



Tobacco Cultivation and Food Insecurity

For Prelims: [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#), [Tobacco](#), [Food and Agriculture Organization](#), [Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#), [World Food Programme](#), [World No Tobacco Day](#), [Promulgation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Ordinance, 2019](#)

For Mains: Impact of Tobacco Farming on Global Food Crisis

Why in News?

The [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) has released a new report highlighting the **urgent need to prioritise food production over tobacco cultivation**.

- The report emphasises that approximately **349 million people worldwide are currently facing acute food insecurity**, while **valuable fertile land is being occupied by tobacco farming**. The tobacco industry's interference in efforts to substitute its crops exacerbates the **global food crisis**.
- Also, [World No Tobacco Day](#), observed annually on **May 31** serves as a reminder of the ongoing battle against global tobacco **epidemic**. The theme of 2023 is **“Grow food, not tobacco”**.

Note: Food insecurity refers to a situation where individuals or communities do not have reliable **availability, accessibility, affordability, to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food** that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life.

How is the Global Food Crisis Related to Tobacco Farming?

- **Land Use Competition:** Both **food production and tobacco farming require land resources**.
 - Tobacco farming is prevalent in over 124 countries, occupying significant agricultural land that could be utilised for food production.
 - **This competition for arable land can limit food production** and exacerbate the global food crisis, especially in areas where food security is already a challenge.
 - The **United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)** also warns of increasing acute food insecurity in various regions worldwide.
- **Resource Diversion:** Tobacco farming requires significant amounts of resources, including water, fertilisers, and labour.
 - The diversion of these resources to tobacco production can result in limited availability for food crops, contributing to **decreased agricultural productivity and food shortages**.
- **Financial Impact:** Tobacco farming can be **financially lucrative for farmers**, leading them to prioritise tobacco cultivation over food crops.
 - This preference for cash crops like tobacco may **reduce the incentive to grow staple food crops**, which are essential for addressing hunger and food security concerns.

- **Environmental Impact:** Tobacco farming practices can have adverse environmental effects.
 - **Deforestation, soil degradation, and water pollution** are often associated with tobacco cultivation. These environmental impacts can further strain the availability of natural resources needed for sustainable food production.
- **Health Consequences:** Tobacco use is a major public health concern, leading to numerous diseases and premature deaths worldwide. **Tobacco farming poses serious health risks to farmers**, including **exposure to pesticides and the absorption of nicotine through the skin**.
 - The health consequences of tobacco-related illnesses can indirectly impact food security by **reducing the productive workforce and placing additional burdens on healthcare systems, diverting resources away from food-related initiatives**.
 - According to the **WHO**, tobacco use kills more than **8 million people every year** and exposes millions more to second-hand smoke.

Note: Nicotine is a chemical compound found in the leaves of the tobacco plant (*Nicotiana tabacum*) and some other plants in the nightshade family. It is **an alkaloid** that is both a sedative and a stimulant.

What is the Status of Tobacco Consumption in India?

- **Status:**
 - Tobacco use is known to be a major risk factor for several **non-communicable diseases** such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, **diabetes**, and chronic lung diseases. **Nearly 27% of all cancers in India are due to tobacco usage**.
 - India is also the **second largest consumer and producer of tobacco after China**.
 - Nearly **267 million adults (15 years and above) in India (29% of all adults)** are users of tobacco, according to the **Global Adult Tobacco Survey India, 2016-17**.
- Indian Initiatives to Curb Tobacco Consumption:
 - The **Promulgation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes Ordinance, 2019** prohibits **Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement of e-Cigarettes**.
 - The **Government of India** launched the **National Tobacco Quitline Services (NTQLS)** which have the sole objective to provide telephone-based information, advice, support, and referrals for tobacco cessation.
 - The Union Finance Minister of India announced a **16% increase in National Calamity Contingent Duty (NCCD) on cigarettes in the Budget 2023-24**.
 - The **Union Health Ministry of India** has announced **new regulations requiring Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms to display tobacco-related health warnings** during streamed content.
 - OTT platforms must attach anti-tobacco health spots at the beginning and middle of programs that display tobacco products or their use.
 - Health spots and tobacco-related warnings are already mandatory for television and films in India.

What are WHO's Actions to Address Tobacco Farming?

- The WHO emphasises the significance of the **Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO-FCTC)**, the **first international agreement aimed at reducing tobacco consumption and its adverse health effects**.
- WHO has partnered with the **UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP)** to launch the Tobacco Free Farms initiative, which aims to assist farmers in countries such as Kenya and Zambia by providing microcredit lending, knowledge, training, and support for cultivating alternative crops.

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