Tobacco Control in EC Development Policy

A Background Paper for the High Level Round Table on Tobacco Control and Development Policy, Brussels, 3-4 February 2003
1. **TOBACCO AS A DEVELOPMENT ISSUE**

**Tobacco consumption entails serious health risks.** Smoking causes lung cancer and other forms of cancer. It is also a significant risk factor behind cardio-vascular diseases as well as a number of other conditions. It is estimated that 2.4 million people die each year in developing countries from tobacco-related diseases. Whereas tobacco consumption is slowly diminishing in many industrialised countries, smoking is increasing in many developing countries – especially among women and young people. This trend is backed up by strong marketing campaigns by the global tobacco industry. Based on current trends, estimates have been made that the mortality figure in developing countries will almost have tripled by 2020. This poses a very heavy burden on developing countries, which are already struggling with the health impact of communicable diseases e.g. HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Furthermore, the health impact of smoking is not equally shared by all. In many developing countries, there is a correlation between low income and low levels of education, on the one hand, and smoking, on the other. This means that the negative health impact of tobacco consumption will be unequally shared to the detriment of the poor.

There are also a number of ways in which **tobacco production** has a negative impact on people’s health:

- In some countries, scarce land resources may be used for growing tobacco rather than for food production. Tobacco use can also, more indirectly, contribute to malnutrition when money is being spent on tobacco rather than on food;

- Tobacco growing contributes to deforestation, since wood is used for drying (“curing”) tobacco leaves;

- Tobacco farming involves a heavy use of pesticides which cause reactions and illness among farmers;

- Tobacco farmers and, in particular, their children may also react to nicotine absorbed through the skin when harvesting tobacco (“Green tobacco sickness”);

- Child labour (sometimes leading to nicotine poisoning and often involving heavy lifting) is frequent in tobacco production.

The European Commission clearly recognises the importance of tobacco control as a development issue and is contributing actively to the development of an international Framework Convention for Tobacco Control (FCTC). Although tobacco control does not figure prominently in country programming, the Commission is willing to support developing countries wishing to address tobacco control, by using existing instruments of development cooperation. At the same time, we must recognise that the list of needs is often long and that development priorities vary from country to country. Demands for support, therefore, should come from the partner country rather than being imposed from outside. When addressing this issue, special consideration should also be given to those few countries (notably Malawi and Zimbabwe) which are heavily dependent on tobacco production and export for generating foreign currency income.
The purpose of this paper is to put European support for tobacco control in developing countries into context. In Section 2, we discuss what lessons can be learnt from the EU experience in addressing tobacco control. Section 3 gives an overview of EC development cooperation in terms of resources, principles and policy priorities. Section 4, finally, presents some conclusions on how EC development cooperation can be used to address tobacco control. It concludes that although tobacco control is a rather new focus for EC development cooperation, the necessary policy priorities and instruments are already there, ready to be used.

2. LESSONS LEARNT FROM EU TOBACCO CONTROL

Tobacco consumption is one of the biggest and most intricate challenges that the European Community is currently facing. It is estimated that over 500,000 deaths per year in the European Union are related to tobacco consumption. The devastating consequences of this epidemic do not only concern human health, but also other areas, such as the social and economic sectors.

The European Commission is firmly committed to develop and implement an effective tobacco control strategy, and it has now established itself as a major player in the European and the global tobacco control field. Presently, both the Community and its 15 Member States are successfully developing effective tobacco control measures within the framework of their respective competencies.

Developing an effective tobacco control strategy requires both technical expertise and resources. Moreover, a coherent and comprehensive tobacco control strategy cannot be exclusively limited to the health area. Many other policies, both on the tobacco demand and on the tobacco supply side, have to be embedded in such a strategy from its inception. Policies with a strong potential for curbing demand for tobacco products include taxation, trade, consumer protection, education and social policies, including social security systems.

On the supply side, tough measures aimed at curbing the large-scale smuggling of tobacco products, which we see in almost all parts of the world, have a potential to reduce consumption. These measures eliminate a source for the provision of cheap cigarettes, which are known to lead especially children and adolescents into the addiction. The European Anti-fraud Office (OLAF), whose action has led to a series of spectacular seizures of illicit tobacco products, plays an important part in the global fight against smuggling.

In order to implement a tobacco control strategy that is successful at a global level, strong leadership at governmental level and an integrated approach involving all relevant policy areas and the civil society is needed. This challenging task is further complicated by the fact that, as in any other epidemic, time is a crucial factor.

Tobacco control at EU level is pursued through binding and non-binding legislation, through EU-wide information campaigns and through support for networking and smoking prevention and smoking cessation projects. Moreover, the Community actively participates in global tobacco control activities, as for example in the negotiation process for the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.
Binding legislation at European level:

- regulates the contents and the emissions of the tobacco products;
- regulates the packaging and labelling of tobacco products;
- imposes the use of health warnings on tobacco packages;
- bans direct tobacco advertising through all media that can have cross-border effects, such as printed media, television, radio and internet;
- bans the sponsorship of international events by tobacco companies.

The next major steps in Community legislation will concern the use of colour photographs to illustrate the health warnings on tobacco packages, and the regulation of the ingredients of tobacco products. Also, the Community will in the near future adapt the measurement methods used for determining the nicotine, tar and carbon monoxide yields, as well as the marking of tobacco products, to technical and scientific progress.

In areas where the Treaty does not mandate the Community to adopt binding legislation, it has developed complementary recommendations. This so called “soft-legislation” addresses a series of elements concerning smoking prevention and smoking consumption. The measures which Member States are urged to adopt include reducing the availability of tobacco products to children and adolescents, prohibiting the promotion of tobacco products, monitoring the promotional activities of the tobacco industry, as well as improving the protection of non-smokers from the effects of passive smoking.

As far as tobacco control outside pure health policy is concerned, taxation is definitively a good example. An increase of taxation on tobacco products is a proven means for reducing tobacco consumption. In the Community, legislation has been adopted in order to increase and progressively harmonise the prices of cigarettes and other forms of manufactured tobacco throughout the EU Member States. Another significant measure adopted in this area is the banning of tax- and duty-free sales of tobacco products throughout the EU.

Agricultural policy is another relevant policy area to consider in this regard. Regulation is now in place within the Community on the occupational safety of tobacco farmers, on limitations of tobacco production, and on the promotion of the reconversion of tobacco growing towards other crops. Moreover, the Commission is committed to the phasing out of the subsidies paid to tobacco growers in the EU, and first steps to reconversion are already being taken in order to address the social implications surrounding this issue. For the time being, the European Parliament and the Council are however not prepared to follow the Commission’s proposals for the phasing out of subsidies.

Raising awareness on tobacco control issues, and organising information and education activities falls mainly under Member States’ competence. Nevertheless, some important activities are also developed at EU level, like the three-year media campaign that under the slogan “feel free to say no” aims at discouraging smoking amongst young people.

Finally, any tobacco control policy can only be successful if it involves the civil society and if an organised movement against smoking is in place. Therefore, encouraging and supporting anti-tobacco NGOs and expert organisations plays an important role in the
strategy of the Community, which helps these organisations to exchange experience, establish best practice and implement a wide variety of smoking prevention and smoking cessation projects.

Obviously, the measures implemented or supported at the European level need to be complemented by tobacco control measures developed at a national level and implemented by the Member States. As a whole, the experience in the European Union demonstrates that reductions in smoking prevalence can be achieved with a comprehensive set of tobacco control policies embedded in a coherent strategy.

Regrettably, the tobacco control policies of the European Union has entailed a substantial amount of litigation brought forward by the big tobacco companies. These companies have almost systematically taken tobacco EU anti-tobacco legislation before the European Court of Justice. Recently, the Court has confirmed the validity of the main provisions of the Community’s Directive regulating tobacco products.

Understanding how tobacco companies operate is very important for succeeding in developing and implementing any tobacco control strategy. Very aggressive and at the same time sophisticated marketing tactics, often targeted at young people and women, are systematically used, both in established and in developing markets. The tobacco industry is permanently identifying and exploiting new markets for its products, and regions with growing populations, rising incomes and lacking legal, social and cultural tobacco regulation become attractive targets for these companies. Obviously, advanced tobacco regulation in certain countries or regions is an incentive for the industry to deploy their marketing power in less advanced countries. Therefore, all governments – both in countries with strong tobacco regulation and in those which are less advanced in his field – have to accept their responsibility to act at a national level, and to actively contribute to tobacco control at the global level.

The Framework Convention on Tobacco Control constitutes a perfect platform for such action at the global level. It covers all the essential areas of a comprehensive tobacco control strategy and constitutes an extremely useful tool to curb the tobacco epidemic. The Community actively participates in its preparation and looks forward to its adoption, which is foreseen in the spring of this year.

Another crucial area for tobacco control outside the EU is the design and implementation of development policies of which tobacco control is an inherent part; also in this area, the Community is firmly committed to assume a leading role.
3. EC DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: RESOURCES, PRIORITIES, AND INSTRUMENTS

3.1. EC resources and instruments for development cooperation

As discussed in the previous section, progress has been made within the EU in terms of developing efficient instruments as part of a comprehensive strategy for tobacco control. The European Community can help address tobacco control in countries outside the EU. In doing so, Europe should build on its experience and its commitment to reducing mortality and morbidity caused by tobacco consumption.

The European Community is the world’s biggest provider of Official Development Assistance (ODA). The European Community provides some 55 per cent of total international ODA and more than two thirds of grant aid. The total ODA from the European Commission and the 15 EU Member States in 2001 amounted to US$26 billion. (As a comparison, the US provided US$10.9 and Japan US$9.7 billion.) Furthermore, the contribution made by the European Community will rise in the next few years, given that the Council, before the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey (March 2002), made a commitment to ensure that by 2006 each Member State allocates at least 0.33% of their Gross National Income (GNI) to ODA and a collective EU average of at least 0.39% of GNI, while maintaining the UN goal of 0.7% ODA/GNI as a target. Realising the target of 0.39% will lead to an extra allocation of €7 billion/year from 2006 onward (to which should be added a further contribution from new EU Member States). Thus, it is clear that already in financial terms the European Community makes an important contribution to development cooperation.

The lion’s share of EC development aid is channelled through national governments in partner countries. Increasingly, support is being provided either for sector-wide programmes (for example in education or health) or through macro-economic support channelled through the state budget. In the future, these approaches will tend to replace aid to specific projects.

A key idea underpinning EC development cooperation is the principle of national ownership of policies. To ensure the involvement of key actors in each country, programming is based on a multi-annual country strategy paper drawn up with the active involvement of various political parties, NGOs, the private sector and other stakeholders. This strategy paper is also the object of policy dialogue between the government and the EC before it is finalised.

EC development cooperation is a joint effort between the Commission and the 15 EU Member States. To further raise the impact and the efficiency of Community development cooperation, the Commission and the Member States need to strengthen their policy coordination. They also need to agree on objectives, pool resources and harmonise procedures for policy implementation and disbursement of grants. In recognition of this, the Council recently made a commitment “to take concrete steps on coordination of policies and harmonisation of procedures before 2004”. This declaration is currently being followed up by a pilot initiative looking into coordination and harmonisation at country level. Coordination of policy is also being promoted through regular meetings organised by the Commission with experts from the Member
States on, for example, education, gender and health and the development of common indicators for the monitoring of progress. The Commission proposes to put tobacco control on the agenda for one of the experts’ meetings on health as a way of getting a better overview of how Member States are addressing this issue.

3.2. Policy priorities in development cooperation

In 2000, the main priorities for the development cooperation policy of the EC were defined in a Commission Communication on the European Community’s Development Policy. This document highlights poverty reduction as the overarching objective of Community development policy. Within this overall objective, the Communication proposes six priority fields for Community development cooperation activities:

1) Trade and development;
2) Regional integration and cooperation;
3) Support to macroeconomic policies with an explicit link with poverty reduction strategies, in particular sector programmes in health and education;
4) Transport;
5) Food security and sustainable rural development strategies; and
6) Institutional capacity-building, good governance and the rule of law.

In addition, three crosscutting principles are identified, namely:

1) Human rights;
2) Gender equality; and
3) Environment.

A Joint Statement by the Council and the Commission (November 2000) following the adoption of this Communication again emphasised the need for having poverty reduction and eradication as the main objective. This Statement supports a wide definition of poverty, which includes the lack of access to health. It also highlights ownership as a key factor to success in development cooperation. Furthermore, the Council approves the choice of priority fields as a framework for Community action. Finally, the joint Statement underlines:

- the need for coordination between the policies of the Community and the Member States, also at country level; and

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1 The European Community’s Development Policy (COM(2000) 212) and The European Community’s Development Policy (Statement by the Council and the Commission)
the common interest of the Union in being able to speak with one voice in international fora, wherever possible, to strengthen its influence, to raise the impact and to increase its visibility, for the benefit of partner countries.

A second important reference point for EC development cooperation policy is the “Millennium Declaration”, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000. This Declaration specifies a number of concrete “Millennium Development Goals” together with targets and indicators, most of which should be reached by 2015. Through its development cooperation policy, the EC is committed to contributing to the attainment of these Millennium Goals.

**3.3. Health as an outcome in development cooperation**

Within this broader framework, improving health outcomes in developing countries is a clear priority. In the broad definition of poverty, lack of access to health is explicitly referred to. Access to basic social services (education and health) is mentioned in the Commission Communication as a key objective linked to macro-economic policies. Finally, out of the eight Millennium Development Goals, three are specifically related to health, whereas each of the other five can be linked to health outcomes.

Since the Commission adopted its Communication in 2000, targeting improved health outcomes is increasingly being seen as a key approach for bringing about poverty reduction. The Commission has, therefore, adopted a series of documents on health outcomes and development policy that elaborates the Community policy in this field in greater detail. As far as tobacco control is concerned, the most important document is the Communication on “Health and Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries” (COM(2002) 129). Here, the Commission proposes “improving health, AIDS and population outcomes at country level, especially among the poorest” as a first objective for EC support.

The negative impact of tobacco use on the health of people in developing countries is explicitly referred to in this Communication. The increasing use of tobacco in developing counties is described as causing “lifestyle related illness”, which together with communicable diseases, (lack of) reproductive health, and nutritional deficiencies constitute the highest proportion of the disease burden of the poor. Within this overall EC strategy on health, HIV/AIDS and population, as set out in the Communication, tobacco control could be implemented as one important intervention for improving health outcomes in developing countries.
CONCLUSION – EC DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENTS TO SUPPORT TOBACCO CONTROL

Support from the European Community for tobacco control in developing countries, should be set against the background described above. There is significant experience of tobacco control within Europe. This experience should be made available to developing countries wishing to address this issue. Although the strategies that need to be developed may differ somewhat from those adopted and implemented in Europe, it is likely that the main components are similar – taxation, comprehensive bans on advertising, education and information, and smoking cessation. Also, Europe could share its experiences of how the global tobacco industry operates in its attempts to recruit new smokers and to put pressure on governments.

There is also a strong commitment shared by the European Commission and the EU Member States to work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, including poverty reduction. Furthermore, there is a broad agreement within the EU on the need to target improved health outcomes as an important contribution to poverty reduction. In this context, tobacco control can be addressed, and it has been shown that effective tobacco control instruments are not necessarily expensive.

Any initiative in this field must come from the development countries themselves, because of the fundamental importance that the EC attaches to national ownership as a basis for successful development cooperation. If a government wants to address tobacco control through its partnership with the EC, the Commission is willing to discuss how funds can be made available and channelled using existing instruments (which differ slightly depending on the various regional cooperation frameworks). Given that these instruments are in place and the relatively modest resources needed for addressing tobacco control, the Commission does not see the added value of putting in place additional instruments for funding tobacco control in developing countries.

To address tobacco control, we need a broad perspective and wide cooperation between different actors across sectors (such as the education, health, finance, agriculture and media sectors). This is typically a kind of intervention where governments will have to play a coordinating role in building partnerships between different actors. Therefore, EC support to governments is likely to be the main channel for supporting tobacco control in developing countries.

In addition, the Commission will look into opportunities for supporting increased partnerships between European NGOs and their sister organisations in developing countries, to help ensure that civil society is actively involved in tobacco control efforts. The private sector could be encouraged to play a significant role in addressing tobacco control in developing countries, not the least through promoting smoke-free work places and helping workers who want to give up smoking by providing adequate support.

To conclude, the European Commission will:

• continue to support efforts, at the global level, to reach an agreement on a Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) negotiated under the auspices of the WHO;
• inform delegations about the importance of tobacco control as a health issue, the outcomes of the Round Table on Tobacco Control and of the outcomes of the FCTC negotiations in Geneva;

• exchange experience with EU Member States on how to address tobacco control in development cooperation together with Health experts;

• address tobacco control in policy dialogue with partner countries on macro-economic support and health;

• be prepared to use instruments for development cooperation with partner countries to address tobacco control, based on a demand from the partner country;

• look into opportunities for supporting exchange of experience between European NGOs, with relevant experience in tobacco control activities, and NGOs in developing countries trying to develop similar expertise.

**Key references**


The Millennium Development Goals (UN Millennium Declaration)