

TOBACCO | EDUCATION

How tobacco control contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4

BACKGROUND

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly formally adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goals call for all countries to eliminate poverty and hunger worldwide, protect the climate, promote decent work and improve public health.

Goal three (health) includes the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). With good reason, considering the fact that seven million people die each year as a result of consuming addictive tobacco products.¹ This is the leading preventable cause of death through non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Tobacco control is also relevant for the achievement of other development goals. For example, the reduction of tobacco consumption and production contributes to the eradication of poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2)² and can help to ensure equitable education worldwide.

TOBACCO USE AND EDUCATION

Tobacco consumption is influenced by a variety of factors such as age, gender, socio-economic status and education.

Some studies have shown that lower educational levels or illiteracy are associated with higher smoking rates, for example in the United States of America, Cambodia and China.³ Educational status indirectly influences smoking behaviour, e.g. because less educated people might know less about the harms of tobacco use, have fewer economic

education, food and healthcare (“crowding-out effect”).⁶ This is especially evident in low- and middle-income countries. A study in Cambodia for example shows that in 2004, non-tobacco urban households spent 10% of their household income on education, while tobacco consuming households spent only 7%.⁷ In Indonesia in 2005, smoker households

QUALITY EDUCATION

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

opportunities and are unemployed at higher rates. Worldwide, smoking prevalence is highest among groups with lower socio-economic status, in low- and middle-income countries as well as high-income countries.⁴

Smoking among children and adolescents can negatively influence learning behaviour because nicotine is associated with “mood disorders, and problems with memory, attention, impulse control, and cognition later in life.”⁵

Furthermore, it has been shown that expenditure for tobacco products diverts resources away from investments in

spent an average of 11.5% of household income on tobacco products while just over 3% was used for education.⁸

The diversion of resources away from education reveals an intergenerational conflict as the addiction of parents leads to impaired future opportunities of their children and hinders sustainable development of the society in general. This has a negative effect on the achievement of SDGs 4.1 and 4.2 (quality primary and secondary education and early childhood development) and deepens social inequality (tackled by SDG 10).⁹

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: UNFAIRTOBACCO

The complexities of the tobacco world market and its impact on a variety of SDGs makes tobacco a perfect example for education about sustainable development and human rights (SDG 4.7). At the same time, this improves learners’ knowledge about the harms of tobacco consumption and promotes tobacco prevention (FCTC Art. 12).



For more than ten years, Unfairtobacco works with youth and interested adults, providing:



Factsheets, studies and other resources



Board games, role plays and films



Workshops and exhibitions in schools



Presentations at conferences and other events



Days of actions, organised by and with youth

TOBACCO PRODUCTION JEOPARDISES EDUCATION

More than 17 million people around the world work in tobacco farming, primarily in low- and middle-income countries where 90% of the global tobacco leaf harvest is produced.¹⁰ Research shows that farmers have difficulties in making a living from tobacco growing and the earnings are often so low that there is no money left to pay workers or sustainably improve their living conditions.¹¹ For this reason, many smallholder farming families turn to their children for help in the field.

The US Department of Labor lists 16 countries for their use of child labour in tobacco farming: Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Indonesia, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Malawi (also forced labour), Mexico, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Philippines, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam and Zambia. Additionally, both India and Bangladesh are listed for child labour in the production of bidis (hand-rolled cigarettes mainly consumed in

sonings, in addition to the time used for work, mean that this work impacts on children's rights to education and leisure (Articles 28 and 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and impairs the achievement of SDG 4.1, 4.2 and 4.5. At the same time, education is needed to break the cycle of poverty and the dependence on tobacco companies.

However, the relationship between tobacco child labour and education is complex. Some children interviewed by Human Rights Watch and Plan Malawi reported that they partly work to earn money for school fees, books and uniforms that their families cannot afford.¹⁵

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Tobacco consumption as well as production have a negative impact on education and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 4. Both ends of the tobacco value chain point to an intergenerational conflict and a vicious cycle of poverty that needs to be broken.

TOBACCO CONTROL IS PART OF THE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

With **SDG 3**, the United Nations want to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages“. This includes target 3.a, which aims to strengthen the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

South Asia).¹² While thoroughly put together, the list is incomplete. For example, tobacco child labour is widespread in the United States itself, as Human Rights Watch has found.¹³

Although many children work alongside school or in school holidays, because of the hazardous nature of tobacco farming, it is a violation of the ILO Convention No. 182 against the worst forms of child labour. It bears high risks of injuries because of the use of sharp instruments and potential poisoning from chemicals and the nicotine in tobacco leaves that can be absorbed through the skin (Green Tobacco Sickness).¹⁴ Injuries and poi-

In low- and middle-income countries, tobacco companies are targeting the education sector with their Corporate Social Responsibility programmes. This includes building schools, sponsoring uniforms and funding scholarships in China, Brazil, Malawi, Argentina and other countries.¹⁶ These kinds of sponsorships promote tobacco companies and brands and undermine tobacco control policymaking. They are also a violation of the WHO FCTC (Art. 13 and 5.3).

It is understandable if governments that are confronted with constrained budgets allow the tobacco industry to sponsor schools, yet this is also owed to a lack of



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knowledge about alternative resources. Tobacco control itself can raise a huge amount of untapped funds: If tobacco taxes worldwide were increased by 80% on average, this would reduce consumption while globally generating additional 141 billion US dollars annually, mainly in low- and middle-income countries (SDG 17.1, FCTC Art. 6), that can be used for healthcare, social welfare, alternatives to tobacco growing, and education.¹⁷

The complexities of the tobacco world market and its impact on a variety of SDGs makes it a perfect example for education about sustainable development and human rights (SDG 4.7), while improving learners' knowledge about the harms of tobacco consumption and promoting tobacco prevention (FCTC Art. 12).

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