

Crop substitution, welfare programmes or rural policy reform

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**Francis Thompson
Director of Policy
and Advocacy**

What the FCTC says about tobacco growing

Preamble

- *“Recognizing the need to develop appropriate mechanisms to address the long-term social and economic implications of successful tobacco demand reduction strategies,*
- *“Mindful of the social and economic difficulties that tobacco control programmes may engender in the medium and long term in some developing countries and countries with economies in transition, and recognizing their need for technical and financial assistance in the context of nationally developed strategies for sustainable development,”*

What the FCTC says about tobacco growing (2)

Guiding Principles (Article 4)

- *“The importance of technical and financial assistance to aid the economic transition of tobacco growers and workers in developing country Parties, as well as Parties with economies in transition, should be recognized and addressed in the context of nationally developed strategies for sustainable development.”*



What the FCTC says about tobacco growing (3)

Provision of support for economically viable alternative activities (Article 17)

- *“Parties shall, in cooperation with each other and with competent international and regional intergovernmental organizations, promote, as appropriate, economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers, growers and, as the case may be, individual sellers.”*

Where did this come from?

- During the original FCTC negotiations, a number of Parties were convinced that the Convention would have a substantial and rapid impact on tobacco growers (via lowered demand), and that rich countries should pay for this in some way. (There was some discussion of a global fund for FCTC implementation, which could have included this function.)
- Other countries brought up the issue of eliminating subsidies for tobacco growing – tobacco growing in rich countries was heavily dependent on such subsidies
- After considerable discussion, we ended up with the language about promoting alternatives “as appropriate”.

Logically...

- ...it seems the Article 17 obligation should only kick in (i.e. become “appropriate”) when FCTC implementation begins to reduce global demand for tobacco so much that sales of tobacco leaf begin to fall.
- But governments in a few countries found tobacco growing was a big political obstacle to FCTC implementation – and saw Article 17 as a route to address this.
- Also, as tobacco control officials learnt more about conditions in the tobacco-growing sector, some increasingly felt that improving living conditions for growers was an important objective in its own right.

Hence, different and possibly competing policy objectives

1. *Help vulnerable growers adjust to FCTC-induced drops in demand.*
2. *Reduce tobacco industry's ability to use growers as "cannon fodder" – industry-sponsored "growers' associations" acting as politically acceptable proxies for tobacco companies.*
3. *Improve the working/living conditions of a particular vulnerable population (tobacco growers).*

A key element of international relations: fudging difficult questions

- COP3 (2008) established a working group on Articles 17/18, with a broad mandate:
 - Standardized methodological framework “for comprehensive assessment of the viability and sustainability of tobacco growing and alternative livelihoods...”
 - Standardized terminology, instruments and variables
 - Promote studies on health and environmental impact of tobacco growing
 - ...elaborate policy options and recommendations.
- Assumption: the search for alternative livelihoods can be treated as a “technical” issue – you can discuss *how* to do it in detail without discussing *why*.

2014: COP finally reaches a decision

After lengthy negotiations (attributable to broad mandate, lack of consensus on approach, multi-sectoral nature of issue), COP6 adopted lengthy “policy options and recommendations.”



Some useful elements in the policy options and recommendations

- There's no miracle crop that can replace tobacco in all settings – need to look in detail at economic and social structures to figure out what might be appropriate.
- You do actually need to talk to farmers to find socially/economically acceptable alternatives to tobacco growing (but how do you do so where TI controls “growers’ associations”?)
- Tobacco growing can't be separated from development issues:
 - “Substitution of one economic activity by another does not, however fully address the problem of the poverty and vulnerability of tobacco growers and workers, typical of economic agents from the primary sector. Diversification strategies should encompass a vision of sustainable development of the agrarian sector.”

Some useful elements in the policy options and recommendations (2)

- Government policy may be contributing to tobacco-growing problems in some places, and should be fixed accordingly:
 - “Governments should consider to avoid measures that encourage new entries into tobacco growing or that discourage existing growers from seeking alternatives.”
 - “Tobacco-growing countries should not encourage and not provide any incentive to increase the acreage of land used for cultivating tobacco.”
 - “Tobacco-growing countries should consider reallocating public funds/subsidies used for tobacco production to alternative activities.”

Some useful elements in the policy options and recommendations (3)

- The first step to dealing with violations of labour rights is to enforce existing international obligations.



Some challenges

- Improving working conditions in the tobacco-growing sector alone would make that sector *more* attractive to new entrants.
- Similarly, measures to promote alternative livelihoods, if open only to tobacco growers, could attract farmers *into* tobacco growing (“I’ll grow tobacco this year to be eligible for a grant next year.”).
- There are no obvious sources of funding for the extensive research and international co-operation activities described in the policy options and recommendations.

Unresolved questions

- Given the (slow) speed at which global demand is likely to drop, is it possible most of the transition will happen by individual farmer decision, rather than government programmes?
- What exactly is the incentive for a major tobacco leaf exporter to shift out of the crop? Do we want to spend political capital pushing for a switch *ahead* of demand?



Further information

- Full text of COP6 decision on Articles 17 and 18: <http://tinyurl.com/pkpx8w8> .
- FCA briefing: <http://tinyurl.com/pfj4jfl>
- e-mail: thompsonf@fctc.org

