

Impact of Tobacco on Environmental, Climatic and Ecological Degradation: Challenges for SDGs in LMICs

Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of death and disease in the world, killing more than eight million people around the globe every year (WHO 2022). Most of these deaths occur in the Low-and-Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) – more than 160,000 in Pakistan alone (TCC 2018).

Tobacco and its products are directly impinging upon the serenity of the environment throughout its lifecycle from cultivation to smoking. A disproportionate use of pesticides during the tobacco cultivation process makes land unusable for growing vegetables or other edibles. WHO (2022) estimates that almost 600 million trees are chopped down to produce cigarettes, around 3.5 million hectares of land are being destroyed for tobacco cultivation, 84 million tonnes of CO₂ are released into the air, and almost 2.2 billion litres of water are wasted in the cigarette manufacturing process. Without catering for excessive drought, famine, and the absence of clean drinking water, tobacco industries continue to use almost 3.7 litres of water for manufacturing one cigarette.

Relatedly, tobacco directly affects the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, i.e., Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 14 (Life Below Water), Goal 15 (Life on Land) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). This connection between tobacco waste and the resultant pollution continues to create unsustainability in multiple dimensions.

Foregoing in view, this panel discussion on the devastating impact of tobacco on the environment, climate, and ecology will contemplate and answer the following vital aspects:

1. What is the general environmental degradation caused by tobacco during its lifecycle?
2. How can tobacco usage be curtailed in terms of impact on the SDGs (especially Goal 3, 5, 6, 12, 14, 15, and 16) to meet the UN SDGs by 2030 and to build forward better?
3. What tactics are used by the Tobacco Industry to 'greenwash' its harmful practices through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and environmentally friendly activities?
4. What is the environmental impact of tobacco trash, including cigarette butts, empty packs, electronic cigarettes, and other waste?

References

TCC 2018, 'Significant Initiatives/Achievements of Tobacco Control Cell', Ministry of National Health Services Regulation and Coordination, Government of Pakistan, <<http://tcc.gov.pk/achievements.php>>.
WHO 2022, 'Tobacco Key Facts', World Health Organization, 24 May, <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>>.

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