



Tobacco

A Barrier to Sustainable Development



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Most of us are strong supporters of the WHO initiatives to dramatically reduce tobacco use, to tax it at a high level, to discourage the uses. It's a killer product and it's a dangerous product and it should be treated as so.

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Jeffrey Sachs, Special Adviser to
UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon
on Millenium Development Goals,
June 17, 2013



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Tobacco is a Leading Threat to Quality of Life

Tobacco is the only consumer product that kills roughly 50% of its users when used as intended.(1) More than one billion people use tobacco around the globe(2) and half of them will die because of their habit. Tobacco related diseases like cancer or heart disease will kill nearly 6 million people each year.(1) Contrary to common perceptions, more than half of these deaths are occurring in developing countries. As a result, tobacco is a major preventable cause of disease and death in the world and the second leading health risk factor globally.(3) Tobacco use is the only major risk factor that causes all four of the major categories of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) - heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and lung diseases.

Currently, NCDs are the leading cause of death in all regions of the world except Africa.(4) However, by 2020, it is expected that the highest increases in NCD-related mortality will be in Africa.(4)

Over the next 20 years, the global economic impact of the major NCDs could reach a total of \$30 trillion.(5) The economic cost of tobacco includes higher healthcare costs, loss of productivity due to illness and death, trade losses, and environmental damage.(6)

In low- and middle-income countries, treating tobacco illnesses costs more every year than all health costs combined.(5) Fortunately, population based measures for reducing the major risk factors for NCDs, including tobacco use, are estimated to cost merely \$0.40 per person each year for all low and middle-income countries.(5)

Tobacco Isn't Just a Health Issue!

Youth

Tobacco use is highly prevalent among youth. As of 2011, in South Africa, 10.6% of girls and 17.9% of boys age 13-15 smoke cigarettes; in Russia, 23.9% of girls and 26.9% of boys smoke; in Japan, 8.5% of girls 12.1% of boys smoke; in the United States, 7.9% of girls 9.7% of boys smoke; and in Brazil 13.3% of girls and 9.2% of boys smoke. (2)

The tobacco industry increasingly targets people in low and middle-income countries, particularly youth, through advertising and marketing campaigns.(9)

In tobacco-growing areas, children are unable to attend school because they are required to harvest and cure tobacco, which is a labor-intensive crop. (10)

Smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke is a major concern for pregnant women as well as their unborn children, as it can put the child at risk for various complications before and after birth.(11)



Photo by: WHO

Women

Smoking among girls is not only catching up to boys, but in at least 25 countries, girls smoke more than boys.(2)

Globally, the rate of smoking among women is expected to reach 20% by 2025. The tobacco industry's targeted marketing towards women is a major factor in the increase of use.(12)

Money spent on tobacco takes away funds for food and health care for mothers and babies, which contributes to poor maternal health and infant mortality.(10)



Photo by: Plan International

Environment

Tobacco cultivation has contributed to an environmental crisis in a number of countries.(6)

The harmful cultivation and farming process causes: soil and water degradation, vegetation and biodiversity losses, and human diseases caused by pesticide poisoning, green tobacco sickness, and inhalation of biomass particles.(13)



Photo by: dehoxis

Why is Tobacco Control a Sustainable Development Issue?

People often think that tobacco is just a health issue. However, tobacco use impedes the 3 main pillars of sustainable development, including environmental sustainability, economic development, and social inclusion.

Across the globe, it is the poor that suffer the greatest harm from tobacco use. Not only is prevalence higher among the poor in high-income countries, but prevalence is increasing among the poor in low-income countries as well. In some of the poorest households in many countries, 15 percent of income is spent on tobacco. (7)

Tobacco use robs resources for basic needs like food, education, shelter, and health care. Having a tobacco-related disease will hinder the main wage earner's ability to work, which in turn reduces household wages, inhibits the ability to provide for and educate children, and drives the family further into poverty.(8) A spreading epidemic of NCDs and tobacco use will undermine progress made in global development over the past fifty years.

Solution

Curbing tobacco use is essential and the world can take a major step in the right direction by including objectives to reduce tobacco consumption in the post 2015 development agenda. Luckily, the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the world's only global public health treaty, contains evidence-based and cost-effective solutions, which, if implemented, can help achieve sustainable development. Measures to curb the use of tobacco impact the 3 pillars of sustainable development:



Economic Development

Effective tobacco control will reduce consumption of tobacco, which should lead to lower health expenses to treat consequences of tobacco use.(6)

Increasing tobacco taxes can generate revenue for governments and thereby finance prevention programs, cover increasing health costs due to NCDs, and reduce consumption.(14)

Reducing tobacco use redistributes money for spending on other goods and services, creating new jobs in the economy.(6)

Environmental Sustainability

Curbing tobacco use can significantly reduce the negative impact of cigarette butts on the environment by decreasing litter and lessening diseases caused by exposure to carcinogenic chemicals and pesticides.(15)

Cutting back on tobacco cultivation and farming can decrease green tobacco sickness, deforestation, soil depletion, and pollution of water tables.(15)

Social Inclusion

Socially excluded individuals who cannot afford health care get sick and die sooner from tobacco-related diseases than those in higher social positions.(4) The end result is further heightening already existing social exclusion.

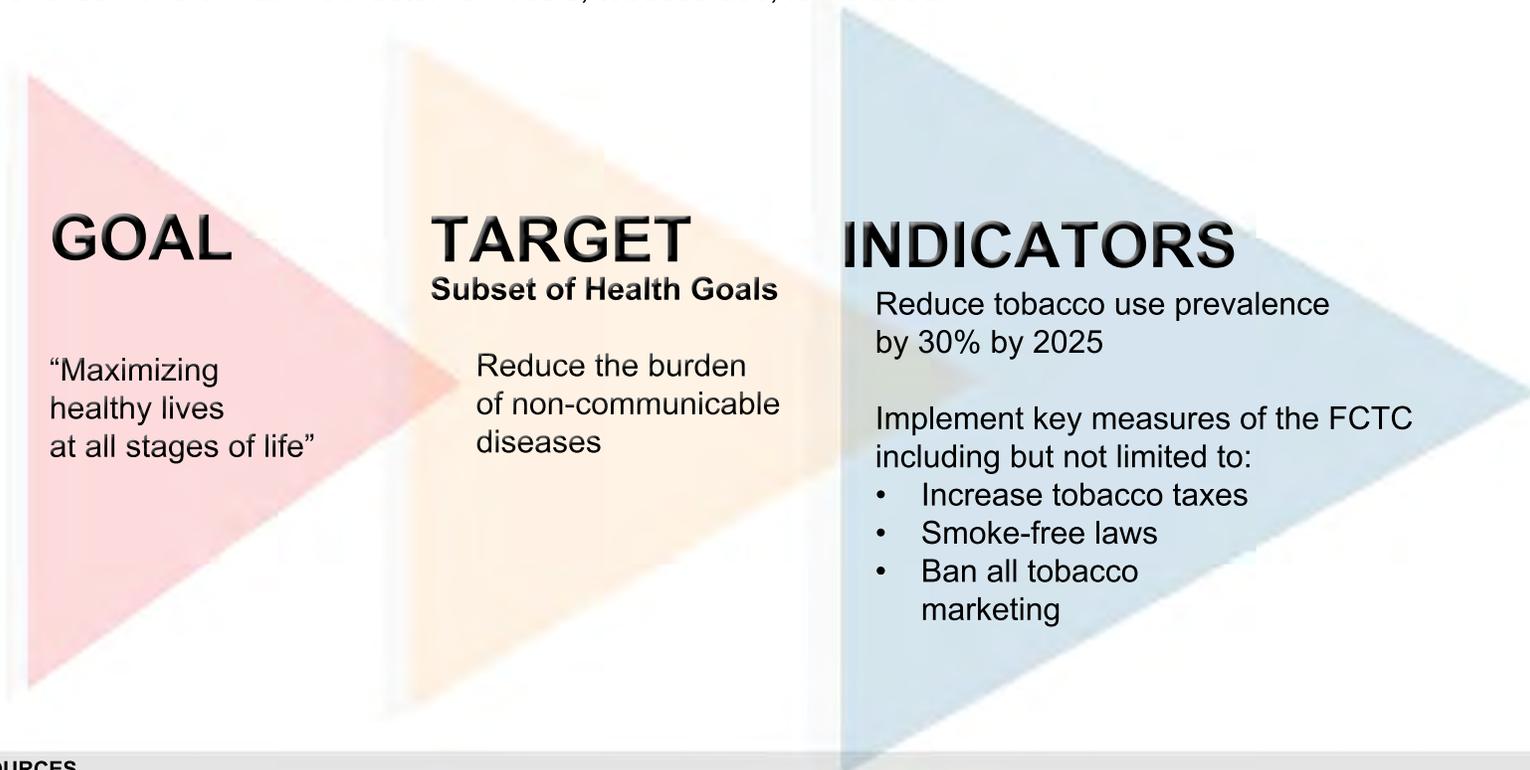
Curbing tobacco use can contribute to achieving social inclusion and favorably impact an individual's right to health, which is a human right as stated in a number of international legal documents, including the WHO constitution. (16) Failing to do so infringes on that right.

Objectives to Curb Tobacco Use Must Be Included in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda did mention that NCDs should be addressed: “On average, people lose 10 years of their lives to illness, mostly to non-communicable diseases. These should be addressed, but the priorities will vary by country.”(17)

The Secretary General’s report: *A life of dignity for all: accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015* also included NCDs in the recommendations for improving health: “reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases.”(18)

Given that NCDs should be included, tobacco control is a key element, since tobacco use is the only major risk factor that causes all four of the major categories of NCDs. The High Level Panel and the Secretary General gave recommendations on goals and targets for future development priorities, however governments should not be bound by these exact suggestions. They must ensure that prevention of the main risk factor for NCDs, tobacco use, is included.



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