



Africa Needs Food, Not Tobacco: Together, we can effectively replace the cultivation of killer tobacco with nourishing food.

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For immediate release

African governments must learn from the Kenya example and seek ways to collaborate with civil society and international organizations to promote better alternatives for tobacco farmers.

Let us feed Africa, not the tobacco industry.

Lomé, 30 May 2023 - This year, World No Tobacco Day focuses on encouraging governments to end subsidies on tobacco growing and use the savings for crop substitution programmes that support farmers to switch and improve food security and nutrition. The theme is developed in line with Article 17 of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) which requires that Parties collaborate with each other and with competent international and regional intergovernmental organizations to promote, as appropriate, economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers, growers, and individual sellers. The theme also weighs in on Article 18 of the Convention which calls on Parties to have due regard to the protection of the environment and the health of persons involved in tobacco cultivation.

The WHO notes that tobacco farming has been on the rise in Africa since 2005 and is concerned that tobacco companies are gaining an increasing foothold in Africa. This is concerning given the knowledge we now have of how disastrous tobacco farming is to farmers, the economy, and the environment.

In a slick move, tobacco companies in Africa provide loans to tobacco farmers who usually cannot afford the resources to cultivate the crop. The tobacco industry also has control over leaf grading and pricing, so it has total control over the resources available for tobacco farmers, and the price it offers for the leaves cultivated. And as it would be expected, studies reveal that most contract tobacco farmers incur losses, which perpetuates their indebtedness to the tobacco company that provides them with the loan. The debt compels them to grow tobacco in the following farming season, in what is usually an unsuccessful attempt to repay the debt. The cycle is usually repeated, making tobacco growing a debt trap, and leading to a vicious cycle of poverty.

This year's World No Tobacco Day provides us with an opportunity to have a discussion on workable solutions to the problem. In Kenya and Zambia, where the WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Food Programme (WFP) are supporting the Tobacco-Free Farms initiative, support is being provided to more than 5,000 farmers to grow sustainable food crops instead of tobacco. Launched in Kenya's Migori County in 2021, it has since expanded to Meru, Busia, and Bungoma Counties in Kenya and the Eastern Province in Zambia. Over the last three growing seasons, it has successfully supported over 2,000 farmers in Migori County to switch from tobacco to high-iron beans.

According to the WHO, so far, growers have sold 135 tons of beans to the WFP, delivering them significantly more income than they earned from tobacco farming. Growing beans has the added

advantage that they are full of iron which helps to counter numerous health and development problems among children and pregnant women. The project has seen farmers' health improve, increased school attendance from children previously working on tobacco farms, and led to better crops for the environment than tobacco.

This project is evidence that global, regional, and national collaboration can effectively contribute to promoting economically viable alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers as prescribed in Article 17 of the WHO FCTC. The good news is that it was piloted and has recorded huge success in Africa which, unfortunately, is currently facing a dire food security problem.

African governments must learn from this example and follow it.

We cannot continue to engage in harmful tobacco farming that only contributes to enriching the tobacco industry at the detriment of Africa's economic stability, public health, and the environment.

Let us feed Africa, not the tobacco industry.

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The African Tobacco Control Alliance (ATCA) is a non-profit, non-political Pan-African network of civil society organizations headquartered in Lome, Togo. With membership in 39 countries, ATCA is dedicated to promoting public health and curbing the tobacco epidemic in the continent. The alliance is an Observer to WHO-FCTC Conference of Parties. It has a Special Consultative Status with the UN ECOSOC, and is certified as a Public Charity organization by NGOsource.