



Malawi Hosts ITGA 2025 Africa Regional Meeting, Minister of Agriculture Stresses Importance of Tobacco Sector and Regional Collaboration

Lilongwe, Malawi – July 3, 2025

The International Tobacco Growers' Association (ITGA) convened its 2025 Africa Regional Meeting in Lilongwe, Malawi, with a high-level Open Session Conference on July 3rd. The event brought together key stakeholders from Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and the international community, uniting representatives across the tobacco value chain to address shared challenges and strategic priorities.

The Honourable Minister of Agriculture of Malawi, Samuel Dalitso Kawale, officially opened the session, noting the economic significance of tobacco for the region. "Today I am here testifying the commitment of the Government of Malawi to the role, you tobacco farmers play, in the economies of our countries and region. Only in Malawi the crop supports over one million people being employed directly or indirectly in the supply chain. We thank the ITGA for bringing the industry together," said Minister Kawale. He emphasized the importance of knowledge-sharing on issues such as sustainability, child labour, and cost of production.

Virtually addressing the session, ITGA President Jose Javier Aranda underscored the Association's pivotal role: "The strong commitment to the ITGA from our Africa Members and Partners has made possible for our Association to establish a strong footprint in this region." He reiterated that "in an ever more volatile world market like ours, ITGA remains the information hub of the tobacco sector, helping growers take informed decisions to improve their businesses."

In a market-focused segment, Charity Musonzo, Director of Trade in Goods at Malawi's Ministry of Trade & Industry, presented on the country's tobacco boom and the structural challenges affecting the sector. She warned of overdependence on tobacco, limited farmer earnings, and market concentration, while stressing the need for auction reforms, diversification, investment in value addition, and climate-resilient practices.

Ivan Genov, ITGA Manager for Tobacco Industry Analysis, offered a global market outlook. He reported that top producers—including Brazil, Zimbabwe, and Zambia—are seeing record crop volumes in 2025, resulting in part in declining average prices after years of tight supply. Concluding the block, Christopher Day of Euromonitor International provided insights into tobacco consumption trends, noting expectations for stable global cigarette volumes in the coming years amid economic pressure and the growth of vaping in Africa despite affordability challenges for heated tobacco products in the region.



During a regulations-focused panel, special attention and in-depth discussion were paid to supply chain compliance under the EU Due Diligence Directive, as well as the upcoming Conference of the Parties to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC COP11). Participants considered the potential impacts of these developments on African tobacco-growing countries and emphasized the importance of coordinated regional responses and policy alignment.

Brian Kapotwe, IFAD Zambia Programme Director, emphasized the critical role of small-scale farmers in Africa, noting that over 60% of the population is engaged in agriculture. He stressed that agriculture remains central to food security, employment, export earnings, and rural livelihoods. Calling to attention the importance of resilience and inclusion, Kapotwe shared that IFAD is focusing on an inclusive, resilient, and market-driven agricultural transformation. He insisted that with shifting global markets and climate realities, we must transition from dependency to diversification.

Innocent Mugwagwa, Executive Director of the Elimination of Child Labour in Tobacco (ECLT) Foundation, presented an in-depth review of child labour trends and their implications for the tobacco sector. Drawing on findings from a recent ILO-UNICEF report, he pointed out that Sub-Saharan Africa continues to face the most severe challenges, especially among children aged 5 to 11, who are at the highest risk. ECLT's call to action focuses on targeted support for this vulnerable group, meaningful farmer inclusion in shaping global strategies, and the strengthening of national and international platforms for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Gracious Ndalama, Project Manager at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Malawi, addressed the conference on the topic of Decent Work, sharing the ILO's four key pillars: international labour standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, employment creation, social protection, and social dialogue and tripartism. Mr. Ndalama showcased ongoing training sessions with farmers, conducted in partnership with TAMA Farmers Trust, aimed at promoting these principles and strengthening compliance and labour practices across the agricultural sector.

Patrick Chiwaya from Agriculture Research Extension Trust (ARET) Malawi presented findings on efforts to accelerate the transition from tenancy to waged employment within the tobacco sector in the country. Based on ARET's recent study, he pointed out the urgent need for increased access to loans for tobacco farmers, training in financial literacy, and the role of tobacco companies in expanding access to bridging finance. Mr. Chiwaya also stressed the promotion of income diversification as a critical pathway to improving farmer livelihoods and economic resilience.

As ITGA's 2025 Africa Regional Meeting concluded, it reaffirmed the Association's role as a vital platform for raising the voices of growers, fostering dialogue across the value chain, and driving coordinated responses to the evolving challenges facing the tobacco sector. Through shared



expertise, policy engagement, and a united regional approach, ITGA continues to empower growers with the knowledge and support needed to build a more resilient and sustainable future for tobacco farming in Africa.

Editor's note:

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