

World No Tobacco Day 2022

Factsheet

Tobacco industry's trail of devastation goes beyond the sphere of individual health and negatively affects the health of the planet and everything that is in it. Every stage of the tobacco supply chain - from cultivation to consumption, and also subsequent waste disposal – puts immense pressure on our already strained natural resources and vulnerable ecosystem.

With a view to raising awareness on the environmental impacts of tobacco and to expose tobacco industry's effort to "greenwash" the havoc it wrecks; the World Health Organization (WHO) has set the theme for 2022 World No Tobacco Day, to be globally celebrated on 31 May, as "Tobacco: Threat to our environment." This theme is particularly relevant for Bangladesh and the developing world where 90 percent of all tobacco production is concentrated.¹

Tobacco and the Environment

Tobacco causes over 84 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually and creates the world's most littered item, cigarette butts. To get a full glimpse of the damages tobacco inflicts on environment, it is useful to trace the key stages of its entire life cycle:

Growing and Curing: Tobacco production contributes up to 30 percent of deforestation in major tobacco-growing countries, mostly low and middle-income nations.² A farmer who plants, cultivates and harvests tobacco may absorb as much nicotine as found in 50 cigarettes in a single day.³ Tobacco plants sap soil nutrients at a faster pace than most other crops. For example, tobacco consumes two and a half times more nitrogen, seven times more phosphorus and eight times more potassium when compared to maize, a food crop. Thus, the short-term cash benefits of tobacco are offset by the long-term

consequences of increased food insecurity, frequent sustained farmers' debt, illness and poverty among farm workers.

Manufacturing, Distribution and Transportation: A single cigarette can be responsible for up to 14 grams of CO₂ equivalent throughout its lifecycle.⁴ The six trillion cigarettes manufactured each year globally require more than 22 billion tonnes of water.⁵ The resources used in the production of non-tobacco elements such as filters, cigarette papers, polyethylene, and plastic pouches for smokeless tobacco – each pose their own environmental impact.⁶

Consumption: Global toxic emissions from tobacco, include 3000-6000 metric tonnes of formaldehyde, 12,000-47,000 tons of nicotine, and the three major greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide.⁷ Tobacco smoke also leaves a long-lasting residue that gathers on





surfaces, can build-up over years and is durable after smoking stops in the environment.⁸

Post-consumption Waste Disposal: Discarded cigarette filters have been recorded as the most abundant litter item worldwide. An approximately 4.5 trillion cigarette butts are being littered every year globally⁹, generating 766,571 metric tons of toxic trash. This adds to 2 million tons of solid waste from cartons and packaging. 19-38 percent of total debris collected from ocean clean-ups globally are cigarette butts.¹⁰

The Bangladesh Scenario

The Myth of Profitability: Bangladesh ranks 14th in the world on the basis of area used for tobacco cultivation, 12th for tobacco production in quantity, and holds a share of 1.3% of global tobacco production.¹¹ Tobacco cultivation is often touted as being profitable than food and other cash crops. However, a recent study¹² busts such myth of higher return. It shows that when opportunity costs of unpaid family labor, firewood from own land, environment pollution, and other similar costs are subtracted, the net social return becomes negative (a loss of US\$ 916.11 on average for per acre of land). Each year, contract tobacco farmers use 2046 family labor hours as opposed to 952 hours for never-tobacco farmers, limiting scope for education, entertainment and engagement in other income-generating endeavors. The rate of return on investment (ROI) per acre is only 22 percent for tobacco farmers while it is between 117 to 152 percent among former and never-tobacco farmers. The only

thing floating tobacco cultivation amid this abyss is easy access to market and buy back guarantee from company agents.

Deforestation: According to Tobacco Atlas, tobacco cultivation accounts for 31 percent of deforestation in Bangladesh.¹³ In just three upazilas of Cox's Bazar and Bandarban, as a study reveals, 85,000 tons of firewoods collected from forest hills are used each year to cure tobacco, leaving local population extremely vulnerable to flash floods and landslides.¹⁴

Threat to Food Security: Compared to rice cultivation, tobacco often requires three or four times more fertilizers and pesticides. Fertility of a land diminishes after it gets used three or four times at a stretch for tobacco cultivation, thus threatening long-term food security of the country. As a result of strategies employed by tobacco companies, tobacco is at the forefront in the scramble for the country's limited 37,674,000 acres of arable land. One acre of allotted for tobacco cultivation means one acre less for staple and cash crops. Besides, agrochemical residues in waterbodies adjacent to tobacco fields negatively impacts fish diversity. A recent report has revealed the concerning fact that agrochemicals washed away from tobacco fields in Halda basin are destroying the one and the only natural carp breeding ground in Bangladesh.¹⁵

Widespread Pollution: About 48 million Bangladeshis are exposed to passive smoking at home, with the majority being women. The numbers of exposed in workplaces and public transport are 8.1 million and 25 million respectively.¹⁶ A recent



Lack of Policy Measure: The Article 17 and 18 of WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) requires parties to protect environment from tobacco's adverse effects and encourage alternative livelihoods for tobacco farmers and workers. Moreover, the Article 12 of the 2013 Amendment requires authorities to adopt a comprehensive policy to regulate tobacco cultivation across the country. Although ten years have passed, there has been virtually no progress in this regard. It should be noted that the Ministry of Agriculture has been identified as one of the government bodies most vulnerable to tobacco industry interference.

study conducted among school children of Dhaka has found out that 95 percent of school-going children have higher nicotine in their body which is undoubtedly a result of passive smoking.¹⁷ Cigarette butts are a major source of plastic pollution in Bangladesh. Each cigarette butt takes almost a decade to degrade and releases more than 7000 toxic chemicals in the process. 71 billion sticks, each containing single-use plastics, were produced in Bangladesh in FY 2020-21 alone which found their way into environment. More than half of Bangladesh's tobacco consumers use smokeless tobacco products (i.e., gul jarda) on a regular basis which are also sold in plastic boxes and pouches.



Tobacco Industry's 'Greenwashing'

Despite being one of the worst polluters and major contributors to deforestation, tobacco companies often flaunt their pro-environment practices. With a combination of deceiving corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs and cunning public relations strategies, these companies divert attention from true impact of environmental harms and escapes culpability.

A number of CSR programs of British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) can be considered as local examples. BATB often boasts about its afforestation program called Bonayon which claims to have contributed more than 110 million saplings in the last four decades.¹⁸ This number is negligible considering the fact that around 2.9 million full-grown trees are felled each year to cure tobacco leaves. BATB also uses its CSR program to engage with influential policymakers and government agencies, paving the way for interference to safeguard its business interest. Most of BATB's CSR initiatives are concentrated on areas that bear the brunt of tobacco cultivation's adverse effects and are aimed at hiding the extent of havoc tobacco wrecks on natural resources in those areas.

Recommendations

The inclusion of tobacco control in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Target 3A) underscores how tobacco threatens the sustainable well-being of mankind as a whole. The use of tobacco causes around 161,000 deaths in Bangladesh a year.¹⁹ It has been ranked as the fourth major contributing factors behind premature deaths in the country.²⁰ The financial loss incurred per year due to tobacco use exceeds BDT 305.6 billion.²¹ Curbing the prevalence of tobacco use through effective measures can truly safeguard environment. The following steps can be considered:

- Amend existing tobacco control law to make it more compliant with FCTC and realize the HPM's vision of a tobacco-free Bangladesh by 2040.
- Hike prices of cigarettes and all other tobacco products by imposing specific excise taxes
- Adopt and implement policy to discourage tobacco cultivation. Reinstate 25 percent export duty on tobacco.
- Ease the access to market for other non-tobacco crops. Financial benefits may be handed over to contract tobacco farmers perpetually stuck in tobacco companies' debt. Coordinate efforts should be undertaken to promote alternative farming and livelihood options.
- Divest government's investment from British American Tobacco, Bangladesh as soon as possible.
- Expedite the adoption of a code of conduct in line with FCTC Article 5.3 for all government officials in dealing with the tobacco industry.

Reference

1. <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-12-2021-protect-the-environment-world-no-tobacco-day-2022-will-give-you-one-more-reason-to-quit>
2. <https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/TI-and-environment.pdf>
3. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/say-no-to-tobacco-farming>
4. <https://exposetobacco.org/news/effects-of-tobacco-on-environment/>
5. <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/188406/cigarettes-have-significant-impact-environment-just/>
6. <https://ash.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Tobacco-Environment.pdf>
7. <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/255574/9789241512497-eng.pdf>
8. <https://tobaccotactics.org/wiki/tobacco-and-the-environment/>
9. https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/20/Suppl_1/i25
10. <https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/TI-and-environment.pdf>
11. https://unfairtobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Akhter_Unfairtobacco_Bangladesh_pesticide-pollution.pdf
12. <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/17/24/9447/htm>
13. <https://bdnews24.com/environment/2016/08/14/tobacco-processing-gobbles-up-forests-in-coxs-bazar-hills>
14. https://unfairtobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Akhter_Unfairtobacco_Bangladesh_pesticide-pollution.pdf
15. <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/losing-fish-tobacco-1201144>
16. <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/2017-gats-fact-sheet-bangladesh>
17. <https://academic.oup.com/ntr/article/21/4/416/4677311?login=true>
18. <https://csrwindowblog.com/2022/05/10/how-bonayan-is-helping-fight-climate-change/>
19. <https://tobaccoatlas.org/country/bangladesh/>
20. Global Burden of Disease Study. Country profile Bangladesh 2019. Available at <http://www.healthdata.org/bangladesh>
21. The economic cost of tobacco use in Bangladesh: A health cost approach. Bangladesh Cancer Society, 2018. Available at: https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/sites/default/files/tat004_factsheet_proact_final_print.pdf



PROGGA Knowledge for Progress