

S.13 Economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

To encourage and support tobacco farmers to switch to economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing.

The bulk of the world's tobacco production has shifted to low and middle-income countries. Despite the claims of the tobacco industry, early evidence was beginning to show that tobacco farming appeared to be a very hard way to make a living for small-scale farmers.

There are also well documented country examples of experiences in switching to alternative crops from tobacco:

- [Case Studies on Alternative Livelihoods to Tobacco | unfairtobacco](#)
- As part of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases Tobacco Control Thematic Working Group, a toolkit for Article 17 and 18 is being developed as a joint project of multiple UN agencies: WHO, Secretariat of the WHO FCTC, UNDP, ILO, UNODC, FAO and UNEP.
- Based on the recent reports received from Parties on implementation of Article 17:
- Parties that reported recent initiatives of alternative crops: China, Colombia, Ecuador, EU (reported on Rural Development Programmes 2014-2020), Malaysia, Mexico, Uruguay.
- Other examples: Philippines (alternative livelihoods), Sierra Leone (it seems they have transitioned all or almost all tobacco growers to other crops).
- Parties that provided information already reported in previous reporting cycles: Afghanistan (since 2018), Bulgaria (2018), Canada (2018), India (2018), Mali (2016), Myanmar (2018), Poland (2016), Timor-Leste (2018), Tunisia (2016), Turkey (2018), Zambia (2016).
- Example of a South-South cooperation project facilitated by the Convention Secretariat:
- [WHO | Article 17: study visit to examine Brazilian alternative livelihoods](#)
- [Report South South Art17.pdf \(who.int\)](#)
- [This proposal](#) is supported by the WHO FCTC Knowledge Hub on Articles 17 and 18 (Oswaldo Cruz Foundation(Fiocruz), an institution of the federal public administration under the Ministry of Health of Brazil, through its Center for Tobacco and Health Studies (CETAB) of the National School of Public Health Sergio Arouca (ENSP).

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

[WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) (WHO FCTC), adopted by the World Health Assembly on 21 May 2003, entered into force on 27 February 2005 and has 182 Parties as of April 2021. It is an evidence-based treaty that sets out objectives and principles that Parties must follow. The WHO FCTC includes measures related to farming of tobacco (Article 17 on provision of support to economically viable alternative activities) and the environment (Article 18 on protection of the environment and the health of people engaged in tobacco cultivation and manufacture). As one of the most widely embraced treaties in the United Nations' history, it is a powerful tool to curb tobacco use across the globe. It is also viewed as serious threat by the tobacco industry, which regularly challenges government implementation of the Convention.

Since its first governing body meeting (the Conference of the Parties to the WHO FCTC) in 2006, the Parties have consistently adopted decisions related to Article 17 and 18.

- [EB Document Format \(who.int\)](#)
- [Microsoft Word - FCTC COP2 DIV9-en.doc \(who.int\)](#)
- [Microsoft Word - FCTC COP3 DIV3-en.doc \(who.int\)](#)
- [Microsoft Word - FCTC COP4 DIV6-en.doc \(who.int\)](#)
- [Microsoft Word - FCTC COP5\(8\)-en.docx \(who.int\)](#)
- [EB Document Format \(who.int\)](#)
- [FCTC/COP7\(10\) Economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing \(in relation to Articles 17 and 18 of the WHO FCTC\)](#)
- [FCTC/COP8\(19\) Implementation of Articles 17 and 18 \(alternative livelihoods and protection of the environment\) \(who.int\)](#)

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

It is a well-established fact that tobacco farmers are the weakest and most vulnerable link in the marketing chain. Continuing growth of demand for tobacco leaf has done nothing more than perpetuate low-incomes and dependency among these farmers. The evidence suggested that tobacco farming was extremely labour intensive with farming families providing much of the unpaid labour (including in many cases, children). The tobacco plant leached nutrients from the soil and required large amounts of pesticides. In addition to the health hazards from the pesticides, others included smoke inhalation from tending to the drying kilns, 'green tobacco sickness' from picking wet leaves, inhalation of tobacco dust from storing the dried leaves in the homestead, etc. Economically, while providing farmers with much-needed cash, they often appeared to find themselves tied into a vicious debt bondage cycle with tobacco companies.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?

As mentioned previously, tobacco farmers face enormous challenges achieving equitable livelihoods in food systems. Tobacco farming is not only unfair to workers, but it is also an incredibly labour intensive and dangerous industry. Due to the lack of industry regulations and protection, often marginalized populations are forced into the industry. Specifically, the tobacco industry really struggles with child labour and still relies on children in many cases as a significant portion of the labour force. Action Track 4: advancing equitable livelihoods and the human rights working group both have an interest in ending child labour and protecting marginalized groups.

5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

Not only does the tobacco industry have significant issues within the supply chain, but the crop itself causes significant health issues globally. This solution is aimed at promoting alternative crops to tobacco, which in turn will cut down on the global addiction to tobacco products. This solution will both protect the workforce in this industry and give alternatives that could provide healthy crops into local and global supply chains.

The guiding principles of these policy options and recommendations include:

- Livelihoods diversification should be the concept guiding implementation of economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing
- Tobacco growers and workers should be engaged in policy development concerning Article 17 and 18 in line with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and its guidelines
- Policies and programmes to promote economically sustainable alternative livelihoods should be based on best practices and linked to sustainable development programmes

- The promotion of economically sustainable alternative livelihoods should be carried out within a holistic framework that encompasses all aspects of the livelihoods of tobacco growers and workers (including the health, economic, social, environmental and food security aspects)
- Policies promoting economically sustainable alternative livelihoods should be protected from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry, including leaf companies, in accordance with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and its guidelines
- Partnership and collaboration should be pursued in the implementation of these policy options and recommendations, including the in provision of technical and/or financial assistance

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a ‘game changing solution’ developed by the Summit?

- **Impact Potential at Scale (including return on investment):** This solution is focused on any tobacco growing country in the world. There are approximately 100 countries that produce tobacco and over 50 countries produce over 5000 tonnes of tobacco yearly.
- **Actionability (taking into account politics, capacity, costs):** Many international governing agencies are already working to implement this solution and there is global agreement on the importance of safeguarding the tobacco industry, but it will require the buy in of governments who have interest in tobacco production. Without a viable alternative, there will be minimal interest for governments to disrupt the industry.
- **Sustainability (i.e., the ability to keep delivering to 2030 and beyond):** As momentum builds between international governing agencies, there will be substantial changes made to the tobacco industry. This will require a multi-sectoral approach, but it is necessary to achieve sustainable food systems.

7. What do you think are the key actions required to address this solution? Please mention the implementation approach for 3 levels, if appropriate:

- Encourage and support tobacco farmers to switch to economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing.
- Implement policies that promote establishment of innovative mechanisms for the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods for tobacco growers a workers in relation to Articles 17 and 18 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).
- Build up development programmes connected with the promotion of food security and feasible markets that cover all aspects of the alternatives to tobacco growing, including economic viability and environmental protection.

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

The main actor would be the Government of these tobacco growing countries and who are Party to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). Government agencies, particularly those with a strong influence in rural areas, have an important role to play in supporting the diversification of livelihoods in tobacco-growing regions, through an array of policies and measures, including the provision of training for tobacco workers and growers and their families. International institutions and farmer organizations should also play an important role in the development and implementation of policy.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited?

Political and policy factors:

- Ownership and access to land and other natural resources specifically assets that increase livelihood productivity such as livestock
- Social and cultural decision-making, agency and leadership roles for women and youth:
- Recognition of traditional forms of knowledge regarding sustainable local food systems
- Realization of aspirations among youth and those with entrepreneurial spirit
- Economic, finance, and building entrepreneurial skill sets
- Training and education, access to technology, knowledge, credit, and financial services
- Capacity of rural institutions:
- Institutions for collective action that foster improved access to markets, financial services, and technology, as well as sustainable management of natural resources with a focus on structural inequities that marginalize disadvantaged communities and diminish opportunities for equitable livelihoods.