

Abstract

There is growing evidence that tobacco farming and use, among other critical livelihood factors, has an impact not only on health but also on the environment. The tobacco industry in Kenya has been on the rise with new production areas emerging. However, the nature of the environmental friendliness of the production, processing and consumption technologies have yet to be evaluated in many parts of Kenya. This study undertook an environmental auditing of tobacco farming activities in the South Nyanza region of Kenya for purposes of evaluating their compliance levels and policy formulation. Data collection was achieved through a detailed environmental audit checklist, focused group discussions, interviews, and field observations. Generally, the environmental compliance level with the National Environment Management Authority, World Health Organization standards and world best farming practices was dismal, at 13.6%. Tobacco companies' compliance rating with standards in application of pesticides and agrochemicals, use and management of energy resources, tobacco leaf storage and disposal of uncollected leaves, occupational health and safety, and best established practices in corporate social responsibility stood at 19.8, 15.7, 27.7, 2.1 and 11.8%, respectively. The low compliance level implies unsustainable farming practices; thus the need for enhanced enforcement of good environmental practices in the sector. Development of policies and legislation on economically viable and environmentally sustainable alternative crops is therefore recommended.