

**This is an exercise in improvisation through which your students can explore the relationship between the tobacco companies and the Third World. Students should previously have seen and discussed the presentation 4.10 ‘What’s Happening?’.**

**A meeting has been arranged between a representative of Amerbrite Tobacco and a Third World community with a history of agriculture. Recent years have been hard, with crop failure leading to malnutrition and extreme poverty as a result.**

**Choose from the list of characters with the number and capabilities of your students in mind. The essential characters Mr Powers and Fola, the others can be woven into the plot in many different combinations. Twenty-four characters are described; feel free to add others.**

**It is suggested that the list of characters might be copied and the biographies issued to the students. They will need some time to think about their roles and to talk to other characters about how they intend to develop the story line.**

**Try not to intervene, but make sure they get the point about tobacco and the motives of the tobacco companies. The 4.10 ‘What’s Happening?’ presentation should take care of that.**

**Note: None of the characters described below actually exist and they are not based on particular individuals, living or deceased. No specific geographical locations are intended. Amerbrite Tobacco is a fictional organisation and no links with any particular tobacco company are implied.**

**Mr Powers** Regional Manager for Amerbrite Tobacco

Mr Powers is genial, smart, well dressed, well fed and has all the answers. He is able to solve any problem, money is not an issue. If equipment is needed, a loan can be arranged. Soil fertility—fertilisers are available. Insect pests—insecticides are available. Land for food—no need, shop at the market. Tobacco is the answer to all.

**Ms Plantin** Agricultural Adviser for Amerbrite Tobacco

Ms Plantin has all the facts and figures at her fingertips. She knows exactly how much tobacco can be grown on the land available to the village. She knows which pesticides and herbicides will be needed for insect and weed control. She knows how much fertiliser will be required and how often it must be applied.

**Mr Cashin** Salesman for Amerbrite Tobacco

Mr Cash is the man who would be the community’s main contact with Amerbrite if they decide to grow tobacco. It is he who would set the price for the crop and who would also set the price for fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. His salary is profit related—the more he makes for the company, the more he gets paid.

**Fola** Patriarch of the village

Fola is held in great respect by the community and it is Fola who will need to be convinced by Mr Powers if there is to be a move into tobacco growing. Fola is extremely concerned for the community and has witnessed its suffering too often. However, he has a strong desire to make sure things don't get worse.

**Abiba** A teenage girl, friend of Baako

Abiba has just seen her grandfather die as a result of emphysema. She is convinced it was caused by his cigarette smoking, a habit he picked up from soldiers who were based in the village many years before. She is strongly opposed to the prospect of growing tobacco.

**Harith** A farmer

Harith has lost his crops to drought and disease. Both his children are thin and malnourished. Harith and his wife are ill as result of their inadequate diet—they don't eat much to ensure there is enough food to keep their children alive. Harith feels he can't risk another failed food crop and is tempted to grow tobacco for cash.

**Zabia** Married to Harith

Zabia is pathetically thin and very weak. She is desperately worried about her children. They are four years old but small for their age, they are listless and have low resistance to infection. She wants her husband to take Amerbrite Tobacco's offer of a loan to start producing tobacco.

**Limber** A young woman, recently married to Tabansi

Limber has not been married long and wants to have children. She knows that feeding a family is hard given the situation the community has been in for the past few years. She has been encouraging her new husband to look into the possibility of tobacco growing as it seems to promise a higher income.

**Tabansi** A young man, recently married to Limber

Tabansi is worried about the prospect of having children with Limber. He wants to work in the city rather than become a farmer as he doesn't think he could grown enough food to support a family. He's heard about the tobacco company's offer and he's interested. Tabansi smokes and that's expensive, but he can't stop.

**Jabari** A middle aged man, married with four children

Jabari works hard to grow his crops and usually manages to feed his family and sell any surplus at the market. He smokes and the money he makes at the market is spent mainly on cigarettes. There was no surplus to sell this year. Even with his eldest son working hard alongside him, it is hard to get by.

- Maizah** A middle aged woman, married to Jabari and mother of his children
- Maizah thinks her husband is becoming interested in growing tobacco. She is frightened because that means there will be no land on which to grow food. They would become completely reliant on selling the tobacco and shopping in the market. She is also worried about how they would repay the loan to the Amerbrite company.
- Baako** Eldest son of Jabari and Maizah, friend of Abiba
- Baako adores his parents and is distressed by his father's smoking. Abiba has told him about her grandfather's illness and death and he has heard other similar stories in the past. He wants his father to stop smoking, not least because there would be more money to spend on his three young sisters. He hates tobacco.
- Halima** Elderly woman, a widow
- Halima has lived a long time and seen many changes. She often offers friendly advice to Fola, in private out of respect for his position. Recently she has suggested to him that the tobacco company man, Mr Powers, may not be the benefactor he seems to be. She has heard of villages who have been unable to repay their loans.
- Yobachi** A talented and well-educated young man, recently returned to the village
- Yobachi was educated in a school two days walk away and then went to agricultural college in another part of the country. He understands the problem of soil fertility and knows that tobacco is a 'hungry' crop which strips nutrients from the soil leaving it fit for nothing without fertilisers—and they have to be paid for.
- Abeni** A young woman from a farming family
- Abeni often works at the market where farmers sell any surplus crops they have. She has noticed that the tobacco farmers in the area seemed to have plenty of money when they started growing tobacco, but that lately they seem as badly off as everyone else. She has heard they have had to buy more fertiliser and pesticides than expected.
- Faraji** A stranger from another village, just passing through
- Faraji has heard about the meeting. His village switched to tobacco production six years ago. All was well at first though it was hard to keep up the repayments on the tobacco company loans. Then the yield began to drop and more fertiliser had to be bought, more money borrowed to pay for it and the downward spiral began.
- Sitembile** A woman visiting her cousins
- Sitembile is very interested in the meeting. She attended another Amerbrite meeting in her home village. The salesman there was unable to persuade her community to grow tobacco. He couldn't explain to the elders how it was possible that chemicals which would kill insect pests would not harm people too.

**Zareb**

An elderly man, a seller of firewood, married to Sibongile

Mablevi collects wood from the forest and sells it to people as fuel for their cooking. He knows tobacco leaves have to be dried using wood smoke and wants to know where the extra fuel would come from. At present there is a balance between the forest and the village; he wonders what tobacco farming might do to the local forest.

**Sibongile**

An elderly woman, married to Zareb, grandmother of Mablevi

Sibongile shares her husband's concerns but she is more worried about her grandson, Mablevi. He has recently started smoking, he was given free cigarettes by someone working for the tobacco company when he went to the market. Sibongile knows smoking will harm her grandson, but he is already addicted to the nicotine.

**Mablevi**

A young boy, just nine years old, grandson of Zareb and Sibongile

Mablevi is already a smoker. He has been frightened by his grandmother's pleadings for him to give up tobacco, but he cannot. The craving for nicotine is too strong. He is angry with the tobacco company for having turned him into a tobacco user. He hates tobacco and does not want his community to grow it.

**Safiya**

A young girl, friend of Mablevi

Safiya has been Mablevi's friend since they were infants. They have grown up together, loving their village and its surroundings. Safiya is horrified at the change in Mablevi since he started smoking. She feels he thinks more of cigarettes than he does of her and that he is no longer interested in spending time with her.

**Jelani**

A lorry driver, a regular visitor to the community

Jelani delivers kerosene, mainly used for lighting, throughout the area. Jelani knows several communities where tobacco is grown and he also knows that some have problems. Farmers have not made as much money as they had hoped and there's not much left for their families after they have paid off their tobacco company loans.

**Kambo**

A girl, her father is too ill to attend the meeting

Kambo's father has been a smoker since before she was born. Now he is ill. She does not know the name of the disease but she has seen him become progressively sicker. He coughs all the time and is unable to breathe properly. He can no longer walk. She thinks tobacco is the cause of his condition and she wants answers.

**Chike**

A boy, works for Jelani, helping with his deliveries

Chike is unwell. While he and Jelani were visiting a tobacco farm a few days before, he had helped to spray the crop. He does not know what was in the spray, but says that it had a very bad smell and made his eyes hurt. Since then he has been having headaches and keeps falling down. He walks very unsteadily and his hands shake.

## Names & their Meanings

The names used for some of the characters are of African origin and many of them have meanings:

Abeni	girl prayed for
Abiba	child born after grandmother died
Baako	first born
Chike	power of God
Faraji	consolation
Fola	honour
Halima	gentle
Harith	cultivator
Jabari	brave, fearless
Jelani	mighty
Kambo	must work for everything
Limber	joyfulness
Mablevi	do not deceive
Maizah	discerning
Safiya	pure
Sibongile	thanks
Sitembile	trust
Tabansi	one who endures
Yobachi	pray to God
Zabia	unknown
Zareb	protector