

Briefing 8:

The study group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing (in relation to Articles 17 and 18: provision of support for economically viable alternatives and protection of the environment and the health of persons)

**Third session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control
17-22 November 2008, Durban, South Africa**

Recommendation

The third session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control should decide to continue the work of the study group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing, and mandate it to:

- elaborate recommendations on effective measures that Parties may take to promote sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing;
- undertake an assessment of barriers to the effective promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing – including tobacco industry practices, the power imbalance between tobacco manufacturers, leaf dealers and processors and tobacco growers, and any policies or measures that support or facilitate tobacco growing – and elaborate recommendations on measures that may be implemented nationally and internationally to overcome these barriers;
- identify and develop opportunities for practical cooperation with competent intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations in the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing; and
- develop, for use in data collection and research – with a view to the regular collection of standardized data and the establishment of an international database of best practices and useful resources for the promotion of sustainable alternative livelihoods – a methodological framework for comprehensive assessment of the viability and sustainability of tobacco growing and its alternatives, taking into account health, environmental and socioeconomic factors.

Background

The study group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing was established by the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO

Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) at its first session (COP-1), taking into account Article 17 (Provision of support for economically viable alternative activities) and supporting provisions relating to research (Article 20.1(a)), provision of technical, scientific, legal and other expertise (Article 22.1(b)), and utilization of funding channels to support alternatives to tobacco production in the context of sustainable development strategies (Article 26.3).¹ The study group was created with the objective of: summarizing the uptake of existing economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers, growers and, as the case may be, individual sellers; recommending to the COP mechanisms to assess the impact over time of the tobacco companies' practices; reporting on initiatives being taken at national level in accordance with Article 17; and recommending cost-effective diversification initiatives.

Following its first meeting, held in Brasilia, Brazil on 27-28 February 2007, the study group presented a report to the second session of the COP (COP-2) on the results of its discussions.² COP-2 mandated the study group to continue its work, taking into account Article 18 (Protection of the environment and the health of persons) and the recognized need to be alert to any efforts by the tobacco industry to undermine or subvert tobacco control efforts.³ The study group held its second meeting in Mexico City, Mexico on 17-19 June 2008, and has submitted a further report (Document FCTC/COP/3/11) for consideration by the third session of the COP (COP-3).

Key findings of the second meeting of the study group

The report of the study group to COP-3 provides an overview of the results of its second meeting, which aimed to expand the scope of its work by updating experiences from its first meeting, introducing recent experiences and cross-national reviews, and reviewing relevant policy tools.

The Framework Convention Alliance (FCA) supports the findings of the second meeting of the study group, and considers that there is a need for the study group to continue its work to assist Parties in promoting sustainable alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers, taking into account in particular the need to protect the environment and the health of those engaged in tobacco cultivation, and considering that, in a medium to long term, a reduction in demand for tobacco products is expected. With a view to the achievement of the FCTC's objective of protecting present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke, FCA considers Parties' commitments under Articles 17, 18, 20.1(a), 22.1(b) and 26.3 to be supportive and complementary to their primary commitments relating to the reduction of demand for tobacco products.

¹ 'Establishment of a study group on alternative crops' (World Health Organization, Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, first session, decision FCTC/COP1(17)).

² 'Matters identified in decisions taken by the Conference of the Parties that call for action in the period between its first and second sessions: Establishment of a study group on alternative crops (decision FCTC/COP1(17))' (World Health Organization, Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, second session, provisional agenda item 5.5, A/FCTC/COP/2/11, 9 May 2007) available at http://www.who.int/gb/fctc/PDF/cop2/FCTC_COP2_11-en.pdf.

³ 'Study group on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing' (World Health Organization, Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, second session, decision FCTC/COP2(13)).

Key findings of the second meeting of the study group included:

Global market trends

The study group reviewed studies indicating that global tobacco production has increased, surpassing global consumption, and that production is becoming concentrated in developing countries (paras 10-13). These trends are causing prices for tobacco leaf to fall, and farmers' profits to decrease. In the context of the current global food crisis, and the negative impact on food security when scarce land is taken up by tobacco cultivation, these market trends give added importance to the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods for small tobacco farmers.

Negative impacts of tobacco growing

The study group noted that tobacco growing has a number of significant negative impacts on farmers, which have been under-reported and under-researched, particularly in developing countries (paras 14-21). Notably, these impacts include:

- worsening poverty – tobacco cultivation relies heavily on child labour and bonded labour, trapping farming families in cycles of debt and poverty and increasing the vulnerability of the rural poor (para 16);
- negative health impacts – tobacco cultivation poses a number of serious health risks, including crop-induced intoxication such as green tobacco sickness, pesticide intoxication, respiratory and dermatological disorders, and certain types of cancer (para 15); and
- negative environmental impacts – tobacco cultivation causes pollution, soil degradation and deforestation, contributing to adverse climate change and biodiversity losses (para 17).

The role of the tobacco industry

The study group found that the tobacco industry has actively intervened to make the cultivation of tobacco appear attractive to farmers, including through significant investments during the production process and guarantee of financial returns (para 22). The industry has also promoted exaggerated assessments of the economic importance of tobacco cultivation, and has used its so-called 'corporate social responsibility' activities to work against the implementation of effective measures to promote and facilitate the development of sustainable alternatives (para 44). The study group agreed that the aims of the tobacco industry and public health are diametrically opposed (para 44). Active counter-interventions to promote and facilitate the development of alternatives to tobacco growing, based on and supported by reliable data and research and protected from industry interference, will be required to effectively assist farmers in shifting towards sustainable alternatives (paras 45-47).

The existence of sustainable alternatives

Current experience from a number of different regions indicates the existence of a range of profitable and sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing (paras 22-34). The study group agreed that a combination of different crops, or a combination of crop and non-crop alternatives, are more likely than single crop alternatives to be effective in sustainably reducing the vulnerability and improving the quality of life of small farmers (para 27 and 32-34).

Promoting and facilitating the shift towards sustainable alternative livelihoods

The study group noted that many tobacco farmers require support to develop alternative economic activities (para 35). Measures to promote and facilitate the shift towards sustainable alternative livelihoods include research and data collection, education, awareness-raising and training, technical and financial assistance, and market and social support (paras 29 and 36-43). Such measures should be developed and implemented in consultation with farmers and in cooperation with relevant intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, and should be integrated into broader development strategies and applied consistently across all sectors of government.

The need for further work

The study group noted the need for further work in a number of areas to assist in the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing. These included:

- development of integrated, intersectoral policies and measures for the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing, encompassing health, economic, social, institutional, political and environmental aspects, with the active involvement of tobacco farmers (paras 42, 50, 54 and 57);
- development of a holistic framework addressing the different aspects of tobacco growers' livelihoods for use as an analytical tool in the assessment of alternatives, including standardized definitions and methods of data collection and analysis (paras 34 and 52);
- regular, systematic collection of standardized data, including on health, social and environmental impacts of tobacco growing and trends in the tobacco market, and on the role of the tobacco industry (paras 49, 51, 56 and 58);
- establishment of an international database of information, research, experiences, best practices and regulations (para 55); and
- awareness-raising and sharing of information with farmers and the public, particularly in relation to health, social and environmental impacts of tobacco growing and the activities of the tobacco industry (paras 56 and 58).

In order to take work on the promotion of sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing forward at the international level, the study group reiterated the need to increase the participation of specialized international agencies in the process (paras 13 and 53), as recognized in the mandate given to the group by COP-1.⁴ Agencies with recognized expertise in the area include the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Bank, among others. The study group also noted the need to incorporate the development of sustainable alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers into existing poverty reduction strategies and programmes, including the World Food Programme (para 57).

⁴ Decision FCTC/COP1(17) noted 'the important work being undertaken under the umbrella of the United Nations Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control, and specially the broad range of agencies that have recognized expertise in this area, including FAO, UNDP, UNEP, the World Bank, among others', and decided 'to mandate the study group to work closely with competent international organizations, in particular FAO and the World Bank and to cooperate in its work with the United Nations Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control'.