

WATER PIPES

SUPPLY CHAINS | ENVIRONMENT | HUMAN RIGHTS

BACKGROUND

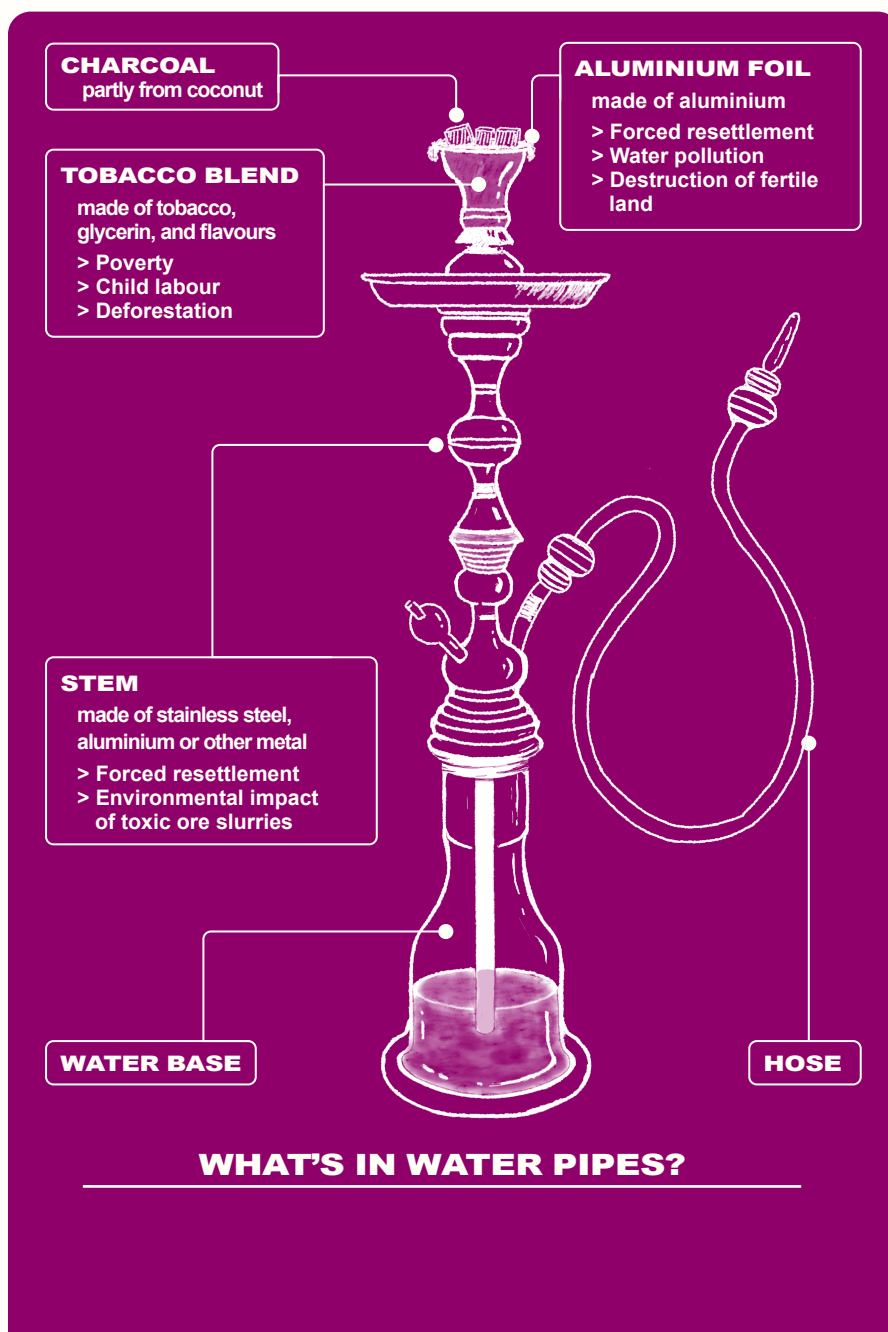
In June 2011, the UN Human Rights Council adopted the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP). According to this, companies should counteract the negative impacts of their business activities, products and services on human rights on a voluntary basis.¹ However, voluntarism has not led to comprehensive improvements. For this reason, the German Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chains will become effective on January 1, 2023. It obliges companies based in Germany with more than 3,000 employees (from 2024: 1,000) to fulfill their responsibility for their supply chains: To respect human rights and meet environmental standards. A comparable law at the European level is currently being negotiated.²

The production and consumption of tobacco and nicotine products are linked to numerous human rights violations and environmental damage. These include economic exploitation, child labour, lack of occupational health and safety, deforestation, water scarcity, and environmental pollution in the tobacco and extractive

sectors. They are an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With regard to tobacco and nicotine products, the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), which is part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 3.a), is therefore of particular importance.³

In water pipes (also hookahs or shishas), a moist tobacco mixture is heated using charcoal. The smoke is inhaled through a hose after being cooled by water.

In Germany, 4.1% of the adult population uses hookahs. For young people, they seem to have lost their appeal in recent years, yet 7.1% of 12-17 year olds and twice as many (14.5%) of 18-25 year olds smoke hookahs.⁴



WATER PIPES AND HEALTH

Water pipe smoke contains harmful substances such as acetaldehyde, the carcinogen formaldehyde, or heavy metals. Hookah smoking causes respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and lung cancer. Compared to cigarette smoking, users inhale larger amounts of smoke and more harmful substances per puff. In addition, the high carbon monoxide content of the smoke can cause acute poisoning. As well, present non-smokers are exposed to the toxic substances of hookah smoke. Water pipe tobacco usually contains nicotine, which can quickly cause addiction. For adolescents and young adults, this is particularly risky as brain development can be impaired by regular nicotine use.⁵

WHAT'S IN WATER PIPES?

A large proportion of water pipes and hookah tobacco are imported to Germany from Egypt or Turkey, for example. Some are also produced in Germany. Hookah coal is produced, e.g., in Indonesia.⁶

Water pipes consist of a water base, in which a stem is placed. On top of the stem is the bowl which is filled with flavoured tobacco. The bowl is usually covered with a perforated aluminium foil. On this foil, a lit coal is placed to heat the tobacco. The resulting smoke is passed through the stem into the water, where it cools down. Then it is inhaled through a hose with a mouthpiece.⁷

The production of water pipes, hookah tobacco and accessories is based on global supply chains in which human rights violations and environmental damage occur, as exemplified here.

The stems of hookahs are mostly made of stainless steel or aluminium. Stainless steel, for example, is produced from iron ore, which is imported to Germany mainly from Brazil. For the mining of iron ore, entire villages are forcibly resettled and forests are cleared. The residue from the mines is toxic ore slurry, which causes devastating and, in some cases, irreversible environmental damage in the event of accidents, such as the Brumadinho dam failure in 2019.⁸

Water pipe tobacco is a blend of glycerine, syrup, flavours, and tobacco, mostly Virginia tobacco. This variety is also grown in Germany and exported to Egypt and Arab countries.⁹ However, on a global scale, Virginia tobacco is mainly grown in countries such as Brazil, India or Zimbabwe, mostly in smallholder farms. Among these tobacco farming families, poverty and as a result child labour are widespread. In addition, the use of chemicals is a heavy burden on people and the environment. The clearing of forests for firewood used to cure tobacco also damages the climate.¹⁰

Hookah charcoal is produced, e.g., from coconut shells in Indonesia. In some cases, waste from coconut production is also used for this purpose.¹¹ However, production and transport are closely linked to the ecological consequences of monocultures and the impact of CO₂ emissions on the climate through transport.¹²

The aluminium foil between the coal and the tobacco is renewed for each hookah session. Aluminium is produced from the mineral bauxite.



BAUXITE

THE MINERAL PROCESSED TO ALUMINIUM

„The construction of the mine had enormous consequences for my personal life: all agricultural activities, with which I could pay my daily expenses, my health care and school fees, were made impossible in one fell swoop. And all this without any compensation measures. On top of that, despite the destruction of our livelihood, the mine operators refuse to hire local people to work in the mines - even though they have the skills.”¹³

Mamadou Malik Bah, active member of Jeunes pour le développement de Hamdallaye, Guinea

Globally, 62.9 million tons of aluminium were extracted by mining in 2019, almost exclusively from the mineral bauxite.¹⁴ Thus, aluminium is the second most produced metal after iron. Bauxite is mainly mined in Australia, China, Guinea and Brazil. The four countries account for more than 80 percent of the global production.¹⁵ Germany imports more than 90 percent of the bauxite it uses from Guinea in West Africa.¹⁶

Aluminium is used in many high technologies, such as electronics, vehicles or aircraft, but also in buildings and packaging and, for example, as a foil between tobacco and coal in water pipes. Due to the increasing use in electric car batteries, but also in light metal construction, almost all forecasts assume a growing consumption.¹⁷ At the same time, some bauxite deposits, such as in Brazil or Guinea, are located in (tropical) forest areas.¹⁸

According to the current state of knowledge, Guinea owns the world's largest bauxite deposits, almost a quarter of all known reserves.¹⁹ The bauxite processed in Germany originates from the Sangarédi mine in Boké district. The mine is operated by the Compagnie des Bauxites Guinée (CBG) owned by the Guinean state at 49 percent, the remaining 51 percent owned by a consortium of the three mining and smelting companies Rio Tinto (UK / Australia), Alcoa (USA) and Dadco (UK).²⁰ Dadco also operates Germany's only aluminium smelter, the Aluminium Oxid Stade refinery near Hamburg.

The mine in Sangarédi exists since 1973. The blasting operations raise large amounts of dust and pollute the water sources. Many residents near the mine also fear a negative impact on their health and the environment due to the dust.²¹ There is much local criticism on how environmental and social standards are being implemented in the recently started expansion of the mine. For example, 540 complainants from 13 affected villages blame CBG of failing to deliver on its promises for resettlement, the regeneration of agricultural land and the provision of water resources. In 2019, they therefore filed a complaint with the World Bank, which is involved in the expansion of the mine with a loan.²²

The mediation process to be held before the World Bank was postponed by one year to April 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, the mining company relocated, among others, the village of Hamdallaye with more than 100 households. The new location lacks agricultural land, opportunities to earn a living, and sufficient access to water and medical care. Although a health station had been built, there was a lack of staff and medication. Furthermore, the resettlement areas, where bauxite had previously been mined, had not been regenerated and rather resemble a desert. Therefore, almost no plants grow in the new village, agriculture is impossible and access to water is very limited. Furthermore, not enough houses were built, and the buildings suffered leaks within a year. Apart from Hamdallaye's inhabitants, at least twelve other communities in Sangarédi complain about land grabbing, the drying up of wells and springs, and water contaminated by dirt and sediments. The mine also has a major negative impact on biodiversity, medicinal plants, and rare animal and bird species.²³

With an Untied Loan Guarantee (German: Ungebundener Finanzkredit, UFK) for the mine, the German government ensured that the extracted bauxite will be processed in Stade, Germany. There is no further processing of the mineral on site. In Guinea, since the 1970s, the various governments have aimed at extending the value chain in the country and at building up an appropriate processing industry with the aim of ensuring that not only the ecological and social costs remain in the country. However, this has been in vain up to now.²⁴

Image: Resettlement area after bauxite mining in Guinea

ACTION

TOBACCO CONTROL, DUE DILIGENCE AND RAW MATERIAL TRANSITION

Through international agreements, Germany has committed itself to sustainable development, human rights and the protection of the environment.²⁵ With regard to addictive products such as hookah tobacco, the German government has an obligation to implement tobacco control measures²⁶ and to fulfill its extraterritorial responsibility.

Waterpipes, necessary utensils and hookah tobacco have global supply chains that include not only tobacco but also raw materials such as stainless steel for the stem and bauxite for aluminium parts and foil. The promotion of hookah smoking on social media as a healthier alternative to cigarette smoking and a life-style product appeals especially to young people.²⁷

To minimize the number of hookah smokers and the potential impact on children and youth, the following measures are particularly important:

- Annual increases in taxes on waterpipe tobacco
- Strengthening the regulation of waterpipe tobacco (e.g., social media advertising)
- Prevention programmes tailored to specific target groups (e.g., on social media)

In global supply chains, including those of waterpipes, hookah tobacco and accessories, human rights violations and environmental damage must be prevented or reduced, including at the beginning of supply chains, e.g., in tobacco fields and iron ore and bauxite mines. The following measures are suitable for this purpose:

- Strengthen Germany's Supply Chain Act to make it more effective²⁸
- Introduction of an effective supply chain law in Europe²⁹

For sustainable development, however, it is not enough to improve the supply chains for raw materials such as bauxite. Instead, there is an urgent need to initiate a raw material transition and, to this end, to greatly reduce the extraction of raw materials. This requires, for example, the establishment of a comprehensive circular economy for aluminium.

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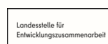
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