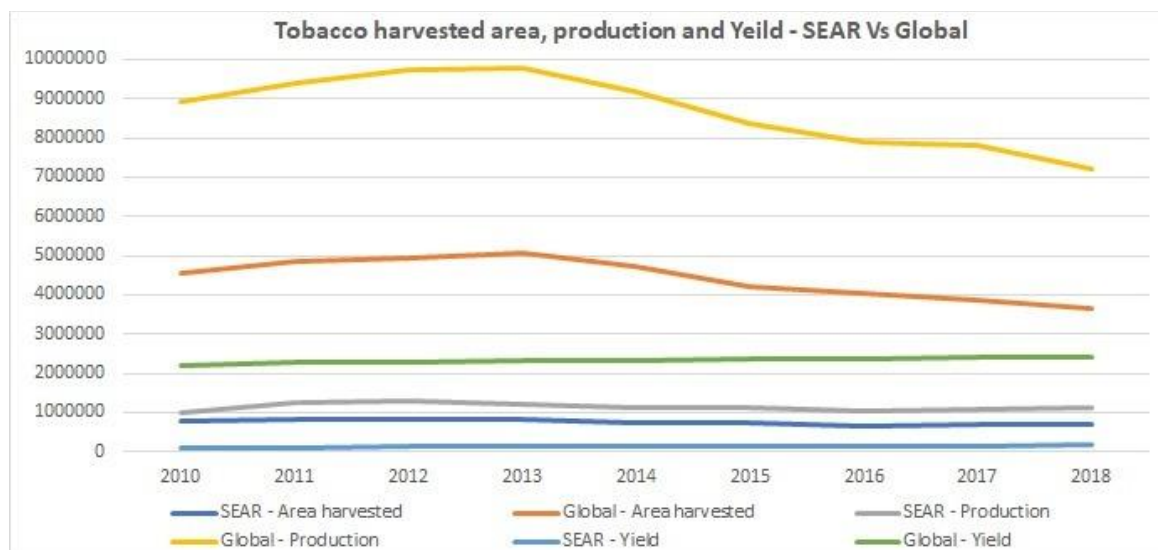


Alternatives to tobacco growing in South-East Asia

Global scenario

WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) advocates alternative livelihoods to tobacco growing as a measure to reduce supply of tobacco. Article 17 of the WHO FCTC requires that Parties to the Convention promote economically viable alternatives for tobacco workers, growers and individual sellers. The Ministry of Agriculture in many tobacco producing SEAR countries have initiated programmes supporting tobacco farmers shift to economically viable alternative livelihoods.

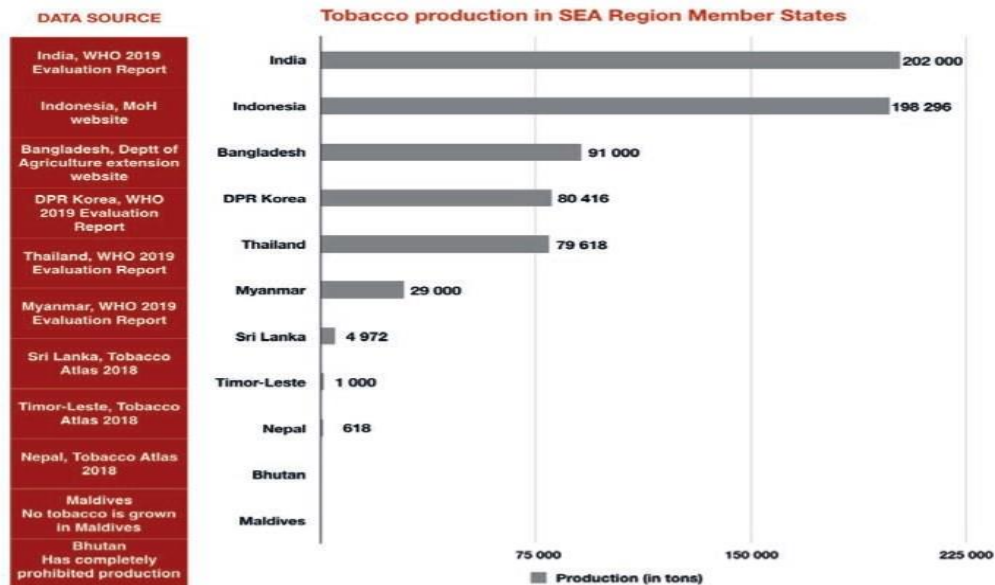
Worldwide, nearly 7 million tons of tobacco is annually produced, with Brazil, China, India, Turkey and USA accounting for nearly two-thirds of the total tobacco crop. Globally, tobacco production and yield reduced significantly.



Tobacco crop growing in South-East Asia

Tobacco cultivation continued to show an increase in production in the South-East Asia despite a slight reduction in harvested area.

In 2018, the SEA Region produced nearly 1.2 Million tons of tobacco, with 760268 ha harvested area. India, Indonesia and Bangladesh are the Region's largest tobacco growers and consumers. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Thailand also grow tobacco. Alarmingly, between 2008 and 2015, Bangladesh saw a substantial rise in the land under tobacco cultivation.



Countries like India and Sri Lanka have taken bold initiatives in providing alternative livelihood options to tobacco growers and workers.

Farmers in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Indonesia are gradually taking to alternate crops that are equally or more profitable. One of the reasons for farmers giving up tobacco cultivation is the high input costs, and declining domestic and international demand, a result of anti-tobacco initiatives taken up by governments to implement the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the tobacco industry looks poised for expansion of tobacco farming as the Government makes feeble efforts to restrict FDI in tobacco through the Tobacco Control Policy.

Tobacco cultivation in Bangladesh has increased recently. Bangladesh stands eleventh in the world in tobacco production. From 2007–2008, the land under tobacco cultivation has increased from 72 000 acres to 127 000 acres in 2014–2015, a 74% increase over a period of seven years

A study on the economics of tobacco cultivation in Bangladesh is underway at present

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Yearbook of Agricultural Statistics 2015–2016

Meanwhile, the Tobacco Cultivation Control Policy of Bangladesh, 2017 has set targets to reduce tobacco cultivation at all stages by 2040. Early 2020, Bangladesh Bank notified all its branches not to sanction loans for tobacco farming, contract or direct. It is also increasing credit flow to farmers switching to alternative crops.

Several surveys have already identified alternative crops for different cropping seasons and for different geographical areas. Alternatives include French beans, potato, felon, sweet gourd, chill, eggplant, groundnut or tomato, wheat, garlic, masur, mustard and leafy amaranths, leaves of radish, coriander, okra, bitter gourd, yard long bean, spinach and cabbage.

India

The country stands third in production of tobacco, after China and Brazil; and third in terms of exports, next to USA and Brazil. India accounts for ten percent of the world's area and about nine percent of tobacco production.

Tobacco farmers in India are willing to shift to viable economic alternatives to tobacco if institutional mechanisms and support is provided for the same says the “Economics of tobacco farming in India” by the Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Research, Dharwad, India.



The Government of India's, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer's Welfare began budgetary allocations from 2015–2016 under the crop diversification programme (CDP), of the *Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana*. It encourages tobacco farmers in shifting to alternative crops and cropping systems, providing them information and technical support. CDP provides assistance for four major interventions: alternate crop demonstrations, farm mechanization and value addition, site-specific activities and contingency for awareness, training and monitoring. Tobacco growing states in India, however, have flexibility to initiate their own programmes for alternative agricultural and horticultural crops.

In India, economically viable alternative crops to the highly remunerative flu cured virginia (FCV) tobacco have emerged in the form of mixed cropping of hybrid cotton+chilli+groundnut, and hybrid cotton+chilli+French beans. In Prakasan district of the State of Andhra Pradesh, a major FCV producing area, many farmers have already replaced tobacco with the more profitable paddy and black gram. Several other States are shifting from tobacco to other economically viable crops such as maize, wheat, raagi, cotton, soya-bean, mustard, ground-nut, castor, chickpea, chilli, potato, ginger, sugarcane, turmeric, moringa, oil palm, etc.

India is also a major *bidi* (tobacco leaves rolled in 'tendu' leaf) producing country where large numbers of women are engaged in *bidi* rolling (hand-rolled *bidis*) both in the organized and unorganized sectors. The Ministry of Labour and Employment, with technical support from WHO is weaning away *bidi* workers through the 'Skill Development Training' programme. Skills thus obtained offer an alternative source of livelihood to *bidi* rollers and their dependents through placement-linked training.

More than 6000 *bidi* rollers and their dependents have been trained in the alternative skills, such as tailoring and other vocations. Over 2000 of the trainees have been provided placement after training. This is just a small beginning for a country where millions of people, mostly women supplement their livelihood by rolling *bids*.

Indonesia

Tobacco is widely cultivated in three provinces of Indonesia- East Java, Central Java and West Nusa Tenggara – where it cultivated in both paddy fields and moorlands. Rice-tobacco-corn is a common cropping pattern, but tobacco is seldom cultivated as the primary crop. Farmers are gradually beginning to look at alternative crops in place of tobacco.

Many farmers were now making a better living growing corn, sweet potato and vegetables. According to the 2018 World Bank Report, poverty plays an important role in the tobacco farmer's decision to shift crop. In Indonesia, 72% tobacco farmers are poor compared to 11% of the general population. The Bank thus suggested additional tax revenue from the tobacco excise tax to help tobacco farmers switch to alternative crops. But no such allocations were announced in Indonesia's 2019 tax raise, as big tobacco companies claimed it affected the livelihood of farmers.

Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is committed to shift all tobacco farmers to alternate livelihoods by 2020

Source: WHO SEARO Inter-country Consultation on Alternative Livelihoods, March 2017, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Around 1,338 ha of land was under tobacco cultivation in Sri Lanka. In 2017, Sri Lanka committed to shift all its tobacco farmers (nearly 3000) to alternative crops/livelihoods following an Inter-country meeting on alternative livelihoods (organized by WHO SEARO) held in Colombo. The Presidential Task Force diverted around 644 ha of this land to alternative crops between 2017 and 2019. Alternative crops to tobacco include ground nuts, big onion, maize, black pepper, beet, and hybrid cabbage. The country achieved 100 percent targets in introducing alternative crops (Red Onion, Beet root) in Kurunegala and Puttalam District. In Central province, pepper was substituted as an alternative to tobacco, with big onion and ground nuts substituted in the Polonnaruwa region. The initiative also provided water tanks and micro water supply infrastructure to farmers who were shifting over to alternative crops. The results are encouraging.