

## TOBACCO INDUSTRY:

Manipulating the Youth into a Lifelong Addiction

The tobacco industry causes a net loss to the global economy, annually costing USD 1.4 trillion in economic losses<sup>1</sup> and killing 8 million people; with a disproportionate impact in developing nations as over 80% of the 1 billion smokers live in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs).<sup>2</sup> Investment analysts estimate that the industry creates at least 5 times more societal costs than benefits.<sup>3</sup> Anti-fraud agencies have found evidence of tobacco companies complicity in smuggling<sup>4</sup> and bribery,<sup>5</sup> resulting in billions in lost revenue. Environmentalists have pointed out that cigarette butts are the most widely littered object in the oceans.<sup>6</sup> Human rights experts concluded that the tobacco industry must stop producing and marketing tobacco because it is “deeply harmful to human health” and irreconcilable with the human rights.<sup>7</sup>



Global Center for  
Good Governance  
in Tobacco Control



Tobacco companies hook the vulnerable youth into starting a lifelong addiction through flavors and targeted marketing.

The tobacco industry publicizes its so-called contributions to society to mask long term health and socio-economic harms while keeping children in tobacco farms, and lobbying against policies that protect children.



### I. HOOKING THE YOUTH WITH FLAVORS

The tobacco companies develop a range of flavored tobacco products, from cigarettes to emerging and novel products like heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes. Flavorings in tobacco products, such as fruit, candy, and mint mask the harsh taste of tobacco, and can make them more appealing to the youth.<sup>8</sup>

## II. TARGETING THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry views youth and young adults as its future loyal customers. Tobacco product use starts during adolescence and **about 90% of cigarette smokers first try smoking by age 18.**<sup>9</sup> All evidence points to the fact that tobacco industry's marketing activities "recruit new users during their youth".<sup>10</sup>

## III. MARKETING TO THE YOUTH

The tobacco industry's marketing activities have led young people to initiate smoking and vaping, prevent users from quitting, and increased tobacco use.<sup>11</sup> These include **playful product**<sup>12</sup> and **package design**,<sup>13</sup> **brand and corporate marketing**,<sup>14</sup> **point of sale**<sup>15,16</sup> and **events marketing** for a young crowd,<sup>17</sup> **pricing strategies** to keep products affordable to teens,<sup>18</sup> embedded marketing including **product placement** in movies targeted to kids,<sup>19</sup> **digital marketing** in platforms accessible by teens,<sup>20</sup> **sports and culture sponsorships**,<sup>21</sup> and so-called **socially responsible activities** that affect youth smoking behavior.<sup>22</sup> Tobacco advertising appeals to the youth because it reflects the aspirations of the youth such as *"independence, liberation, attractiveness, adventurousness, sophistication, glamour, athleticism, social acceptability and inclusion, sexual attractiveness, thinness, popularity, rebelliousness, and being "cool".*<sup>23</sup>

## IV. CAUSING LIFELONG ADDICTION

The tobacco industry retains as key ingredient in their products, nicotine, which is more addictive than cocaine or heroin.<sup>24</sup> Nicotine tricks the nerve cells into sending a message to release more dopamine which is passed on to give a feeling of "high". The young brain creates more receptors to handle the anticipated nicotine, which leads teens to needing more nicotine to get the same high. Because the brain continues to develop until about age 25, **the young brain can get addicted more easily than adults. Nicotine addiction leads to an increased risk of addiction to other substances.**<sup>25</sup>

## V. CAUSING PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS AND COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT

The transnational tobacco companies have invested research in manipulating the effect of nicotine on the brain.<sup>26</sup> Nicotine affects parts of the brain responsible for learning and memory and, in the adolescent brain, the effect can become permanent.<sup>27</sup> **Nicotine can also impair decision making ability in the long term and worsen anxiety,**<sup>28</sup> **irritability,**<sup>29</sup> and **impulsivity.**<sup>30</sup> Moreover, youth who smoke are at increased risk of developing mental disorders such as major depressive disorder, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety disorder, and panic disorder.<sup>31</sup>

## VI. LOBBYING AGAINST TOBACCO CONTROL POLICIES THAT PROTECT YOUTH

The tobacco industry lobbies against evidence-based life-saving tobacco control measures<sup>32</sup> such as ban on flavoring, packaging restrictions,<sup>33</sup> ban on all forms of advertising,<sup>34</sup> nicotine regulation, and increase in price through tax measures.<sup>35</sup>

Governments have committed to implement these measures which are embodied in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), however, the tobacco industry poses the single greatest barrier to these efforts.<sup>36</sup> It intends to gain a seat at the table, **pre-empt or influence regulation, or secure incentives from the government by making contributions or offering partnerships** to government offices or officials, offering weak draft legislation, seeking appointments for its officials or allies, bribing public officials, hiring former public officials, funding front groups and scientists to voice its interests and to cloud the debate.<sup>37</sup> Although the tobacco industry would purport to support legislation to restrict access to children, the interventions supported are typically ineffective ones.<sup>38</sup>

## VII. MASKING THE DAMAGE TO GAIN THE TRUST OF A YOUNG MARKET

The belief that tobacco companies are benefiting society gives it the credibility and legitimacy it needs to sell to a young market. Hence, **it uses political and corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities to rehabilitate its image** in the area of environment, human rights, science, agriculture, public health, disaster management, and development.<sup>39</sup> These activities also detract from the obligation to make the tobacco industry accountable<sup>40</sup> for all the harms caused, such as through policies and suits to recoup healthcare costs and other damages.<sup>41</sup>

## VIII. KEEPING CHILDREN IN TOBACCO FARMS

The tobacco industry casts an image of promoting sustainable tobacco farming while continuing to purchase **leaves produced using child labor**.<sup>42</sup> Child labor in tobacco thrusts children into a cycle of poverty by causing health harms and restricting access to education.<sup>43</sup> Instead of promoting a globally mandated shift towards alternative livelihood in accordance with the WHO FCTC, the tobacco industry seeks to justify tobacco growing and encourages tobacco dependence through **contract farming**.<sup>44</sup>

Across the world, governments have recognized that there is a fundamental conflict of interest between tobacco control and public health.<sup>i</sup> In 2015, the international community of nations committed to attain the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and these goals include strengthening implementation of the WHO FCTC which obliges governments to protect public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry (WHO FCTC Article 5.3).<sup>ii</sup> Pursuant to this obligation, governments and public officials must limit interaction with the tobacco industry unless strictly necessary for regulation, avoid conflicts of interest; reject partnerships and contributions from the tobacco industry; require the tobacco industry to be accountable and transparent in its operations including requiring the submission of all forms of marketing, public relations; and lobbying information; denormalize and regulate so-called “socially responsible” activities of the tobacco industry; and not give in any preferential treatment, benefits, or incentives.<sup>iii</sup> These measures are intended to empower governments to resist industry influence and lobbying against policies that protect the youth from tobacco industry’s manipulation.

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<sup>iii</sup> WHO (2008). Guidelines for implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article\\_5\\_3.pdf](https://www.who.int/fctc/guidelines/article_5_3.pdf) (accessed on 18 April 2020).

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- “shows the Business and Sustainable Development Commission's (2017) estimate that smoking is one of the largest societal economic burdens: USD 2.1 tn or 3% of global GDP, and this is only a partial estimate of smoking's negative impacts.”*
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- <sup>6</sup> Ocean Conservancy (2019). The Beach and Beyond: 2019 Report. Retrieved from <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Final-2019-ICC-Report.pdf> (accessed on 25 May 2020)
- <sup>7</sup> The Danish Institute for Human Rights (4 May 2017). Human Rights assessment in Philip Morris International. Retrieved from <https://www.humanrights.dk/news/human-rights-assessment-philip-morris-international> (accessed on 25 May 2020).
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