

SDGs and cross-cutting risk factors

Preventing and reducing harm caused by alcohol and other drugs

1 September 2019



A thriving present was given to the humanity and the planet on 25th of September 2015. We all have received Sustainable Development Goals colorfully wrapped and creatively presented. The long period of negotiations about the SDGs has been concluded with an impressive show on the night of September 25th. The goals were projected on the UN HQ building; there were concerts and other public events to raise awareness about the new vision the world leaders have for all of us. And the awareness raising efforts continue.

Four years later and the Master Plan for dignified co-existence of all has not landed yet. Our leaders are still finding ways to work with the concept of SDGs and how to make them priority guiding their decisions.

The SDGs have given us a vision and hope for a better and healthier world, for the world where we work together. However, the achievement of them requires a transformational shift. A shift in our approach, in our thinking and in our actions.

The novelty of the goals is clearly reflected in the reality of their state of art. We still have not warmed up to the Goals. The global community is lagging behind in reaching the targets. After one quarter of the time we have to achieve the goals has passed, we have all become experts on communicating that the goals are in place.

Addiction is so pervasive worldwide that it puts a heavy burden on all societies and communities within them, especially those who are already marginalized and vulnerable.

IFFD co-organized last year an event with IOGT International, to understand better how mental ill-health and substance abuse impact sustainable development, to outline the work of the UN system in response to this health and development priority, to share inspiring stories from affected communities and their work for transformative change, to present concrete best practices to address the problems locally, and to discuss ways forward exploring synergies and effective ways to tackle the problem and contribute to sustainable development.

Some orientations about this topic in reaching the SDGs are suggested in this paper, as a complement to it.

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But there are huge gaps in actions leading to their achievement.

The Sustainable Development Goals are a perfect puzzle where every piece matter and that is why it is important to make a thorough analysis and find common denominators – cross cutting (risk) factors - that need to be addressed if we really want to start moving forward. The Synthesis report on Key Findings on Families, Family Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals coordinated by IFFD is a perfect example of such an approach.

IOGT International has prepared a similar analysis through the lens of alcohol harm which of a shortened version I would like to present on the following pages.

Due to alcohol abuse or alcohol caused disorders, alcohol harm is one of very concrete examples of common denominators hindering the achievement of the SDGs. Alcohol is a major obstacle to sustainable human development, adversely affecting all three dimensions of sustainable development – social, environmental and economical. Alcohol kills 3.3 million people worldwide every year. It means: Every 10 seconds a human being dies because of alcohol. This represents 5.9 % of all deaths. Globally, alcohol is the 5th leading risk factor for premature death and disability; among people between the ages of 15 and 49, it is the number one risk factor for death.

Through its multiple public health, social and economic impacts, alcohol is a massive obstacle to achieving 13 out of 17 SDGs, and a total of 52 targets.

Alcohol is an obstacle to development by jeopardizing human capital and hindering sustainable human development. If we do not start making effective and evidence-based alcohol policy measures the priority they should be we will not change the current trend of being further and further away from reaching the goals. And yet, alcohol policy is often an overseen area while its consideration and implementation would in a long term bring tremendous social and economical benefits.

In Agenda 2030, the governments state the following:

“We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

“We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

“We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

“We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

“We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people”.

If we divide this commitment into parts, we can look at the adverse effects of alcohol on each and every pledge by our governments.

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Poverty and hunger

Alcohol can push people into poverty and lock them, their families and entire communities there over generations. The direct costs of alcohol harm to the household are often considerable and frequently underestimated – and put a big burden on development. A study in Sri Lanka found that over 10% of male respondents reported spending as much as or more than their regular income on alcohol [1]. In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), alcohol tends to crowd out other more productive household spending, such as spending on education, health care and healthy food. Desperately needed resources are being taken away from the little available for food and other basics.

Health

Alcohol use during pregnancy is associated with increased morbidity and mortality in infants and children [2]. Alcohol is widely established as a structural driver of both the tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS epidemics. Alcohol is one of four major risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, lung diseases and diabetes.

There is a causal relationship between alcohol use and a range of mental and behavioral disorders as well. In Latin America: alcohol has become the leading cause of male death and disability threatening further progress and sustainable development [3].

Violence

There is a strong relationship between alcohol and domestic abuse, intimate partner violence and sexual assault. For example, in Australia alcohol contributes to 50% of all partner violence, and to 73% of physical assaults by a partner [4].

Bottles over books

While we often choose to see alcohol use as a responsibility of each and every adult, we cannot forget the impact of the harm caused by alcohol on children.

- In many deprived and vulnerable communities, children bear a disproportionate burden. Alcohol does play a tremendous role.
- Parental roles are neglected and too often abandoned;
- Wages are wasted on alcohol, the household economy is ruined, jobs are lost;

Resulting health issues even exacerbate the dire situation.

All that means scarce resources cannot be invested in children's primary education and school material, depriving children of their right to primary education [5] and to the healthy environment where they can fulfill their potential in dignity and equality. Moreover early alcohol abuse that often occurs in families with increased alcohol use is a well-documented risk factor for young people leaving school early and without qualifications [6].

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Sustainable production

In 2011, 768 million people remained without access to an improved source of drinking water. Alcohol production is a threat to water security in many regions of the world. For example, to get one liter of wine, 870 liters of water are needed, while for one liter of beer, 298 liters of water have to be used [7] [8].

Levels of alcohol harm, alcohol's harm to others and the economic and social costs of alcohol make consumption levels unsustainable.

Urgent action on climate change

Additionally, the negative impact on water security and food waste and even the energy-consuming production processes are causing externalities that are unsustainable. Other aspect of the alcohol industry contributing to global warming are greenhouse gas emissions, high energy use, pollution and use of natural resources are: refrigeration in the hospitality sector, use of fertilizers, water use, packaging, waste, transport of raw material and distribution of the products [9].

Prosperous life

The economic burden of alcohol worldwide is substantial, accounting for up to 5.44% of Growth Domestic Product (GDP) in some countries [10].

Combined tangible and intangible costs of alcohol harm to the economy reached nearly 10 -12% of GDP in South Africa [11].

Globally, alcohol is the world's number one risk factor for ill health and premature death amongst the 25 to 59 year-olds, the core of the working age population when people are typically at their most productive economically [12].

Alcohol use disorders likely result in billions of dollars of lost wages each year [13].

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Free from fear and violence

Alcohol violence impacts physical, mental and sexual health. It considerably burdens the public health system and other public sectors, making it a major sustainable development issue. Alcohol use can have a range of negative consequences on people other than the alcohol consumer, for example physical violence, road traffic accidents, relationship problems, financial difficulties, feeling scared in public places, or reporting negative impacts on children due to parents' alcohol use. Only the EU, there are 9 million children (underestimated) growing up with parents who suffer alcohol use disorder.

Children, adolescents and youth bear a disproportionate burden of alcohol's harm to others: they suffer alcohol violence perpetrated by adults, often parents. In the United States, more than 10% of children live with a parent with alcohol problems [14].

In the USA 13% of child abusers are under the influence of alcohol [15]. In Europe 16% of all cases of child abuse and neglect are alcohol-related [16].

We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

The harm caused by alcohol is horrific and has an adverse impact on individuals, families and societies. There are established and evidence based effective

SAFER

Strengthen restrictions on alcohol availability

Advance & enforce drink driving counter-measures

Facilitate access to screening, brief interventions & treatment

Enforce bans/ comprehensive restrictions on alcohol advertising, sponsorship & promotion

Raise prices on alcohol through excise taxes & pricing policies

WHO-led initiative and action package aim to support global target of reducing harmful use of alcohol by 10% by 2025. On September 2019, at the High-Level Meeting on NCDs, The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a groundbreaking new initiative and technical package called SAFER – outlining five high-impact strategies that can help governments prevent and reduce alcohol harm and related health, social and economic consequences. Multiple partners, from governments to civil society organizations, have lent their support to the new SAFER initiative. IOGT International has played a key role in lending support to the development of the new technical package and initiative, SAFER.

measures effectively reducing the harm but the implementation of the measures is insufficient.

The countries are determined to mobilize means that are required to implement the Agenda and one of the most effective alcohol policy measures, which is alcohol taxation, not only contributes to reduce the burden alcohol harm imposes on Sustainable Development but it actually generates means that could be used for the implementation of the Agenda 2030.

Agenda 2030 opens an array of comprehensive solutions to present problems that need a

holistic approach used on all levels. Through our work we see how addressing alcohol problems in communities leads to decreased violence, higher level of overall engagement in the society, better productivity at work and community resilience.

We have received a wonderful present and now we all together need to write a manual on how to use it. Reducing alcohol related harm is IOGT International's contribution to the guide leading us towards the common goal – sustainable social, economic and environmental development.

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