

Rethinking Tobacco Control in Pakistan: Advancing Fiscal Policy, Environmental Accountability, and Regulation of Emerging Nicotine Products

Tobacco remains one of the leading preventable causes of death in Pakistan, imposing substantial health, economic, environmental, and social costs. As Pakistan pursues its sustainable development agenda, tobacco control must increasingly be viewed not only as a public health priority but also as a fiscal, environmental, and development imperative. Tobacco-related diseases impose billions of rupees in annual healthcare costs and productivity losses, underscoring the importance of effective fiscal and regulatory measures.

While combustible tobacco continues to impose a significant burden of disease and premature mortality, emerging challenges, including the environmental footprint of tobacco production and waste, the continued freeze on tobacco taxation, and the rapid proliferation of unregulated nicotine and tobacco products, are threatening both public health and sustainable development.

It is increasingly important to examine how tobacco contributes to deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, water depletion, greenhouse gas emissions, and the growing crisis of cigarette butt pollution, placing tobacco squarely within Pakistan's environmental and climate agenda. It will also explore the economic and health consequences of maintaining stagnant tobacco taxes amid inflation, highlighting the missed opportunities for reducing tobacco consumption, increasing domestic resource mobilization, and financing health and environmental priorities.

Equally important, the session will address the unchecked expansion of nicotine pouches, e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products, and other novel nicotine delivery devices, many of which continue to enter the market through regulatory gaps, creating new avenues for youth initiation and nicotine addiction. Bringing together policymakers, public health experts, environmental specialists, economists, researchers, tax authorities, civil society organizations, and development partners, the discussion will identify integrated, evidence-based policy solutions consistent with Pakistan's sustainable development

priorities and its commitments under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

The panel aims to generate actionable recommendations for strengthening fiscal policies, regulating emerging nicotine products, incorporating environmental accountability into tobacco control, and protecting future generations from an evolving tobacco epidemic that threatens health, the environment, and economic resilience alike. The expected outcomes include making recommendations for the 2026–27 fiscal agenda, policy options for regulating novel nicotine products, strategies for implementing WHO FCTC Articles 17–19, recommendations for integrating environmental accountability into tobacco control, and strengthened coordination among government, academia, and development partners.

Foregoing in view, this panel will delve into the following questions:

1. How can Pakistan integrate tobacco control into its broader sustainable development agenda by addressing the interconnected challenges of public health, environmental degradation, and domestic resource mobilization?
2. What are the economic, health, and environmental consequences of maintaining a freeze on tobacco taxation, and what fiscal reforms are needed to reduce tobacco affordability while strengthening public revenues?
3. What legislative, fiscal, and institutional reforms are required to hold the tobacco industry accountable for its environmental impacts while fulfilling Pakistan's commitments under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control?

Panel Organisers:

Syed Ali Wasif Naqvi, Senior Research Associate, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: wasif@sdpi.org

Dr Waseem Iftikhar Janjua, Advisor, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan

Email: waseem@sdpi.org