

TOBACCO INDUSTRY IN MALAWI

Malawi is a land-locked country in South-Eastern Africa and has a total area of about 120 000 square kilometers, a fifth of which is covered by water.

According to official statistics, nearly 80% of the total population, which is about 10 million, are smallholder farmers residing in the rural areas.

The country is one of the two countries¹ worldwide that are significantly dependent on raw tobacco for their export earnings. About 70% of Malawi's export earnings come from this single commodity, contributing about 33% of the GDP and 23% of total tax revenue. It is estimated that about 52% of Malawi population derive their livelihood from the tobacco industry²

Tobacco growing in the country is encouraged and supported by the tobacco Industry, financial institutions and the government through the provision of technical, material and financial support to tobacco growers. The Malawi government and tobacco Industry has pumped in a lot of resources to improve production of the crop; institutions have been established to provide farm input loans, research and extension services.

Tobacco is the only crop that enjoys such support.

Nonetheless, despite growing tobacco for numerous years, the country is still among the poorest countries in the world.³

Malawi's social-economic indicators show that the economy as well as the living standards of the people has not improved despite increased tobacco production and exports over the past years.

It is only the tobacco industry that has benefited greatly from the crop. While tobacco companies continue to grow, the farmer/ordinary man who grows the crop remains poor.

In spite of the knowledge and awareness of the adverse impact of tobacco on the health of consumers, proponents of tobacco production argue that there is no real economic substitute for tobacco. They contend that no other crop in the country can compete with tobacco in terms of growth and cash potential, sustainability to local environmental conditions, manpower requirements and existing infrastructure or reliable earnings.

The Malawi government also realises the consequences of heavy reliance on tobacco to generate foreign exchange since this leaves the economy vulnerable to price fluctuations on the international markets as well as crop failure.

But, since early 1990s, the government stand on tobacco is unchanged; it (the government) contends that the crop would be produced in the country until a suitable substitute is identified.

PREVALENCE OF TOBACCO USE

Statistics on the prevalence of tobacco use in Malawi are not available but apparently tobacco use among the young people is on the rise due to the following reasons (among many others):

¹ The other country is Zimbabwe.

² Currently, there is no producer of cigarettes or other tobacco products in the country. B.A.T (Malawi), which operated for the past 50 years, closed down its production line about four years ago and now imports all cigarettes that are sold on the local market. Other traders have emerged and supply the market with both smuggled and duty paid tobacco products.

³ In 2000, the UNDP ranked Malawi 163rd out of 174 countries in Human Development Index.

- (a) Lack of information on the dangers of tobacco use.
- (b) Rampant child labour in tobacco farming and trade exposes children to tobacco products.
- (c) The aggressive promotion activities of tobacco firms woo the youth into smoking.
- (d) Most youths misinterpret the meaning of democracy and they smoke to express their "freedom".
- (e) Peer pressure significantly influences the youth to begin smoking.

METHODOLOGY

The global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS) is a school-based survey. In Malawi, the survey was conducted in the year 2001 in two regions and districts of Blantyre and Lilongwe, among mostly teenage pupils of standard 7, standard 8 and Form 1.

Malawi has 26 administrative districts; 5 in Northern Region, 9 at the Centre and 12 in the Southern Region. Blantyre (in the Southern region) and Lilongwe (centre) are Malawi's Commercial and Capital cities respectively. The latter is one of the main tobacco growing districts in the country.

SAMPLING

The 2001 Malawi GYTS is a school-based survey, which employed a two-stage cluster sampling design to produce a nationally representative sample of standard 7, standard 8, and form 1 students. The first sampling frame consisted of all regular government/public primary and secondary schools in the two districts; Blantyre and Lilongwe. Schools were chosen with probability proportional to school enrollment size. 51 schools in total were selected; 26 from Blantyre district and 25 from Lilongwe district.

The second sampling stage consisted of systematic equal probability sampling, with a random start, of classes from each school that took part in the survey. All classes in the selected school were included in the sampling frame. All students in the selected classes were eligible to participate in the survey.

A weighting factor was applied to each student record to adjust for non-response and for the varying probabilities of selection. The school response rate, the student response rate and the overall response rate were 92.3%, 85.2% and 78.6% respectively for Blantyre. In Lilongwe the school response rate, the student response rate and the overall response rate were 100%, 83.9 and 83.9% respectively.

Epi info was used to compute the 95% confidence intervals for the estimates.

QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

A group of experts on tobacco addiction from the first group of countries selected to carry out GYTS, and staff members of WHO-TFI and CDC, wrote the 57 questions of the "core" part of the GYTS, which was adapted by the Malawi GYTS.

In addition, Malawi developed more questions in order to take into account local tobacco-using behavior and the psychosocial, cultural and contextual determinants thereof.

All the questions were multiple-choice apart from very few that asked for background information such as age, gender and school class.

The questionnaire was translated into Chichewa, which is Malawi's national language.

Respondents were given the chance of completing the questionnaire of the language of their choice.

The questionnaire was pre-tested before it was administered to schools.

The questionnaire completion time was atmost 45 minutes.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Survey procedures were designed to protect the privacy of the students by allowing for anonymous and voluntary participation. The self-administered questionnaire was administered in the classroom. Students recorded their responses directly on an answer sheet that could be scanned by a computer.

The fieldwork was done from 23rd August to 31st August 200. The fieldwork was conducted and coordinated by Consumers Association of Malawi staff and other auxiliary staff; 18 in each district.

The training workshops of survey coordinators and administrators were done (four weeks prior to data collection) where field researchers were instructed on the standard procedures to assure comparability on data collection.

RESULTS

A total of 3 704 students were sampled from the two districts; 1 536 from Blantyre and 2 168 from Lilongwe.

Out of 1 536 that were sampled in Blantyre, 1 308 students participated in the survey, giving the student response rate of 85.2%. The school and the overall response rates for the district were 92.35 and 78.6% respectively.

In Lilongwe, 1 820 students completed the questionnaires. The school response rate in the region was perfect-100%, the student response rate and the overall response rate were the same-83.95%.

Table 1: BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristic		BLANTYRE n (%)	LILONGWE n (%)
Total		1 308	1 820
Sex	Male	574 (48.7)	869 (50.2)
	Female	610 (51.3)	856 (49.8)
Class	Standard 7	196 (51.3)	876 (53.4)
	Standard 8	857 (43.3)	620 (42.1)
	Form 1	133 (5.4)	221 (4.5)
Age	< 11	75 (10.3)	153 (8.6)
	12	146 (20.7)	296 (17.9)
	13	233 (20.9)	395 (23.6)
	14	308 (23.0)	414 (23.6)
	15	242 (14.4)	274 (15.6)
	16	151 (8.8)	153 (7.9)
	17 +	36 (1.8)	54 (2.8)