

Marketplace for Tea Enterprise

Submitted to:
Kathmandu University School of Management (KUSOM)
Kathmandu, Nepal

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Date: 18th Feb 2025



Kathmandu University
School of Management



Acknowledgement

We extend our sincere gratitude to the **WTO Chairs Programme - Nepal, Kathmandu University School of Management** for their trust and support in this initiative. Their collaboration has been instrumental in shaping this Market Place for Tea Enterprises platform.

We also express our appreciation to the tea producers, SMEs, and stakeholders who have shared their insights and experiences, enabling us to better understand the challenges and opportunities within Nepal's tea sector. Their valuable input has helped us design a platform that aims to enhance market access and global visibility for Nepali tea enterprises.



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1. Background of the study

Nepal's tea industry holds a rich history, beginning with the establishment of the Ilam Tea Estate in 1863 and the country's first tea factory in 1978. Over time, regions like Ilam, Panchthar, Dhankuta, Terhathum, Sindhupalchok, and Kaski have become key tea-producing areas, hosting 68 major factories and around 150 small orthodox tea plants. Despite its diverse offerings, the industry faces several challenges such as over-reliance on intermediaries, limited access to international markets, and poor visibility for local producers, all of which prevent fair pricing and broader recognition.

In light of the challenges facing the sector, digital tools such as e-commerce, social media, and SEO offer significant potential to transform Nepal's tea industry. By leveraging these strategies, producers can bypass intermediaries, expand their global reach, and enhance market visibility. This study aims to explore how digital innovation can elevate Nepalese tea on the global stage, support sustainable growth for local producers, and establish Nepalese tea as a competitive player in the international market.

The Nepal Tea website is a B2C platform to showcase Nepal's rich tea heritage to the world. It is built with PHP and Laravel, the site offers comprehensive information on various tea types, interactive features to engage users, and an educational exploration of Nepalese tea culture and history. With an intuitive design, the website connects tea enthusiasts directly with authentic Nepalese products, while the admin panel supports efficient content management.

2. Objective of the study

- **Strengthening Buyer-Producer Connections:** Establish direct linkages between Nepali tea producers and intended buyers to minimize dependency on intermediaries and ensure fair value distribution.
- **Content Development and Branding:** Collaborate with stakeholders to create high-quality, compelling content, including descriptions, visuals, and branding, that effectively showcases the uniqueness of Nepali tea producers and their products.
- **Enhancing Online Market Presence:** Implement targeted digital marketing strategies to boost the visibility and reach of the marketplace portal, increasing engagement and driving sales in the global market.

3. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to explore strategies to enhance the market presence and competitiveness of Nepali tea producers by addressing key challenges in the sector. Specifically, it aims to investigate methods to establish direct linkages between producers and buyers, reduce reliance on intermediaries, and promote Nepali tea in national and international markets through digital marketing and e-commerce platforms.

The study seeks to identify effective approaches for developing high-quality content, implementing SEO-driven strategies, and utilizing digital tools to improve the visibility and sales of Nepali tea. Furthermore, it examines the potential for creating a sustainable online marketplace that fosters growth for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tea industry while contributing to local economic development and global recognition of Nepali tea.

4. Methodology

The development of the Nepal Tea website followed a systematic and strategic methodology aimed at enhancing both user experience and technical performance. This approach ensured that every aspect of the website was carefully planned, implemented, and optimized for optimal functionality and user engagement.

4.1 Requirements Gathering

The project began with a comprehensive evaluation of the existing system, followed by gathering feedback from stakeholders to identify areas for enhancement. The key objectives were to improve data management, optimize navigation and interactivity, strengthen security through role-based access control, and facilitate seamless content updates. The goal was to ensure the platform's scalability, elevate the overall user experience, and reinforce security measures.

4.2 Design and Planning

The design and planning phase concentrated on structuring the website to fulfill user needs and enhance functionality. Several key activities were undertaken to align the site's architecture with the established requirements. The database schema was revised to optimize data management and scalability, incorporating adjustments to existing tables and the addition of new ones. Logos for Nepal Specialty Tea were crafted using Figma, ensuring they accurately represented the brand's identity and visual appeal. Furthermore, wireframes and mockups were developed for new pages and sections, including "History,"

"About Us," and "Information," to ensure a seamless, visually cohesive, and user-centric experience throughout the site.

4.3 Implementation

The implementation phase focused on developing new features and refining existing ones:

- **Role-Based Access Control (RBAC):** Implemented RBAC to restrict admins to managing only their own organization's content, while superadmins retained full access.
- **New Pages:** Created "Information," "History," and "About Us" pages to provide detailed content about Nepal Speciality Tea, with interactive features for easy navigation.
- **Dynamic Content Management:** Enabled superadmins to update content on key pages directly through the admin interface.
- **User Experience Enhancements:** Improved page layouts, added visuals, and refined content to optimize the user browsing experience.
- **Technical Improvements:** Resolved issues with image/video controllers, streamlined blog creation workflows for admins, and enhanced site responsiveness across devices.

4.4 Testing

Extensive testing was conducted to ensure the stability and performance of the implemented features. Unit testing was carried out on the updated database schema and RBAC functionality to validate data integrity and security. End-to-end testing was performed to check the overall navigation, content accuracy, and responsiveness of the site. The dynamic content update features for superadmins were also tested for reliability, and any bugs, particularly those related to controllers and image uploads, were identified and resolved to ensure smooth operation.

5. Tea Enterprises

5.1 Lalipma Specialty Tea

The company is a family-owned business established in 2021, producing premium handmade tea with seven employees. Four people majorly focus on tea farming along with handling meticulous sorting, ensuring high-quality production. The factory specializes in artisanal tea, producing 20 kg daily and offering 23-24 varieties, including Jhakri Gold, white tea, and Oolong tea.

Key Highlights:

- Traditional practices, such as worshipping the “mother bush,” emphasize respect for nature and purity of production.
- Specialization: Only factory in Nepal focusing on handmade tea.
- Product Portfolio: Popular offerings include Jhakri Gold , white tea, Oolong, steam tea, and more, catering to both domestic and international markets.
- Market Reach: Exports to countries like Russia, China, and Germany, while Kathmandu remains a key domestic market, with 500 kg sold locally this year.
- Organic Practices: 100% organic cultivation using homemade compost for over eight years, enhancing flavor and quality.
- Unique Approach: Personalization for orders, including firing, blending, and sampling, allows buyers to select their preferred blend.
- Production Capacity: Seasonal adjustments to meet demand, with pricing strategies reflecting market conditions.

Challenges:

- Financial constraints and limited capacity hinder growth.
- Retailers manage export and pricing, with tea priced from 3k per kg. Bulk sales dominate, though smaller quantities are accommodated.

Strategic Insights:

- Focused training for farmers ensures quality and income generation.
- Dedicated land blocks for specific grades and clones improve efficiency and output.

This enterprise exemplifies a blend of tradition and innovation, ensuring premium quality handmade tea that resonates with both local and international consumers.



Green Tea



Jhakri Gold
Black Tea



Pu'er Tea



Oolong Tea



Shoumei Tea



Silver Needle (Tips)

5.2 Lamandala Specialty Tea

The company, established and registered in 2019, specializes in producing organic black, green, and white tea varieties, including Ruby Black, White Tea, Spring White, Golden Tips, and Silver Needle. With 3,800 kg of annual production, Ruby Black is the top-selling variety, priced at €32-35/kg internationally and widely preferred in the Nepali market. Spring White, another popular variant, undergoes processing within 18 hours of plucking, reflecting the enterprise's commitment to quality.

Production Process

The factory operates with 2 full-time workers and 5 additional sorters from nearby villages. The production process involves withering, rolling, spreading, drying, and sorting, typically completed within 24 hours. All operations are machine-assisted, with packaging handled locally.

Farming and Sourcing

The company works with 32-33 farmers, each cultivating 6-8 ropanis of land. It does not own farmland but purchases green tea leaves directly from farmers. Shifting to organic farming 2-3 years ago, the company emphasizes pesticide-free cultivation to enhance soil health and ensure the production of premium organic tea.

Market Reach

Tea is sold in both local and international markets through 2-3 retailers. Sampling precedes bulk orders to meet customer expectations. Organic options dominate demand, with international buyers favoring smaller, high-value orders and domestic customers preferring black tea in larger quantities.

Key Details:

Registered/Established: 2019

Initial Investment: NPR 40-50 lakhs

Employees: 2 full-time, 5 part-time sorters

Annual Production: 3,800 kg

Popular Varieties: Ruby Black (€32-35/kg), Spring White (€28/kg)

Market Focus: Domestic and international, primarily organic tea

Opportunities:

- Growing demand for organic tea in both domestic and international markets.
- High preference for premium black tea varieties like Ruby Black.
- Ability to cater to niche markets with specialized products such as Spring White and Silver Needle.
- Strong relationships with local farmers, ensuring a consistent supply of green tea leaves.
- Potential to expand market reach through established retail partnerships.

Challenges:

- Managing overproduction during peak demand periods, requiring extended working hours.
- Reliance on third-party retailers for customer interactions and distribution.
- Limited in-house workforce, requiring additional part-time support for sorting.
- Dependence on external farmers for tea leaves, limiting direct control over farming practices.
- Need for consistent quality assurance across different tea grades.



Baimudan

Baimudan



Ruby black

Ruby Black



Spring Oolong

Spring Oolong



Silver Tips

Silver Tips

5.3 Mai Pokhari Tea

The business specializes in producing a variety of teas, with a strong focus on Oolong tea, which is distinguished by its unique fruity flavor and prolonged taste retention. The distinctiveness of Oolong tea lies in its labor-intensive processing methods, which set it apart from other teas. Annual production includes approximately 9,000–10,000 kilograms of tea, of which Oolong tea accounts for 4,000 kilograms, making it the most profitable variety. Green tea, while the most sold, has a comparatively lower profit margin.

The tea is cultivated on 25–30 ropanis of self-owned land situated at an altitude of 2,100 meters. This high-altitude cultivation contributes to the distinct taste and medicinal benefits of the tea, as recognized by experienced tea tasters. The business also procures tea leaves from local farmers to meet demand. Quality assurance is maintained through a two-stage sorting process: machine sorting to classify grades and hand sorting to ensure no leaves go to waste. Lower-grade tea is sold at a reduced price in the local market.

Tea production follows a seasonal cycle, beginning in March-April (Chaitra) and concluding in November-December (Mangsir), with flushes like the autumn flush dictating supply. The processing of Oolong tea involves several meticulous steps to ensure quality and flavor consistency. Substandard tea or tea affected by external contamination, such as chemical or odor absorption, is sold locally at a discount or discarded if unsellable.

The packaging strategy is tailored to target both domestic and international markets. For the local market, golden-colored self-sealing bags and cartons are used, while export packaging prioritizes durability to prevent damage. The brand name "Mai Pokhari Tea" is prominently displayed on all packaging.

Challenges:

The business has encountered several operational and external challenges:

- **Contamination Issues:** Tea leaves occasionally arrive from farmers contaminated with chemicals or substances like petrol, spoiling entire batches.
- **Quality Variability:** Inconsistent quality from suppliers and competition among factories can lead to compromised standards.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Local consumers are unfamiliar with the benefits of organic teas, often favoring traditional black tea with milk and sugar over higher-priced organic alternatives.
- **Limited Government Support:** The government has yet to fully recognize the potential of organic tea production and its role in promoting Nepalese tea internationally. Farmers and producers receive little assistance to address their challenges effectively.

Opportunities for Growth:

Despite the challenges, the tea business sees significant potential in both local and international markets:

- **International Demand:** Organic teas, particularly Oolong, are increasingly sought after in colder regions due to their health benefits and unique flavor profiles.
- **Consumer Education:** Educating Nepali consumers about the health benefits and proper consumption of organic teas could increase local demand. Highlighting the difference between plain organic tea and traditional tea with additives could shift consumer preferences.

- Focus on High-Quality Production: Leveraging the altitude advantage and unique processing methods can enhance the appeal of the teas in niche markets abroad.
- Advocacy for Support: Advocating for greater government involvement in supporting small producers could open pathways to international markets and foster sustainable growth.

Future Outlook

The business believes that small producers with hands-on expertise will play a pivotal role in introducing Nepalese tea to the global market. By refining processing methods, ensuring consistent quality, and emphasizing the unique qualities of high-altitude organic teas, the company aims to expand its market presence. Government recognition and support are deemed crucial for empowering small producers and realizing the full potential of Nepalese tea in international markets.

Key Business Details

Company Name: Mai Pokhari Tea

Established: 2067 BS (2010 AD)

Registered: 2071 BS (2014 AD)

Initial Investment: NPR 1.5 Crore

Employees: 5 regular staff; additional workers hired during peak seasons



Gaba Oolong



Green Oolong



Hand Rolled Tea



Ruby Tea



Red Oolong



Red Panda Oolong



Maipokhari Oolong

5.4 Noorling Speciality Tea

Established in 2020 as a partnership business, the company initially operated independently before transitioning to its current model post-COVID-19. It specializes in small-scale production of specialty teas, relying on traditional handmade techniques to ensure quality and timely supply. Operations are managed by four partners, who actively engage in factory work alongside 4-5 employees. Annual production ranges from 2,200 to 2,500 kg of specialty teas, supplemented by 25-30k kg of green tea and 4-5k kg of mid-grade tea.

Product Categories and Specialties:

1. White Tea: Silver Needle, Peony White (Bai Mu Dan), Godawari White.
 - Most popular and best-selling category, especially in international markets.
 - Contains health benefits, including support for skin health, heart disease, and diabetes management.
 - Unique flavor profile enhanced by monosaccharides as a natural sweetener substitute.
 - Non-fermented, smooth taste profile.
2. Black Tea:
 - Includes varieties like Ruby Gold and Classic Black.
 - Different grades produced based on plucking techniques and fermentation methods.
3. Green Tea:
 - Produced primarily during the rainy season.
4. Golden Tea:
 - Special grade tea made from tips, known for its golden color and lower caffeine content.

Production Process

Seasonal Focus:

- First flush: White tea production.
- Rainy season: Black tea production.
- Autumn: Return to white tea production.

Organic Farming:

- No use of pesticides or insecticides; focus on sustainable farming practices.
- In the process of obtaining organic certification, which involves a rigorous 3-year ICS (Internal Control System).

Quality Maintenance:

- Close interaction with farmers to ensure proper plucking and adherence to organic methods.
- Hygienic handling and precise techniques in withering, rolling, and drying.

Packaging:

- Export packaging: 12 kg cartons with food-grade materials to prevent spoilage.
- Local packaging: Available in 200g, 500g, and 1kg sizes for Nepalese customers.

Market and Distribution

International Markets:

- Export destinations: France, Germany, Japan, Czech Republic, Canada, and Russia.
- Largest export market: France, followed by India.
- Customized packaging for international clients (e.g., candy-themed designs for Australia).

Domestic Market:

- Focused on Kathmandu, Butwal, and Pokhara.
- Local awareness about white tea is limited, requiring education efforts during sales.

Sales and Supply Channels:

- Direct purchases by some buyers; bulk orders handled by HIMCOOP and HDPA.
- Samples sent to Nepali clients before bulk orders.

Business Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges:

- Quality inconsistency due to variable plucking standards by farmers.
- Spoilage risks during rainy seasons and power outages.
- Ineffective market management affecting timely payments to farmers.
- Limited awareness about specialty teas, especially white tea, in Nepal.
- High cost of organic certification renewal (NPR 6 lakhs).
- Policies lack effective implementation and practical support.

Opportunities:

- Growing global demand for specialty teas, particularly in health-conscious markets like Europe and Japan.
- Rising local interest in diverse tea varieties, offering an untapped potential for market expansion within Nepal.
- Niche product offerings (white and golden teas) cater to premium market segments.
- Organic certification can boost marketability and command higher prices.
- Customizable packaging as a value addition for international clients.

Future Goals

- Increase production capacity to meet rising demands.
- Enhance local awareness and market presence for specialty teas, especially white tea.
- Complete the organic certification process to strengthen the brand's credibility.
- Launch and operationalize the factory's website to streamline online sales and information dissemination.
- Strengthen relationships with farmers through training and quality incentives.

Financial Overview

- Initial Investment: NPR15-20 lakhs.
- Current capital is allocated to leasing factory space (NPR 60 lakhs) and investing in equipment for handmade tea production, such as drying machines and withering facilities.
- Revenue streams comprise 40% from international exports and 60% from domestic sales, with significant demand in India.



White Tea



Hayasun



Silver Tips



Golden Tips



Ujeli



Oolong Tea



Blackforest Tea



Baimudan Tea



Peony

5.5 Farmer Tea Processing Industry

The company, established in 2020 as a partnership, focuses on producing specialty teas, including white, green, black, and golden tea. It operates on a small scale, utilizing traditional handmade methods instead of heavy machinery, ensuring high-quality production. With a workforce of 4-5 employees, the company produces around 2,200 to 2,500 kg of tea annually, with variations based on seasonal demand.

Product Offerings

The company specializes in white tea (Best-seller), black tea, green tea, and golden tea. White tea, known for its health benefits, is particularly popular in European markets. Other varieties, like black tea and golden tea, are also produced using meticulous fermentation and drying processes. The company is committed to organic farming, avoiding pesticides, and is in the process of acquiring organic certification.

Market and Distribution

The company exports to countries like France, Germany, Japan, and India, with France being the largest market. Domestically, the company focuses on Kathmandu, Butwal, and Pokhara, with growing interest in specialty teas. The company ensures careful packaging with food-grade materials to maintain quality during shipping, both for local and international markets.

Challenges:

- **Inconsistent Plucking by Farmers:** Farmers' plucking practices do not always meet the company's quality requirements, affecting the consistency of the tea produced.
- **Power Outages During the Rainy Season:** Power interruptions, especially during the rainy season, increase the risk of spoilage, as generators alone are insufficient to maintain processing operations.
- **Limited Local Awareness of Specialty Teas:** There is a lack of awareness among local consumers about specialty teas like white and golden teas, which are more popular in international markets.

Opportunities

- **Expansion of Production Capacity:** The company has the potential to increase production, allowing it to meet growing demand both locally and internationally.
- **Organic Certification:** Obtaining organic certification will enhance the company's credibility and attract a larger market, particularly in regions where organic products are highly valued.
- **Increased Local and International Awareness:** Educating local consumers about specialty teas and expanding brand visibility internationally can drive demand and boost sales.

- Customized Packaging Requests: Offering customized packaging options, such as themed designs, opens up new market opportunities, particularly for international buyers.

Future Goals

The company aims to increase production capacity, strengthen farmer relations, and complete its organic certification. Additionally, it plans to enhance local awareness of its products and launch its website to streamline operations.

5.6 Kalapani Tea Industry

Kalapani Tea Industry is a tea production company based in Pachthar, Nepal, with over four years of experience in the tea farming and processing sector. The company operates on 50-60 ropanis of land, producing a variety of teas, including black, white, and green teas, with Apsara Green Tea, named after the founder, being the top-selling product. Their production is known for its organic quality, as the tea is cultivated in a cool climate, free from pesticides and additives, ensuring a premium and natural product. The company exports its tea to international markets, including China, France, Japan, and Germany, while also selling small quantities locally within Nepal.

Production Process

The company follows an extensive and careful process to produce high-quality tea, which includes plucking, fermentation, enzyming, rolling, and drying. Green tea production, in particular, requires careful handling, with extra time and care dedicated to its processing, resulting in a product that stands out in both taste and aroma. The company's green tea is slightly stronger and more bitter compared to others, offering health benefits such as aiding weight loss, improving skin health, and providing antioxidants. The company also produces other types of tea, including black and white teas, which also have significant market demand.

The name Apsara Green Tea was given by buyers who appreciated the unique contributions of the founder, Apsara Neupane, to the tea industry, especially as a woman in a traditionally male-dominated field. Other types of tea, including white tea and golden tea, are also in demand. Orders are typically placed after buyers receive and approve samples, and invoices are processed accordingly.

Challenges:

- Farmers lack training on proper plucking techniques, affecting tea quality.
- Power cuts during the rainy season disrupt production.
- There's a lack of skilled workers for plucking and processing.
- Difficulty in managing pests and other agricultural issues.
- Unpredictable weather conditions can spoil tea and affect production quality.

Opportunities:

- Growing demand for organic, high-quality teas both locally and internationally.
- Training local farmers and workers in proper tea production and plucking techniques to improve quality.
- Gaining organic certification to enhance market value and appeal to health-conscious consumers.
- Potential for expanding the product range beyond green tea to meet different consumer preferences.
- Government initiatives to motivate farmers and provide grants could further grow the tea industry.

Future Outlook

Kalapani Tea Industry is optimistic about the future of tea farming in Nepal. With the rise of more organized factories and increased awareness about the significance of tea, the industry is expected to flourish. The company remains dedicated to producing high-quality, organic teas and expanding its market reach. With ongoing efforts to improve production techniques and training local farmers, Kalapani Tea Industry is well-positioned for continued growth and success.

Social Impact

Beyond business success, Kala Pani Tea Industry has had a positive impact on the local community. It has helped increase the income of local farmers, particularly through fair trade practices and ensuring that their hard work is compensated appropriately. The company also focuses on empowering local women by providing them with training and employment opportunities in the tea industry. This contributes to the broader goal of gender equality in a field that is traditionally dominated by men.

Company Size and Operations

- The company has around 3-4 employees working on tea farming and processing.
- The initial investment was between 15-20 lakhs, used for setting up tea production and acquiring necessary equipment.
- The company operates on leased land and sources additional tea leaves from local farmers.



Kalapani Yak



Saino



Barsha



Apsara Green



Junkiri



Ujeli

6. Challenges

Nepal's tea industry faces various challenges that hinder its growth and sustainability. While Nepali tea is becoming more recognized internationally, there's still a lack of awareness among local consumers about organic teas, especially varieties like white tea. Most people in Nepal are familiar with black tea and milk tea, and only recently has green tea started gaining some attention. However, other types, such as white tea and other organic specialty teas, are still largely unknown. Many Nepalese people see these teas as pricey luxuries and don't fully understand their health benefits or the effort that goes into producing them. Issues such as contamination of tea leaves with chemicals have, at times, ruined entire batches, complicating the production process. Furthermore, the lengthy and costly organic certification process, coupled with high renewal fees, places additional strain on producers. These obstacles make it harder for them to maintain a steady income and ensure the consistent production of organic tea.

Despite the challenges faced by factories, farmers are significantly affected by a range of issues in the tea production process. Poor market management, which often results in delayed payments to farmers, even when they've worked hard to provide high-quality green leaves. Farmers face challenges such as low prices for their crops, labor shortages during the plucking season, and difficulties with pest management. These issues make it harder for them to maintain a steady livelihood and continue producing quality tea. Additionally, weather-related challenges, particularly during the rainy season, force farmers to harvest tea leaves regardless of the weather, which can complicate the process. These ongoing issues create significant barriers for farmers, making it even more difficult for them to thrive in the industry.

Although the government does introduce policies aimed at supporting the tea industry, they often aren't very effective. Many in the industry have concerns about these policies but don't hold high expectations for real change. Even when policies are introduced, they don't

always provide the much-needed support or bring about meaningful improvements. Despite these obstacles, the government has yet to fully recognize the potential of organic tea, offering minimal support to small producers who possess hands-on expertise in tea cultivation. The Tea Board's efforts to raise awareness and encourage collaboration have been insufficient, further hindering the growth of the domestic market. For Nepalese tea to truly thrive, it is essential that the government prioritizes support for smaller producers, improves market management, and invests in educating both farmers and consumers about the true value of organic teas.

7. Way Forward

To address the challenges faced by Nepal's tea industry, a comprehensive approach is needed, involving both government action and public awareness initiatives. First, the government could play a crucial role by providing grants and incentives to farmers, motivating them to engage more actively in tea cultivation. This would help reduce the negative impact of poor processing and marketing, which has previously demotivated farmers and led to a decline in production.

The government should also make a genuine effort to understand and address the specific issues faced by farmers. This can be achieved by engaging directly with them, studying their challenges, and implementing tailored solutions. Currently, there seems to be a lack of attention from the government, leaving farmers to navigate these difficulties on their own. By taking a more proactive approach, the government can help create a more supportive environment for tea cultivation.

Raising awareness about the value of organic tea is also crucial. Educating people about the health benefits of plain tea, as opposed to tea with added sugar and milk, is essential. Once the government and public understand these benefits, they can spread the message further. Additionally, proper education on how to consume tea is also necessary to ensure people gain its full health benefits.

Finally, the Tea Board needs to take a more active role in promoting awareness of different types of tea, especially white tea. The limited awareness around white tea can be attributed to the Tea Board's insufficient efforts to collaborate and raise public knowledge. By focusing on more proactive and collaborative strategies, the Tea Board can play a significant role in driving the growth of Nepal's tea industry, helping both farmers and consumers recognize the value of organic and specialty teas.

In summary, a combination of government support, farmer engagement, public education, and more active promotion by the Tea Board can help overcome the challenges faced by Nepal's tea industry, ensuring its growth and sustainability in the long term.

8. ANNEXES

