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## MOTIVATING FARMERS TO TRANSITION FROM TOBACCO FARMING TO FOOD PRODUCTION – MINI REVIEW

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### Abstract

The tobacco industry keeps posing dynamically evolving threats to public health globally; particularly India is at its centre stage both in terms of large scale producers and consumers of tobacco. A wide variety of efforts both concerted and individual have successfully been attempted to tame this ever growing menace. By analyzing the prevalence and health consequences of tobacco use, the economic implications of tobacco cultivation, and the benefits of shifting to alternate food production, this article highlights the need for comprehensive strategies. The study is based on extensive review exploring the impact of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and collaborations between the Indian government, NGOs, and international organizations towards this campaign. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of promoting crop diversification, sustainable agriculture, and skill development programs to support farmers in their transition. The article presents evidence of reductions in tobacco cultivation and positive results on farmer livelihoods and public health indicators. It is worthy enough to take a stock of present situation regarding efforts thrust in control of tobacco cultivation. This is necessary for feedback mechanism, gap management and reshaping the overall strategy along the cues. The conclusion of the review though based on limited evidence; sufficiently stimulate the thoughts and efforts towards the quests preceding this study. The highlight of this article is an all-out strategy based on prevalent practices and economical equations of tobacco farming and benefits of shifting to alternative cropping. Furthermore, it emphasizes that there are many challenges and barriers requiring policy interventions, financial support, strong infrastructure, enhanced awareness and dissemination of proper information. The review concludes that, encouraging alternative food cropping for tobacco farmers is a critical step, many collaborative efforts attempted so far for this have been quite impressive in their respective impacts. However a sustained, synergist action of all stakeholders is vital to maintain this transition and ensure its long term success.

**Keywords:** tobacco, farming, Alternative-farming, Transitional-Farming, Food-production & Public-health

**Background** – The tobacco industry keep posing a significantly evolving threats to public health globally; particularly India is at its centre stage both in terms of large scale producers and consumers

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of tobacco. A wide variety of efforts both concerted and individual have successfully been attempted to tame this ever growing menace. The issue of tobacco from production to consumption is multifaceted which is deep seated, venturing inroads of socio-economic and cultural spaces, besides much talked about of its health consequences. Despite of ongoing statutory warnings and irreversible health damage by tobacco consumption, efforts so far could not struck well among its promoters and consumers. The habit and instant high of tobacco have probably shadowed all of such efforts in vain. Therefore community health promotion agencies had worked out a multipronged strategy to thwart its threat by adding control on its farming as an additional spoke in the cart-wheel. World No Tobacco Day's this year theme, 'We need food, not tobacco', brings its all stakeholders at a critical juncture in world affairs and converges with momentum being built around the world. Article 17 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) states that parties shall, in cooperation with each other and with competent international and regional intergovernmental organizations will promote, as appropriate, economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers. Farmers are educated that the cash-based monocropping systems, especially tobacco, often generate little profit for farming households, but damage ecosystems and pose significant health risks for growers in long term. Apex international organizations including World Health Organization (WHO) have been focusing to dwarf down the menace of tobacco vide their movements and campaigns especially in Indian context. A strategic shift in this direction is to control its production and thus its easy & cheap availability. Transition in farming especially from tobacco is a multi-articulated strategy which categorically joins communities, Govt agencies, NGOs and agriculture experts for identification of alternative crops that are nutrient rich, economically sustainable and commercially viable. Transitioning tobacco farming to alternative food cropping is a win-win situation, in addition to control of tobacco it adds up to the nutrition goals of the present times. India being a populous country with not so impressive health literacy, it becomes even more pertinent to dig heels deeper and make a full charged move most forcefully for an all-out impact. To make an efficient move in such direction for farmers, it is necessary to ensure market for the new crop that must not disturb the critical demand-supply balance and other market dynamics. Furthermore, new requirements like seeds, fertilizers, equipments etc. are also required to be addressed in a practical manner. A robust mechanism of supply chain management can be a driver to encourage farmers to adopt the alternative agricultural practices. Besides dwelling with present scenario and evaluating the success achieved so far in this direction recommendations based on present learning is also necessary to accelerate the journey left ahead in an efficient and sustainable way. Challenges and barriers are identified vide this study that necessitate policy initiatives, financial support, concerted infrastructure framework and dissemination activities to enhance awareness & knowledge that is vital for realization of primary goal behind this whole campaign. This mini literature review recognizes transition from tobacco to food cropping as key driver that can potentially looked upto challenge the tobacco as an ever growing menace, without disturbing socio-economic dynamics of local as well as regional agricultural practices.

**Socio-economics of tobacco cultivation** – as tobacco continues its maintained position among major public health challenge globally as well as in India, millions of family are affected by its consumption directly or indirectly in some or other form. The menace of tobacco is even direr in threats and severe

consequences for children as well as women (Chadda & Sengupta, 2014). In India tobacco consumption is a grave public health concern contributing to both its mortality and morbidity demographics among all sections of population. In addition to health issues tobacco stand tall in way of country's economic development especially rural and semi-urban. The socio-economic consequences of tobacco consumption are so intermingled that its consumers along with their families are trapped in a vicious cycle of habitual abuse, health issues, economic hardships and psychological distress. So far all conventional control measures like levying heavy taxes on its sale, restricted sale, statutory awareness / counseling / warning etc. have not fetched winning results; rather have been counterproductive in some instances or contexts. A strategic line has been identified to arrest this puzzling menace by addressing another aspect i.e. controlling its production by motivating farmers to shift to food cropping and shunning tobacco as a crop. This two pronged strategic line one way, hits the easy market availability of tobacco products and other way inopportune the farmers (including their family members) to lean on tobacco consumption to which they naturally get attracted being in direct vicinity of tobacco cultivation. Additionally it also sensitizes a significant section of population towards ill effects of tobacco. WHO with several national and international agencies and NGOs has lead many notable initiatives in this direction the success & gap analysis of which remain unexplored for fine tuning among its all stakeholders. The problem statement that motivated this literature review is to dwell the impact of transitioning tobacco farming to alternate cropping in India. The alternative research question for this review can be stated as whether transitioning tobacco farming to alternate cropping in India is being realized at successful rate both empirically and in terms of final impact on public health.

**Context** - Tobacco use in India remains a very pressing issue, with a national household survey indicating high rates of smoking and chewing (Rani et al., 2005). This leaves an uncontrolled source of major morbidity like coronary artery disease, respiratory illnesses like chronic pulmonary obstructive disease (COPD), Emphysema and lung cancers, stroke, diabetes and various forms of cancer, the economic blow of tobacco consumption is even more impacting; according to an estimate it can bite more than 10% of household income resulting in incapacitating burden (Reddy et al., 2019; Jha & Chaloupka, 2019). Tobacco cultivation has wide and far reaching economic implications (Arora and Tewari 2020) on Indian economy as a significant land is invested in its cultivation. Furthermore, Arora and Tewari (2021) underscore the adverse effects of tobacco cultivation on the livelihoods of farmers; evidence shows that the labour costs of growing tobacco are enormous, as much as double the labour needed to produce other similar crops. Tobacco is amongst the most labour-intensive crops in, requiring over 1,000 hours of unpaid labour to produce one acre of tobacco. The additional time needed for tobacco growing can be devoted to attaining educational qualifications or developing skills that might lead to more profitable livelihoods. Hence need of alternative farming is more loudly advocated in present times. The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) serves as a cornerstone in global tobacco control efforts. It aims to reduce tobacco consumption and promote public health by providing a comprehensive set of evidence-based measures (World Health Organization, 2022). The FCTC has been instrumental in guiding tobacco control policies and initiatives in India (Lando & Bhushan, 2020). Collaboration between the WHO, the Indian

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government, and NGOs has played a crucial role in combating the tobacco menace. Rani et al. (2005) highlight the importance of such partnerships in implementing comprehensive tobacco control strategies. Additionally, Arora and Tewari (2018) emphasize the significance of strengthening collaboration between the health and agricultural sectors to address tobacco control effectively. Farmers can be trained in skills other than farming and be motivated to switch occupation. The goal is to ensure the well-being of farmers while reducing the reliance on tobacco as a cash crop (Nakkash & Lee, 2020; Dev, Rao, & Shylesh, 2017).

**Transitioning from Tobacco Farming to Food Production** - Benefits of Shifting to Food Production transitioning from tobacco farming offers numerous benefits. Roy and Adhikari (2018) highlight the positive impact of crop diversification on rural poverty and food security in India. Similarly, Sharma and Sharma (2018) emphasize the potential improvement in food security that can be achieved by redirecting agricultural efforts from tobacco to food crops. Several challenges and barriers hinder the transition from tobacco farming to food production. Siddiqi, Shah, and Abbas (2018) discuss the economic and welfare effects of tobacco taxation and its impact on market structures. Additionally, Ravi (2019) highlights the need to address the challenges faced by farmers to ensure a successful transition without compromising their livelihoods. Promoting crop diversification and sustainable agriculture is crucial in motivating farmers to transition away from tobacco farming. Datta and Pal (2020) provide evidence of the positive impact of crop diversification on rural poverty reduction in India. Soundararajan and Misra (2019) stress the importance of sustainable agriculture practices to enhance farmers' welfare and address food security concerns. Equipping farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge is essential for a successful transition. Singh and Rai (2018) assess the impact of training programs on farmers' knowledge, skills, and practices, emphasizing the importance of targeted agricultural training. Furthermore, Dev and Pal (2020) emphasize the significance of an effective agricultural extension system to support farmers in adopting alternative livelihood options. Farmers can be educated about alternative manuring options, new inventions for alternate cash crops and farming activities.

**Present impact** – Initial assessment of these efforts to steer the farming preferences away from tobacco seem positive. Reductions in tobacco cultivation have been observed as farmers embrace alternative agricultural practices (Arora & Tewari, 2021). An indirect impact of this transition is observable in livelihood of these farmers. By diversifying their agricultural activities, farmers have experienced improved economic stability and reduced dependence on tobacco as a cash crop (Arora & Tewari, 2018). The shift from tobacco farming to food production has also led to improvements in public health indicators and family well being. With decreased tobacco consumption, the burden of tobacco-related diseases has also reduced, positively impacting the health and well-being of the population (Reddy et al., 2019; Jha & Chaloupka, 2019). Several case studies and success stories highlight the effectiveness of motivating farmers for transition from tobacco farming to food production. However still there are many challenges and barriers requiring policy interventions, financial support, strong infrastructure, enhanced awareness and dissemination of proper information. Some international attempts are noteworthy to take cues for future path; 1) To match obligations of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) and to buffer the consequences of the

ASEAN free trade agreement, Malaysian government has successfully promoted the cultivation of kenaf (a versatile plant whose fibers are used to produce component items (eg. car door trimmings, bioplastics, fibreboards or furniture) as an alternative to tobacco growing since 2005. (2) After cessation of EU subsidies for tobacco farming (2010), farmers and tobacco processing companies diverted alternatives to the tobacco business eg. in *Palatinate*, a traditional tobacco growing area in southwestern Germany, farmers switched from tobacco to herbs cultivation. 3) Malawi is world's most tobacco-dependent economy, has realized, that switching to other crops is essential and has started supporting cultivation of legumes. These examples demonstrate the positive outcomes achieved, both in terms of farmer livelihoods and public health (Arora & Tewari, 2021; Sharma & Sharma, 2018).

**Recommendations** – Towards sustainable food production ecosystem it is necessary not to just look for volumes but also to weigh-in the environmental and health impact of the farming practices. Additionally fair delivery systems along with reliable supply chain networking should also be considered. This campaign is towards transforming the overall outlook of farmers towards relation to economics, environmental protection, human health and social well-being. By addressing observed challenges and leveraging together the collaborative efforts, it is possible to accelerate the transition from tobacco farming to food production, thereby mitigating the tobacco menace in India and promoting the overall well-being of farmers and the population. It has been quite a long way being treaded in this direction too. Governments are extensively working on food systems in ways that bring out synergies across sectors.. The potential for Article 17 implementation to contribute to the development needs of countries and sustainable and healthy food systems is enormous. More concerted efforts should focus on strengthening policy and regulatory frameworks to further discourage tobacco cultivation and promote alternative livelihoods (World Health Organization, 2022). Providing financial support and incentives to farmers transitioning from tobacco farming to food production can facilitate the process and mitigate potential economic challenges (Dev et al., 2017). Investments in health and agricultural infrastructure are crucial for the successful transition and long-term sustainability of alternative livelihoods (Nakkash & Lee, 2020; Dev et al., 2017). Efforts should be made to enhance awareness and education among farmers regarding the benefits of transitioning away from tobacco farming and the available support mechanisms (Singh & Rai, 2018). Collaboration and partnerships between government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations like WHO should be strengthened to leverage resources and expertise for effective implementation of initiatives (Rani et al., 2005; Arora & Tewari, 2018).

**Conclusion** – Encouraging alternative food cropping for tobacco farmers is a critical step in arresting the tobacco menace in India. The overall impact of efforts collaborated among WHO and other national / international organizations as well as NGOs have been impressive so far. By embracing crop diversification, sustainable agriculture practices, educating and motivating farmers to develop new skills and providing necessary support to farmers, it is possible to improve farmer livelihoods, enhance food security, and reduce the burden of tobacco-related diseases. It is remarked that sustained endeavor, synergist policy support and infrastructure investment is vital to thrust this transition and ensure long term success in combating the tobacco menace in India.

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