must be registered at the public authorities in charge of tea in Sri Lanka.
- Operators have frequent and mandatory exchanges with Sri Lankan authorities and are compelled to record their operations (especially regarding inputs and outputs of materials).

8.1/ Traceability at the level of tea leaf growers, leaf collectors

Tea gardens below 10 acres are under the supervision of the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA) while other tea gardens (Regional Plantation Companies and private gardens, here called "estates") above 10 acres are under the supervision of the Sri Lanka Tea Board. Finally, a very tiny proportion of the leaves are produced by state-owned estates under the authority of the Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation Industries. Regardless of their size however, all tea gardens are registered with the Tea Land Registration System managed by the SLTB.

All quantities of plucked leaves supplied to the tea factory are recorded. If the tea factory is on the same land as the tea garden (for instance estates of Regional Plantation Companies collecting tea leaves from their own estate), the traceability is ensured by internal documents.

When the tea garden is independent from the tea factory (this is the case for 78% of the tea leaves that are sourced from gardens under 10 acres), the supply of tea leaves can be done either directly by the tea grower himself, or through a collector, registered at the Sri Lanka Tea Board serving as a middleman between tea garden and factories, or directly by a tea factory employee. Regardless of the collection method used, all operators (tea farmer, collector, and factory employee) record the quantities of leaves supplied since tea leaves are paid according to quantities supplied (for a tea grower) or collected (for collector or factory employee).

Collectors must monthly communicate to the SLTB the quantity of leaves received and supplied to factories. They are therefore submitted to a particularly strict and mandatory bookkeeping practice(s).

8.2/ Traceability at the factories level

The traceability at factory-level operates on the same basis. All tea factories are registered at the Sri Lanka Tea Board. Factories must record the quantities of leaves received (whether from their own tea gardens, independent tea gardens, or from collectors) and must record all operations tea leaves undergo (withering, rolling, fermenting etc). Every month, factories must send to the SLTB all information about their production: the quantity of leaves received, production output, quantity and use of refuse tea, sales details of the production.

The finished product called 'made tea' is stored in air and moisture-proof bags, which are gathered into invoices composed of 10 to 40 bags of the same grade. Each bag is tagged with the invoice number and the number of the bag within the invoice.

8.3/ Traceability at the level of brokers

90% of the tea produced in Sri Lanka is sold at the auction, through 8 brokers. The 8 brokers are registered at the SLTB and are intermediaries between factories and exporters/local distributors.

Once invoices are ready at factory level, the broker collects them and gives a batch number to each invoice (without any change of the content of the invoice). Brokers do not blend, flavour or modify the tea, they just serve as middlemen to introduce this tea at auctions. All the operations of the online auctions (i.e. sale and purchase of tea) are recorded.

8.4/ Traceability at the level of exporters

95% of the tea produced in Sri Lanka is exported. Exporters must be registered at the Sri Lanka Tea Board. Exporters buy tea batches (so the factories' invoices) at auctions.

Most of the tea produced in Sri Lanka, whether exported or not, is blended by exporters with other teas from Sri Lanka. As explained previously, to ensure traceability, exporters must create a blend sheet that records the different teas mixed into one blend. To obtain the authorization to export, exporters must submit this blend sheet to the Sri Lanka Tea Board.

9/ Controls

The Ministry of Agriculture Plantation Industries (MAPI) of Sri Lanka is the competent authority in charge of the overall 'Ceylon tea' GI control system, as defined in the Tea Control Act. The Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation Industries is headed by a Minister appointed by the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka under the approval of the Parliament. As the competent authority of the Geographical Indication, the Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation Industries delegates its authorities to two control bodies:

The Sri Lanka Sri Lanka Tea Board (SLTB) and the Tea Small Holdings Development Authority (TSHDA) are already under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation and Industries which validates every year their budget and action plan. Moreover, every quarter, the TSHDA and the SLTB report their activities to the Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation and Industries (for instance: number of inspections conducted on the value chain, number of formations delivered, number of advertisement campaigns done). Finally, within the MAPI, a team composed by 6 employees has been appointed to follow the Geographical Indication project.

The scope of SLTB's control activity is under the purview of a dedicated department, located in the central office in Colombo, called the Tea Commissioner division. It is headed by a Tea Commissioner supervising the control activity.

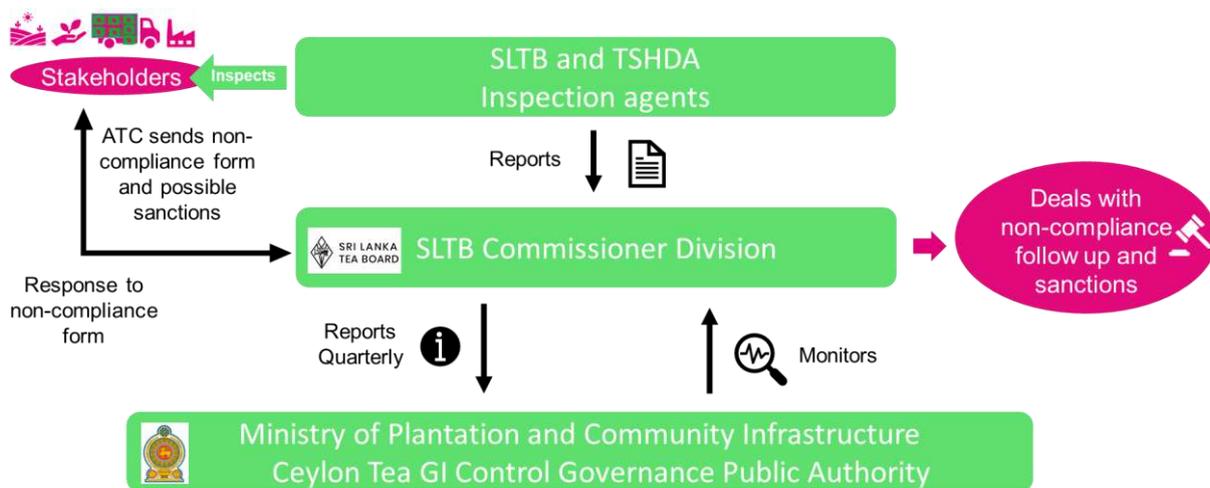
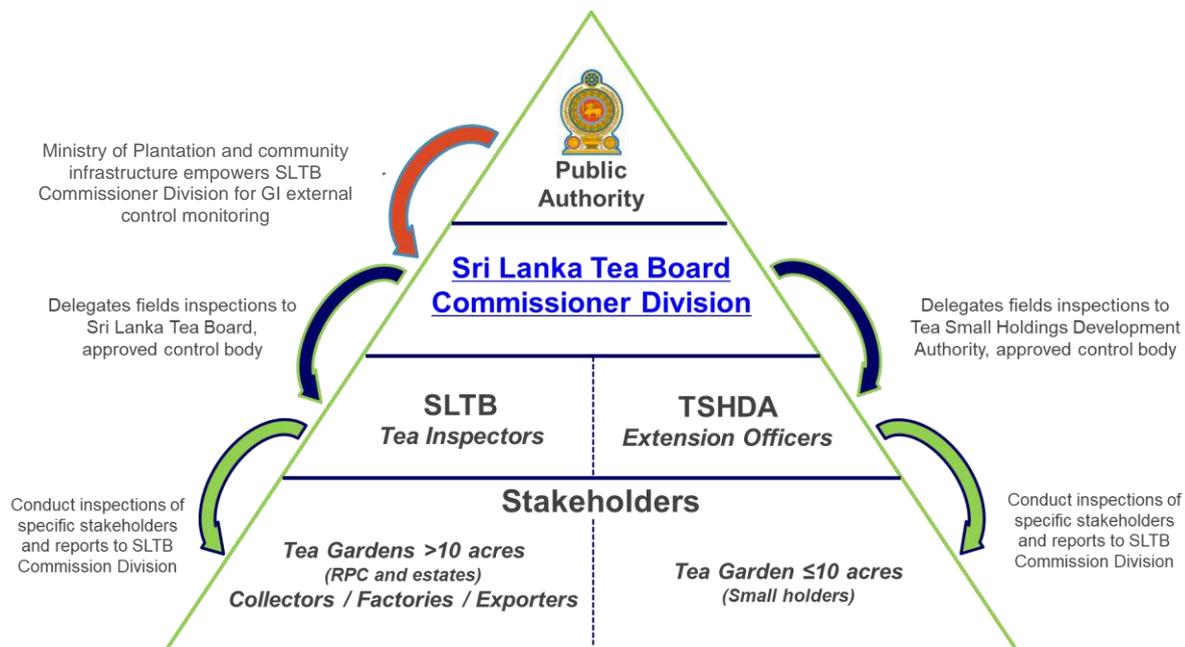
At the regional level, this function is delegated to Assistant Tea Commissioners. They manage a team of tea inspectors who inspect tea gardens (with an area larger than 10 acres), the factories and exporters.

TSHDA is a public body responsible for small tea growers producing tea on plots of land less than 10 acres. Inspections are conducted by tea inspectors, under purview of regional extension officers, who are themselves supervised by the extension officers of the central office located in Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte, the administrative capital of Sri Lanka.

The responsibilities of the SLTB and the TSHDA are not conflicting as both control bodies control different sets of stakeholders. The TSHDA extension officers have no power of constraint. The TSHDA conduct inspections to check compliance with the book of specification and produce an inspection report; the results are sent to the SLTB commissioner division for possible sanction implementation.

The SLTB can impose specific sanctions (i.e. specific conditions of return to conformity) to non-compliant stakeholders, depending on a sanctions grid drafted in the control plan which is approved by the MAPI. For coordination and monitoring purposes, upon request, the GI Management Committee in charge of the governance of the GI can consult the status of controls carried out, their results and sanctions applied by both public control bodies. The SLTB commissioner division informs the GI management Committee and the MAPI within one (1) week of any sanction issued against a non-compliant stakeholder. Finally, in the event of a new type or an unusual non-compliance (unanticipated in the sanction grid), the MAPI is responsible for designing the conditions of return to compliance. The stakeholder can appeal a decision regarding non-compliance to the Ministry of Agriculture and Plantation Industries.

Figures: Current Control System of Tea – SLTB and TSHDA



10/ 'Ceylon tea' traceability flow chart

