

TOBACCO A BARRIER TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



Photography: Chris Stowers/PANOS

Tobacco is extraordinarily dangerous to human health and highly damaging to national economies.

Nearly one billion people in the world smoke every day; about 80% of them are in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).¹ Over six million people die from tobacco use every year, the majority in their most productive years (30-69 years of age).²

Over-burdened health systems in all countries are already caring for countless people who have been disabled by cancer, stroke, emphysema and the myriad other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) caused by tobacco.

The diseases caused by tobacco use impose high productivity costs to the economy because of sick workers and those who die prematurely during their working years. Lost economic opportunities in highly-populated developing countries will be particularly severe as tobacco use is high and growing in those areas.

The vector of the tobacco epidemic is a wealthy, powerful, transnational industry.

From 1970 to 2000, cigarette consumption tripled in developing countries due to aggressive acquisition and marketing strategies.³ Tobacco industry revenue dwarfs the GDP of many countries. Manufacturers' worldwide profits were about \$50 billion in 2012.⁴ The industry uses its wealth to battle for market share in the developing world.⁵

We know exactly how to tackle the scourge of tobacco.

We have an internationally-negotiated, legally-binding package of evidence-based tobacco control measures, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control,⁶ the world's first treaty devoted to improving public health. 179 countries and the European Union are Parties to the FCTC. The slow pace of FCTC implementation causes immeasurable suffering, and imposes economic hardship on governments facing rising healthcare costs and lost opportunities to invest in sustainable development.

As the world comes together this year to agree on the post-2015 agenda for sustainable development, no country can afford the health, social, economic or environmental consequences of tobacco.



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Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Tobacco use is highest among the poor.⁷ Money spent on tobacco is not available to be spent on basic necessities such as food,⁸ education⁹ and healthcare.¹⁰ For those families living on very low incomes, even a small diversion of resources to buy tobacco can have a significant impact on health and nutrition.⁷ In the poorest households in some countries in Africa, 15% of disposable income is spent on tobacco.¹¹

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Tobacco growing occupies about 3.8 million hectares of agricultural land.² About 90% of commercial tobacco leaf is grown in the global south,¹² often in countries where undernourishment and child labour are major problems. In 2008 in Malawi, a top tobacco-producing country with an undernourishment rate of 27%, each hectare of land devoted to tobacco produced one ton of tobacco leaf; a hectare of land growing potatoes produced 14.6 tons in the same year.² Many other crops, crop combinations, farming systems and livelihood strategies offer better opportunities for farmers.¹²

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Tobacco use is a leading driver of the NCD epidemic and the number one cause of preventable disease and death worldwide, killing over 6 million people each year.² Exposure to second-hand smoke is responsible for at least 600,000 deaths each year among non-smokers; nearly half of these deaths occur among women and over a quarter among children under the age of five.²

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

In Viet Nam, smokers spent 3.6 times more on tobacco than on education in 2003.¹³ Child tobacco workers are regularly denied opportunities to pursue education.

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Women comprise about 20% of the world's smokers and are ruthlessly targeted by tobacco companies to increase uptake of smoking.¹⁴

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Tobacco farming in LMICs causes environmental damage including pollution of waterways.²

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Reducing costs associated with the tobacco epidemic could generate funds to be invested in developing renewable energy infrastructure.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Global cigarette production is dominated by a few transnational companies, with profits largely flowing to a few Northern countries. The tobacco business worsens LMICs' balance of trade, destroys human capital and diverts resources into a product that is a significant drain on government and household finances.

“Among the revenue proposals I have examined, tobacco taxes are especially attractive because they encourage smokers to quit and discourage people from starting to smoke, as well as generate significant revenues. It's a win-win for global health.”

—Bill Gates, G20 Summit, France, 2011

REDUCING TOBACCO USE IS CRITICAL TO ACHIEVING EVERY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL¹⁵

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Researchers are using tobacco plants as hosts for bioengineering processes to produce new medicines, biodegradable plastics and industrial solvents.¹⁶ Most recently, these techniques were used to develop ZMapp for the treatment of Ebola patients.¹⁷

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

By 2030, tobacco use is projected to kill over 8 million people a year, more than 80 percent of these deaths in LMICs.² Reducing tobacco use and exposure is key to reducing economic and health disparities.¹⁸

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Tobacco smoke is a major source of indoor air pollution.¹⁹ Establishing smokefree work places and public places denormalizes tobacco use and saves lives.

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Tobacco farming as it is practised in LMICs today leaves many farmers accumulating debt under contracts with transnational leaf buyers.¹² Tobacco companies routinely offer inducements and loans to farmers to begin growing, often based on unrealistically optimistic forecasts of prices and yields.²⁰

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

In LMICs, tobacco farming causes deforestation. Around 600 million trees are cut down every year to make room for tobacco crops, burned during the tobacco curing process, and used for construction of curing barns.^{12, 21}

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

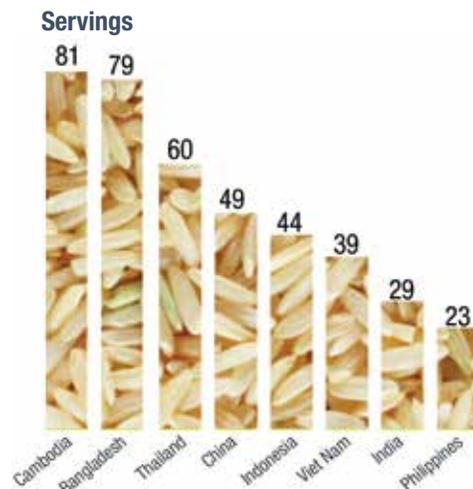
Cigarette filters are made from cellulose acetate, a type of plastic that can take up to 12 years to decompose. The 2013 International Coastal Clean-up in 92 countries found that cigarette butts constituted 15% of the total pieces of debris collected, the most common single item.²²

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Tobacco farming in LMICs causes severe land and soil degradation and a host of other ecosystem disruptions.¹²

How many servings of rice can a pack of Marlboros buy?

1 serving = 28.21g of rice, dry weight, 2010



Source: Tobacco Atlas, 4th edition, tobaccoatlas.org

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

The tobacco industry abuses domestic and international legal systems in order to prevent or delay tobacco control measures, often launching cases without legal merit in order to apply “regulatory chill” to governments and maintain its markets.²³

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

WHO, World Bank, UNDP, the wider UN system, and other global and regional organizations have emphasized the importance of prioritizing tobacco control within the development agenda.

Strengthening implementation of the FCTC as part of achieving sustainable human development will provide a major boost to global development by delivering rapid and quantifiable benefits of lives saved and healthcare costs reduced, and a sustainable return on investment in a healthier, more able and productive global population.

The FCTC has spurred countries around the world to implement science-based measures to reduce tobacco use and improve health outcomes:

- Pictorial warnings on cigarette packs are now required in 77 jurisdictions. In Pakistan, India, Nepal and Thailand, warnings cover 85% of packs.
- 43 countries have enacted 100% smokefree policies for all workplaces and public places.
- 29 countries have enacted complete bans on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.
- 32 countries have implemented tobacco taxes of 75% or more of the price of the most widely sold cigarette brands.

Despite this progress, more must be done to achieve global targets to reduce premature deaths from NCDs²⁴ and to achieve future sustainable development goals.

The treaty process has highlighted the tobacco industry's relentless efforts to fight these measures and sell more of its deadly and addictive products, especially in LMICs.

In 2001, British company Imperial Tobacco struck a 25-year deal with Lao PDR to limit tax on tobacco. Between 2002 and 2013, the Lao government suffered revenue losses of \$79.42m due to this unfair contract — money that could have been used for health and social development for the nation.²⁵

Countries must be as aggressive in fighting the tobacco epidemic as the tobacco industry is in perpetuating it.

Yet national tobacco control and NCD programs in many LMICs are inadequately staffed and seriously under-resourced.

Development assistance for tobacco control has been negligible to date.²⁶ Major philanthropic funding in recent years, has made a significant impact but more must be done.²⁷

All countries must commit to strengthening national tobacco control and NCD policies, in addition to reorienting health systems to address prevention of NCDs, most notably through tobacco control. It is especially critical that nations step up efforts to increase tobacco taxes, which is the most direct and effective strategy to reduce tobacco use and can provide sustainable domestic funding for tobacco control.²⁸

Tax is the subject of FCTC Article 6 and best practice guidelines on implementation were approved by all Parties to the treaty in 2014.

Country experience shows higher taxes increase government revenues, in spite of reduced consumption.

A 10% increase in cigarette prices reduces cigarette demand by about 4% in high-income countries and by about 6% in LMICs.²⁹ If tax increases result in just a 10% increase in cigarette prices, the number of smokers worldwide would decline by 42 million (38m in LMICs).³⁰

Governments collect around \$145 billion in tobacco excise tax revenues each year; and this increases to around \$300 billion taking into account all taxes.³¹

Appropriately structured, tobacco taxes have the potential to pay for tobacco control, and for action on other sustainable development goals.

It is vital that these current proposed targets under the health SDG (Goal 3) are in the final post-2015 framework:

3.4 By 2030 reduce by one-third pre-mature mortality from non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and wellbeing.

3.a Strengthen implementation of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries as appropriate.

Prioritising FCTC implementation in all countries is critical to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. Meaningful financial and technical assistance is essential for success.

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