Incompatible development partners - harmful product industries simply can't be in the mix

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Industries built on health harming products are constraining development, and not suitable partners © Shutterstock

It is indisputable: Tobacco is bad for health. It is the leading risk factor for numerous cancers, heart disease and lung disease, harmful to the health of the user and the people around the user. It is also a retardant for development, and its growth, manufacture and use has implications across the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). So when, in October 2016, an Indonesian tobacco company, PT Djarum, exploited an SDG event of the Indonesia Philanthropy Festival, (IPFEST) **[1] for a sponsorship opportunity, alarm bells went off. Mary Assunta of the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA) explains why the tobacco industry has no place in development.**

When the tobacco company PT Djarum flagerantly promoted their sponsorship of IPFEST with banner advertisements along the streets of Jakarta, Indonesia, promoting its corporate social responsibility programme (CSR) we saw red.

• *Photo: Dinas Pajak Provinsi DKI Jakarta, 6 October 2016*

• *Photo: Dinas Pajak Provinsi DKI Jakarta, 7 October 2016*

Tobacco and Development: Incompatible

SDG number 3 is to *"Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,"* and targets to reduce premature death from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) by a third by 2030. The fact that a tobacco company's core business contradicts the achievement of the SDGs seems to escape organisers of SDGs related events and activities, as in this case at IPFEST.

There are about 65 million smokers in Indonesia with two thirds of Indonesian males (68%) above the age of 15 years smoking [1]. Tobacco use kills about 240,000 people in Indonesia every year. Tobacco companies are aggressive in their advertising and marketing tactics to increase sales. This undermines Indonesia efforts to realise the achievement of the SDGs. The contradiction was clear and infuriating.

Indonesian health advocates responded swiftly to oppose this offensive advertising. The Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiative (CISDI) expressed their opposition to the IPFEST **[2]** for allowing a tobacco company to participate in their event as it sends the wrong message about health and the goal of development, including to the young people involved in the event. According to CISDI [2], cigarettes are a product that have no benefit and should not be associated with philanthropy. **Within 24 hours the advertisements were removed.**

International standards on CSR activities

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control [3] (FCTC) Guidelines on Articles 5.3 and 13 **recommend governments ban CSR activities by tobacco companies**. Although Indonesia is not a Party to the FCTC, the need to ban such tobacco CSR activities is relevant to 180 countries. PT Djarum exploited Indonesia's non-party position.

The International Organization of Standards' ISO 26000 [4] sets out clear criteria and guidelines for what qualifies as CSR activities. Tobacco industry related CSR activities fail every single one of the seven principles [5] and core subjects of the ISO's social responsibility guidelines. The seven principles of ISO 26000 on social responsibility are:

- Accountability,
- Transparency,
- Ethical behaviour,
- Respect for stakeholders' interests,
- Respect for rule of law,
- Respect for international norms of behaviour, and
- Respect for human rights.

One of the core subjects in the ISO 26000 is the 'Protection of consumers' health and safety' involving the provision of products and services that are safe and that do not carry unacceptable risk of harm when used or consumed. The protection should cover both the intended use and foreseeable misuse. It is self-explanatory why the tobacco industry would fail this criteria miserably.

However *it appears philanthropic organisations are unaware of the existence of the ISO 26000 guidelines* and miss out on how it may help them [6] in identifying who qualifies to conduct CSR activities.

> *This Indonesian tobacco inustry CSR fiasco has emphasised the need to review partnerships with the private sector in SDG implementation.*

Apply due diligence to private sector partnerships to avoid conflicts of interest

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a key SDG partner and a partner to the IPFEST, were alerted to the SDGs being exploited by a tobacco company. UNDP's policy document on partnerships from 2013, "Due Diligence Policy on Work with the Private Sector" *[7]* - sets out guidelines for the selection of partners with which to engage - under carefully determined criteria, the tobacco industry is excluded from engagement.

Does this mean other industries are acceptable partners? This Indonesian fiasco has emphasised the need to review partnerships with the private sector in SDG implementation. Besides tobacco, the UNDP has listed other

industries in its exclusion and 'high risk' lists, namely alcohol (spirits), pesticides/ herbicides and asbestos among others. The UNDP also lists other sectors such as oil and gas, timber and mining that should be treated with particular caution and therefore require a higher degree of due diligence.

Some would say this leads to a “slippery slope” of exclusions. Not necessarily. Main principles need to be set out, starting with conflict of interest.

In implementing the SDGs, governments need to review private-public partnership and identify any conflict of interest. This is not a new discussion. Consumer and environmental protection groups have a wealth experience and information on this issue and should be involved in the discussion. Lessons from a 1979 publication, *Hucksters in the Classroom* [2] which exposed how the food and beverage industry promoted their products to schools, is still as relevant today as it was then.

Partnership principles must be aligned across sectors to optimise all development objectives

> *Building on the work of the UNDP, all organisations involved in implementing the SDGs need to a have clear set of criteria for their partners, and reject those with a conflict of interest. We can't afford to blindly allow the foxes into the hen houses if the world is actually going to make progress on all SDGs.*

UN Agencies, and development partners, must lay out clear principles as to which industries are eligible for partnerships to implement the SDGs.

> ***As long as the core business of a company is undermining health and sustainable human development objectives, they should not be an SDG implementation partner.***

About the Author:

Mary Assunta is an international tobacco control advocate with more than 20 years of experience. She is Senior Policy Advisor to the Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance (SEATCA, @SEATCA_Org [8]). Mary obtained her PhD at the School of Public Health, University of Sydney and her research reviewed internal tobacco industry documents. She now serves as an adjunct senior lecturer at their School of Public Health. SEATCA is a regional network that works closely with governments, non-government organizations (NGOs), development agencies, and the academe to advance tobacco control in the ASEAN region.

Further references

[1] Ministry of Health. *Basic Health Research 2013;* Republic of Indonesia

[2] Sheila Harty. *Hucksters in the Classroom*. A Review of Industry Propaganda in Schools. Center for Study of Responsive Law. Washington, D.C., 1979

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Related Resource: Tobacco: A Barrier to Development [9]
Related Link: Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance [10]
UNDP: Due Diligence Policy on Work with the Private Sector [11]



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[8] http://twitter.com/SEATCA_Org
[9] https://ncdalliance.org/resources/tobacco-a-barrier-to-development-0
[10] http://seatca.org/

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[12] https://ncdalliance.org/taxonomy/term/37