



## VISION FOR ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT (VALD)

### MAINSTREAMING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS SDGS (Target 3a and 3.5) INTO GHANA'S MEDIUM TERM DEVELOPMENT PLAN (MTDP)

#### An opportunity to safeguard Ghana's future: Ensuring tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy commodities are included Next Medium Term Development Plan

The Vision for Alternative Development (VALD) and the Ghana Tax Advocacy Network for Health Promotion commends the valiant efforts and commitment the government of Ghana has made to control the use of tobacco and other unhealthy commodities. For example, it was the first country in the annals of world history to have ban tobacco advertising as early as 1982. It is also reported that policy interventions to control the harmful use of tobacco was noted as early as 1993 with the establishment of the Ghana Committee on Tobacco Control. Furthermore, Ghana is a Party to the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) when it signed and ratified the convention in 2003 and 2004 respectively. To domesticate the WHO FCTC, Ghana passed the Public Health Act which included the Tobacco Control Measures in 2012, and adopted the Tobacco Control Regulations (LI. 2247) in 2015. The passage of the Public Health Act 2012 (ACT 851) was a major singular policy action which made significant provision on tobacco control.

According to the World Bank, “**the largest increase in deaths worldwide due to NCDs in the next decade should take place in Africa, where NCDs shall become the leading cause of death in 2030.**”

#### **Justification for the mainstream of tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy commodities**

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable diseases and premature deaths in the world. The rapid increase in the consumption of tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy products are not only hazardous to the well-being of its consumers and non-consumers but also puts a heavy financial burden on the economic health of Ghana. The Covid-19 pandemic has created greater awareness of the importance of clean air and healthy living. Since prolonged tobacco smoking and alcohol intake is considered a leading risk factor for several underlying medical conditions that increase the chances of developing severe illness from Covid-19, it has become urgent for governments to fully implement effective control measures developed by the WHO FCTC.

The Third International Conference on Financing for Development 2015, noted the enormous burden non-communicable diseases (NCDs) place on developed and developing countries; as part of a comprehensive strategy of prevention and control, price and tax measures on tobacco (alcohol) was identified as the most effective means to reduce consumption of these unhealthy products and healthcare costs and present a revenue stream for financing development in countries.

According to the Tobacco Atlas, more than 5,000 Ghanaians die from tobacco-related diseases and the economic cost amounts to some ₵97million Ghana Cedis. The government can save 22,000 lives by 2025 by implementing all of the WHO “Best Buys”. The Ghana 2017 Global Youth Tobacco survey in Junior high schools revealed that 8.9% of students, 8.9% of boys, and 8.2% of girls currently use tobacco products. 7.0% of boys and 5.3% of girls currently smoke tobacco while 0.4% of boys and 1.7% of girls smoke shisha.

A recent observational study conducted by Vision for Alternative Development (VALD) proved that tobacco and alcohol are very cheap products in Ghana and this has led to a rise in consumption. A stick of cigarette costs only 20pesewas (pack of 10sticks cost 1.50cedis (0.30cents)) and a sachet of alcohol costs as low as one cedis (0.20cents). Factually, the low cost of these products targets vulnerable youth and the poor, yet when the poor and the vulnerable contract NCDs such as cancers, stroke, diabetes, and other chronic diseases, the cost of treatment is not comprehensively covered by the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Pitifully, poor people spend 10 – 15 % of their household income on tobacco products thereby shifting their household expenditure from basic needs like food, education, and shelter to these unhealthy products. Sadly, this imposes financial hardship, worsens their poverty level, and further widens the poverty gap.

Goal 3 of the SDGs aims at “*ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages*”. This goal further reaffirms the need for countries to tackle NCDs and to accelerate the implementation of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC).

SDGs Goal 3. Target 3.a: *Strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate*

SDGs Goal 3. Target 3.4: *“by 2030, reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being<sup>i</sup>.” This target is further emphasized by recommending that countries need to “strengthen the implementation of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries, as appropriate”.*

SDGs Goal 3. Target 3.5 states *“Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol”*

Ghana is at a critical crossroad, and this opportunity to invest in the next generation cannot be made to slip away. Future generations will commend you for taking a strong stand to prioritize the accelerated implementation of the WHO/FCTC in the process of mainstreaming the SDGs into Ghana's Medium Term Development Plan, and ensuring that the next generations of Ghanaians are not burdened with the health, economic, and social harms of tobacco and alcohol.

According to experts, increasing tobacco taxes is an efficient and cost-effective way of reducing tobacco use and effective domestic revenue streams to fund development initiatives.

Including the accelerated implementation of the FCTC within the framework of localizing the SDGs will enable Ghana to fulfill its FCTC obligations and thus help Ghana to prevent a health disaster linked to consuming unhealthy commodities such as tobacco and alcohol use and other unhealthy diets.

The Health Sector Medium Term Development Plan 2018-2021 recognizes the need for implementation of the International Health Regulations with specific reference to the WHO-FCTC.

In conclusion, it is imperative to recognize and acknowledge the fact that the health of a nation is cardinal to its development; health is wealth. Many countries are taking measures to improve the health and wellbeing of its people via the adoption and implementation of policies on tobacco, alcohol, and other unhealthy products such as Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and trans-fatty products. These measures include increasing taxes to reduce and discourage its use, reducing accessibility and exposure especially among children, the youth, the poor, and the vulnerable group. The government through the Ministry of Finance should increase the tax on these unhealthy products to raise additional revenue to support government health expenditure, and achieve the Universal Health Coverage by 2030 and the SDGs as a whole.

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