Alternatives to tobacco growing, recent evidence at country and global levels

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Tobacco growing associated risks

- Health
- Environment
- Socio-economic
Health – occupational risks

- **Green Tobacco Sickness (GTS):**
  - Nicotine poisoning affecting by absorption of nicotine through the skin (symptoms: dizziness, nausea, headache, vomiting)

- **Exposure to pesticides:**
  - breathing difficulty, nausea, chest pain, eye and skin irritation.
  - organophosphate exposure linked with neurological damage leading sometimes to depression in suicidal tendencies (cases reported in Brazil and Kenya for example).

- **Respiratory effects from exposure to tobacco dust**
  - Associated to impaired breathing function and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease

- **Other injuries: cuts and skeletal injuries**
Environment

- Deforestation
  - Curing tobacco leaves, clearing land for cropping, construction of curing barns

- Contamination of water supplies because of pesticide use
  - Contamination of rivers and other water supplies that are key for livelihood of farmers (incl. for domestic purposes) in developing countries.

- Soil degradation because of intensive use of fertilizers for tobacco growing

- Cigarette butts
Socio-economic

- Unfair contractual arrangements between farmers and tobacco industry
  - Trapped in vicious circle of debt and unable to get a fair price for their product

- Child labour
  - Prevalent because tobacco growing is labour intensive (particularly in harvesting season) and most farms in developing countries are of small acreage and family owned
Looking for alternatives

- **Facts**
  - supply reduction cannot be forced upon farmers
  - because as long as there is demand there will be supply

- **Livelihood of tobacco farmers and growers: concern raised from the beginning of the negotiations of the WHO FCTC**
  - detrimental environmental, health and socio-economic impact
  - many farmers around the world wish to quit tobacco growing
  - demand will ultimately decrease and affect livelihoods of farmers

- **Research on alternative livelihoods and development of support programmes**
  - Will vary by country – one size does not fit all (depends on the market in the country, environmental conditions etc.)
Existing initiatives that promote alternatives to tobacco growing

Globally
WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

- **Article 17**: Provision of support for economically viable alternative activities
- **Article 18**: Protection of the environment and the health of persons
- Establishment in 2008 of "Working group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing".
Working group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing

Mandate:

- Develop a standardized methodological framework to assess viable and sustainable alternative livelihoods to tobacco growing,
- Promote knowledge and research on the impact of tobacco growing,
- Elaborate policy options and recommendations for implementation of Articles 17 and 18.
Draft policy options in the making. The main recommended strategies were defined. They included:

- Research promotion,
- Development of educational programmes for growers and workers,
- Removal of obstacles to diversification,
- Removal of policies promoting tobacco growing,
- Mainstreaming tobacco growing alternative livelihoods programmes into existing government schemes,
- Ensure participation of the civil society.
Existing initiatives that promote alternatives to tobacco growing

At country level

Examples
Brazil

- Ministry of Agrarian Development: provides technical assistance and rural extension for tobacco farmers,
- National program for the agricultural family: provides credit with low interest rates to agricultural families engaging in tobacco who wish to invest in other activities (no loans provided to tobacco growers working in partnership with the tobacco industry),
- Other interesting project: national school feeding programme: utilize products primarily from local rural communities for school meals.
Brazil: diversification project in Dom Feliciano municipality

- Project financed by the Ministry of Agrarian development and supported by other ministries, NGOs and the mayor of the municipality (located in the south of Brazil, heavily dependant on tobacco growing),

- 150 families currently involved in the project of tobacco diversification => plan to reach 1,000 families in 5 years,

- Alternative activities very diverse: fruits and vegetables, aquaculture, animal husbandry, fruit processing,

- Includes education, provision of input and market access,

- Pilot project for possible other similar ones in the country.
Kenya

- Project funded by the IDRC in South Nyanza Region: Bamboo as an Alternative Crop and Livelihood Strategy 2006-2012.
- Promotion of bamboo among 240 smallholder tobacco farmers
- Benefits:
  - Different viable alternatives: crop growing, input for housing, handicraft (furniture, baskets, cutlery, jewellery etc.)
  - Economic: requires little capital investment, high yield per acre.
  - Environment: lower demand in wood, improves soil fertility, helps purify air and water, no utilization of fertilizers and chemicals
  - Societal: less labour requirement than tobacco during harvesting, promotes community based processing and creates employment opportunities.
EU

- Tobacco growing subsidies were phased out by 2010. Amounts moved to a tobacco fund to promote knowledge on effect of tobacco but also research on alternatives to tobacco growing.

- Evidence suggesting a good candidate for alternative for tobacco in a number of European countries: Stevia
  - **Health**: low calorie, natural sweetener. Used as an argument for obesity reduction, suitability for diabetics
  - **Economic/Technical**:
    - Emerging crop with high market potential
    - Agricultural technique similar to tobacco
    - No additional investment needed for tobacco farms
Conclusions

- Supply reduction cannot be forced upon farmers,
- However, alternatives should be explored and programmes developed in preparation for demand reduction in the future and to support farmers wishing to switch,
- Sustainable alternative livelihoods to tobacco do exist but vary depending on countries, regions and areas,
- Government initiatives exist in a number of countries and should be strengthened and used for the farmer's benefit.