



Women from self-help groups in north Bengal take part in the three-day training programme in Jalpaiguri on handmade tea

## Women's handmade tea brews global plans

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**Siliguri:** Women associated with self-help groups and farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) in pockets of north Bengal are preparing to take their handmade specialty teas to European markets.

These women get training that focuses on sustainable cultivation, top-notch quality and business development.

Organisations working with small tea growers are training women to meet the stringent requirements for exports, Bijoygopal Chakraborty, the president of the Confederation of Indian Small Tea Growers' Associations (Cista), said.

He said that women from self-help groups in Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar, North Dinajpur and Darjeeling hills were producing handmade teas.

Seven FPOs in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar and four FPOs in the hills currently involve women in producing specialty teas.

"These women make four varieties of tea — green, white, black orthodox and oolong. We want to help them build sustainable businesses and access international markets," Chakraborty said.

Sources said experts with specialised agencies started training programmes to help these women understand governance, financial discipline and marketing.

"A three-day training programme was recently conducted for them, where participants were apprised about export-related standards and certification requirements," said a source.

Chakraborty stated that the push for export comes with challenges. "European buyers insist on strict quality controls, including pesticide-free production and compliance with certification norms. Trainers teach participants how to reduce the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and adopt environment-friendly cultivation practices," he said.

He said that one of the most promising examples emerged from Jamtala in Mainaguri block of Jalpaiguri, where 23 women have formed a group to produce handmade specialty teas. "The group's green, white and orthodox teas recently received appreciation at events in Delhi and Calcutta," he added.

"If the women can meet export standards and maintain quality, north Bengal's handmade specialty teas could soon find a place on shelves in the UK and Europe," he added.