



THE AFRICAN CAPACITY BUILDING FOUNDATION | FONDATION POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DES CAPACITES EN AFRIQUE
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Shifting from Tobacco to Sustainable Alternatives: A Strategy for Empowering Zimbabwean Farmers



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Key Takeaway

In Zimbabwe, despite the fact that farmers are aware of the health consequences of tobacco and generally support control measures, they continue to grow tobacco. The study showed that farmers are willing to consider alternative crops if they are considered as rewarding as tobacco. However, the choice of the preferred alternative is influenced by their experience of the crop. Government should recognize that the transition from tobacco to alternative crops will take time and require long-term planning and support. This could involve developing a comprehensive strategy for the transition, providing ongoing support to farmers, and regular monitoring and evaluation of progress.

1. The issue

The issue at hand is the impact of tobacco control measures on the livelihoods of tobacco farmers in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the World Health Organisation Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC), which encourages governments to promote alternatives to tobacco farming. However, the implementation of the FCTC has been delayed due to the conflicting economic benefits associated with tobacco growing in Zimbabwe.

Tobacco farming plays a significant role in the country's economy, with production targets for tobacco in metric tonnes increasing from 154926 Mt in 2020 to a projected 300000 Mt in 2025. Despite the health risks associated with tobacco use, the crop is seen as economically beneficial, leading to a reluctance to transition to alternative crops.

The emergence of New and Emerging Tobacco and Nicotine Products (NETNPs) presents unclear pricing and taxation dynamics, coupled with limited evidence on the situational nature of NETNPs consumption control and taxation. Furthermore, the lack of clarity in the pricing and taxation of new age tobacco products is exacerbated by lack of data on the actual types of NETNPs that have gained wide acceptance among consumers.

This study aims to contribute to the emerging knowledge on the consumption and taxation of NETNPs in Zimbabwe, and the potential for transitioning to alternative crops. The findings of this study will have significant implications for policy-making, particularly in relation to the promotion of economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco farming.

2. Key findings and implications

Tobacco dependency:

The study found that a significant number of farmers in Zimbabwe (79%) are highly dependent on income from tobacco farming. This dependency is primarily due to the perceived high returns from the crop. This high dependency poses a challenge for transitioning to alternative crops, as any such transition would need to ensure comparable income levels for the farmers.

Knowledge and support of tobacco control measures:

Surprisingly, despite their dependency on tobacco for their livelihoods, many farmers are aware of and support tobacco control measures. They understand the negative health implications of tobacco and prioritize health considerations over income generation. This finding suggests that farmers might be more open to transitioning to alternative crops than previously thought, provided they are given the right incentives and support.

Barriers to transitioning to alternative crops:

The study identified several barriers to transitioning from tobacco to alternative crops. These include the high initial costs of establishing the required infrastructure for new crops, lack of established and readily available markets for alternative crops, lack of suitable genetics of alternative crops, and the perceived lower returns from these crops. Addressing these barriers is crucial for a successful transition.

Potential for alternative crops:

Despite the challenges, the study found that farmers are willing to consider alternative crops if they are seen as rewarding as tobacco. However, the choice of the preferred alternative is influenced by their experience in growing it. For instance, maize was identified as a potential alternative due to farmers' previous or current experience in growing it.

Impact of tobacco control measures on demand:

The study also highlighted that while tobacco control measures, such as taxation and advertising controls, are effective in reducing domestic smoking rates, they may not significantly affect the demand for tobacco from importing countries. This is particularly relevant for Zimbabwe, where most of the tobacco grown is exported.

These findings have significant implications for tobacco control policy and the promotion of alternative crops in Zimbabwe. They suggest that a successful transition from tobacco to alternative crops requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the economic concerns of farmers, provides them with the necessary support and incentives, and takes into account the global dynamics of tobacco demand.

3. Main policy recommendations

Policy incentives for alternative crops:

The government should introduce policy incentives to make alternative cash crops as attractive as tobacco. This could include financial incentives, access to affordable inputs, and support for market access. Given the high initial costs associated with transitioning to new crops, financial support could be crucial in encouraging farmers to make the switch.

Transparency in marketing and pricing of alternative crops:

The government should ensure that there are legislations promoting transparency in marketing and pricing of alternative crops. This would make these crops more attractive to farmers and could facilitate a smooth transition from tobacco growing.

Continuation and enhancement of tobacco control measures:

The government should continue with the current tobacco control measures, including tightening them up to extract more revenue from tobacco smoking. This would help reduce domestic demand for tobacco and could provide additional funds to support the transition to alternative crops.

Promotion of alternative cash crops:

The government should actively promote the cultivation of alternative cash crops. This could involve providing farmers with training and technical support, improving access to necessary inputs, and helping farmers access markets for these crops.

Development of alternative tobacco use industries:

The government should promote the development of industries that use tobacco in ways other than smoking. This could include, for example, the extraction of edible oil from tobacco seeds. This would provide additional uses for tobacco and could help maintain its economic value while reducing its public health impact.

Long-term planning for transition:

The government should recognize that the transition from tobacco to alternative crops will take time and will require long-term planning and support. This could involve developing a comprehensive strategy for the transition, providing ongoing support to farmers, and regularly monitoring and evaluating progress.

4. Further reading:

For more detailed information, please refer to the full study:

The impact of tobacco control measures on livelihoods: A grower-based perspective.

<https://elibrary.acbfpack.org/acbf/collect/acbf/index/assoc/HASH36c1/c4c1359c/010f9b53/41.dir/The%20Impact%20of%20tobacco%20control%20ACBF-%20ZEPARU%20Report.pdf>



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