



REDUCING BIG TOBACCO'S CONTROL IN AGRICULTURE

Big Tobacco harms tobacco farmers and farm workers through child labor, bonded labor, pesticide poisoning, deforestation and other exploitative agricultural practices. This document presents key steps for health officials, researchers and decision-makers to counter Big Tobacco's economic and socio-ecological practices in tobacco growing. The steps serve two purposes: 1) to assist health and tobacco control advocates in the passage of strong policy language in the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Articles 17 and 18 on alternative livelihoods and environmental protections, and 2) to provide suggestions for building sustainable relationships among tobacco control practitioners and government officials focused on health, agriculture and trade. Relationships of solidarity are needed to counter tobacco industry interference in health policymaking as well as to generate fair leaf prices and living earnings for tobacco farmers and farm workers. These relationships combined with viable mechanisms to enforce Articles 17 and 18 will promote employment, rural development and food sovereignty in countries that seek to end Big Tobacco's control in agriculture.

BACKGROUND

For decades, tobacco has threatened the lives of tobacco producers in developing countries. Individuals and communities located in tobacco producing countries that are faced with high unemployment and land shortages sell their labor to farm authorities, working long hours in tobacco fields.

Tobacco production is inherently dangerous for those who produce it. In addition to the long hours required for maintaining the crop, the health of men, women and children in tobacco production are vulnerable to pesticide poisoning and green tobacco sickness (nicotine poisoning through the skin).

Food insecurity has become a major problem for tobacco dependent countries. When tobacco displaces food crops such as vegetables and grains, this shift puts the overall health and socioeconomic conditions of the farmers at risk.

CASE STUDY: BANGLADESH

Tobacco production has been responsible for the displacement of food and other economic crops in Bangladesh, putting the health of the country at risk. The fertile region of Kushtia, the second largest tobacco-producing district in Bangladesh, was once a food-surplus region. Today, tobacco occupies the best lands in the district, having displaced vegetables, pulses, sugar cane, and jute crops. A similar pattern takes place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where tobacco is replacing the traditional rice and vegetable growing economies.

Source: Lecours, "Environmental health impacts of tobacco farming: A review of the literature," *Tobacco Control*, 2012

STEPS FOR REDUCING BIG TOBACCO'S CONTROL IN AGRICULTURE

1. Prepare for Sustained Opposition from Big Tobacco

Cigarette manufacturers and leaf buying companies purchase leaf from about 130 countries and the global demand for tobacco leaf appears steady. To protect Big Tobacco's access to low cost leaf and labor, these companies will over the long-term challenge tobacco control and its goals to improve health and livelihoods. Big Tobacco uses the International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA), an agricultural lobbying group designed to promote cigarette makers and leaf buyers, to protect corporate profits. Targeted resources and interventions are required in the next 25 years to reduce health and ecological impacts of Big Tobacco and the ITGA.

2. Debunk Big Tobacco's False Claims that Tobacco Control Harms Farming

Big Tobacco and ITGA circulate mistruths that tobacco control policymaking negatively impacts farming, and reduces revenues, jobs and rural development. Tobacco control policymaking is a process with participation of over 175 countries, including virtually all of the major tobacco growing countries, that puts health and livelihoods above corporate profits. Countering Big Tobacco's lies involves a strategy of transparency in the tobacco supply chain. Families and communities who cultivate tobacco are the nerve centers of the chain, and Big Tobacco in its efforts to publicize 'ethical supply chains' diverts attention from its bad agricultural practices.

CASE STUDY: KENYA

For far too long, the poor tobacco farmer has had to suffer in silence, often a victim of his own ignorance, at the hands and to the advantage of the rich multinational tobacco firms. Tobacco was introduced in Kuria district, a tiny but productive area in Western Kenya, as a cash crop in 1969. It was then grown by farmers who were organized into a cooperative society. However, the society only lasted three years as the British American Tobacco (Kenya) silenced it. That marked the beginning of the tobacco farmers' woes in Kuria district. BAT went into a full-scale recruitment drive targeting farmers of its own choice, mostly ignorant people who could hardly question officialdom, leaving any "troublemakers" aside.

In short, it was a ring of daylight gagging, mugging, and bagging. Betrayal because the unsuspecting farmers entirely trusted BAT, or its appointees, to be doing things to the best interest of the farmer. Silence, because by killing the cooperative society, BAT had taken away the right of the farmer to bargain collectively. In fact, the farmer, without the advantage of average formal education, was left on his own to farm, harvest, cure, and sell according to the dictates of BAT. Blackmail because BAT kept deregistering farmers they did not like, or declined to register farmers they did not like, as a way of silencing anyone who would want to demand a better deal for himself. This way, the farmer in Kuria was blackmailed into silence. Robbery, and this is the most bitter bit, because the Kuria farmer has never reaped his worth's return from farming tobacco. The insulting payment made to the farmer at the end of every farming season only achieves one thing—it enhances a circle of dependency which the main beneficiaries of the crop, namely the firms, have cultivated over a period of 31 years.

—Samson Mwita Marwa, *Former Tobacco Farmer & Member of Parliament, Kenya*
Source: *Golden Leaf Barren Harvest*, Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids

3. Prepare for the Discontent Between ITGA Interests and Local

Priorities

ITGA says it represents tobacco farmers. In reality, ITGA represents the interests of Big Tobacco and an elite group of tobacco farmers that makes up a tiny portion of the estimated 30,000 individuals who cultivate tobacco around the world. ITGA interests to protect earnings of Big Tobacco contrast sharply with interests of civic groups and government organizations that seek to protect the health of populations. Voices that are not funded by or dominated by the tobacco industry exist in tobacco growing developing countries. These voices are an alternative to ITGA and

Big Tobacco lobbyists from affluent countries. Industry lobbyists seek to draw attention to poverty instead of tobacco-related child labor, bonded labor, deforestation, pesticide poisoning, soil depletion and water pollution. Exposing how corporate interests are opposed to priorities of farmers and farm workers provides a counter to ITGA and Big Tobacco lobbying against tobacco control. Publicizing the tobacco supply chain as iron shackles subordinating slave to master raises awareness of disconnections between ITGA interests and priorities of farmers and farm workers.

CASE STUDY: ITGA “ROAD SHOW”

In March 2000, Hallmark Public Relations, acting on behalf of ITGA, organized a 2-week “road show”—a media event involving presentations by economic consultants working for the industry and tobacco farmers’ representatives to promote the economic benefits of tobacco growing—in Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Kenya, and India. The goal of the road show, financed by BAT and other transnational tobacco manufacturing companies, was “to encourage governments and opinion leaders in key developing countries to stand up for the interests of their nations’ tobacco growers in international forums such as the World Health Assembly, UN organizations and other international assemblies, and regional economic groupings.” ITGA used the road show as its major public relations effort in 2000 to: “get major messages [on the negative economic consequences of tobacco control for growing countries] to opinion leaders directly, in a year when FCTC is under intensive development.” The road show was a key vehicle for transnational manufacturing companies to promote pro-tobacco positions in Malawi.

Source: Otañez M, Mamudu H, Glantz S, “Tobacco Companies’ Use of Developing Countries’ Economic Reliance on Tobacco to Lobby against Global Tobacco Control: The Case of Malawi,” *Tobacco Control*, 2011



4. Strengthen Public Health Alliances with Tobacco Growers and Farm Workers

Health and tobacco control advocates have a growing track record building alliances with tobacco farmers and farm workers. In some cases, tobacco control supports initiatives to switch from tobacco to food crops and other cash crops. In other cases, tobacco control collaborates with farmers and farm workers to improve conditions through living earnings and fair prices campaigns. The history of engagement among tobacco control advocates and tobacco producing families and their organizations provides the basis for forging deeper solidarity with individuals who desire

corporate accountability to exploitative agricultural practices. Alliances and their supporters can explore and integrate healthy crops in local and global markets, promote effective prices and transfer skills from tobacco to alternative livelihoods. Involvement of tobacco workers and officials in health and agricultural ministries makes the alliances sustainable and effective for promoting life-affirming social, economic and agricultural change.

CASE STUDY: MALAWI

In Malawi, tobacco has threatened the future of the country's economy by imposing long term damage on the environment and by increasing Malawi's dependence on a single cash crop, one that is controlled by only a few large corporations. Malawi is the most tobacco-dependent country in the world, and continuing the expansion of this crop will only put the country at a higher risk for dependency and economic collapse.

On the other hand, Malawi's tobacco union movement has been well established for over a decade and has experience working with tobacco control advocates and representing tobacco workers' rights and interests. The Tobacco and Tenant Allied Workers Union (TOTAWUM) supports efforts to improve the livelihoods of Malawi's tobacco farmers. Through solidarity linkages between TOTAWUM and global advocates in support of fair leaf prices and living earnings, local union members are seeking to see Malawi's Parliament pass the Tenancy Labor Bill to uplift employment and health conditions on tobacco farms. When the Bill becomes law, it will provide a regulatory framework that can be replicated in other tobacco growing developing countries as a tool to increase dignity in tobacco fields and promote tobacco industry corporate accountability.

Prepared by

Marty Otañez, University of Colorado, Denver, USA, marty.otanez@ucdenver.edu
Adeline Lambert, International Labor Rights Forum, USA, adeline.zensius@gmail.com
Raphael Sandramu, Tobacco Tenants and Allied Workers Union of Malawi,
rsandramu@yahoo.com