

Governments should fight air pollution from fossil fuels like they fight tobacco: new report

Langue Anglais



September 19, 2019 (Geneva) – A new report launched today has challenged decision-makers, policy-makers and political leaders to tackle fossil fuel production and consumption as a health control issue, in the same way that smoking has been reduced and regulated.

The report, [*Burning Problems. Inspiring Solutions: Sharing Lessons on Action Against Tobacco and Fossil Fuels*](#) [1], co-authored by the International Institute for Sustainable Development ([IISD](#) [2]) and the Noncommunicable Diseases Alliance (NCD Alliance), was released today on the sidelines of the United Nations (UN) Climate Summit and [UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage](#) [3] taking place this week in New York.

Fossil fuel combustion is a major source of toxic air pollution that kills 7 million people every year, almost the same as the number of deaths caused by tobacco smoking. **Burning fossil fuels releases a series of gases and tiny particles that have noxious effects for human health**, leading to several respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and cancer. In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) recognized air pollution as a major health risk factor, alongside tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diets and physical inactivity.

“Public information about the hazardous health effects of air pollution from fossil fuels is very limited and normally not high on public health agendas,” said **Lourdes Sanchez**, a Policy Advisor at IISD Global Subsidies Initiative and a co-author of the report.

“The Paris Agreement on climate change does not even mention fossil fuels: instead, it focuses on greenhouse emissions without naming their root causes. There is an urgent need to step up the pace. Perhaps it is time to come at the issue from more of a public health perspective, just as we have done in the fight against smoking.”

Through international forums such as the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#) [4] and domestic policies, **many countries are already taking steps to reduce the noxious effects of producing and using fossil fuels**, but progress is slow and predominantly led by environmental concerns.

Tobacco control on the other hand has been governed internationally by the only universal framework convention on health, the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control ([WHO FCTC](#) [5]). The WHO FCTC has led to significant successes in both developed and developing countries and, importantly, proscribes a set of rules that signatory governments adhere to.

The battle against tobacco smoking is far from over, but anti-tobacco campaigns, smoke-free zones or additional taxes on tobacco products are now common and have, for many people, become accepted parts of our daily lives.

"Mindsets have changed when it comes to smoking and its social acceptability - how many of us can imagine going back to the days of smoky restaurants and offices?" said **Nina Renshaw**, Policy and Advocacy Director at the NCD Alliance and a co-author of the report.

"So why not draw lessons from the action against tobacco smoking to regulate fossil fuels? Can we imagine a time in the near future when it becomes commonplace to complain to a driver of a parked car who has left their engine running in the same normalized way we would react to someone smoking at a neighbouring table in a designated non-smoking area of a restaurant?

"Can we similarly arrive at the point someday where warning slogans such as '*burning fossil fuels kills*' become as commonplace at gas stations or on electricity bills as health warnings found on cigarette packets all over the world?"

The report makes a **series of recommendations**, including:

- Naming and addressing fossil fuels as the root cause of the issue, just as was done with tobacco. This also involves raising awareness among the population of the negative health effects, both locally and globally, of the combustion of fossil fuels, beyond the environmental ones.
- Regulating and implementing government measures to curb the production and use of fossil fuels through the many instruments available, such as getting market prices right through subsidy reform, taxation measures and the introduction of regulations banning the specific production and consumption of certain products.
- Defining adequate, fair and just transition plans away from unhealthy commodities, recognizing the needs of those groups depending on oil, gas and coal, whether they be consumers or employees.

Click the infographic below to enlarge

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Further Information:

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[About the IISD Global Subsidies Initiative](#) [2]

The IISD Global Subsidies Initiative (GSI) supports international processes, national governments and civil society organizations to align subsidies with sustainable development. GSI does this by promoting transparency on the nature and size of subsidies; evaluating the economic, social and environmental impacts of subsidies; and, where necessary, advising on how inefficient and wasteful subsidies can best be reformed. GSI is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and works with partners located around the world. Its principal funders have included the governments of Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, as well as the KR Foundation.

About the [NCD Alliance](#) [9]

The NCD Alliance (NCDA) is a unique civil society network, dedicated to improving NCD prevention and control worldwide. Today, our network includes NCDA members, national and regional NCD alliances, over 1,000 member associations of our founding federations, scientific and professional associations and academic and research institutions. Together with strategic partners, including the World Health Organization, United Nations and governments, NCDA is uniquely positioned to transform the global fight against NCDs through its core functions of global advocacy, accountability, capacity development and knowledge exchange

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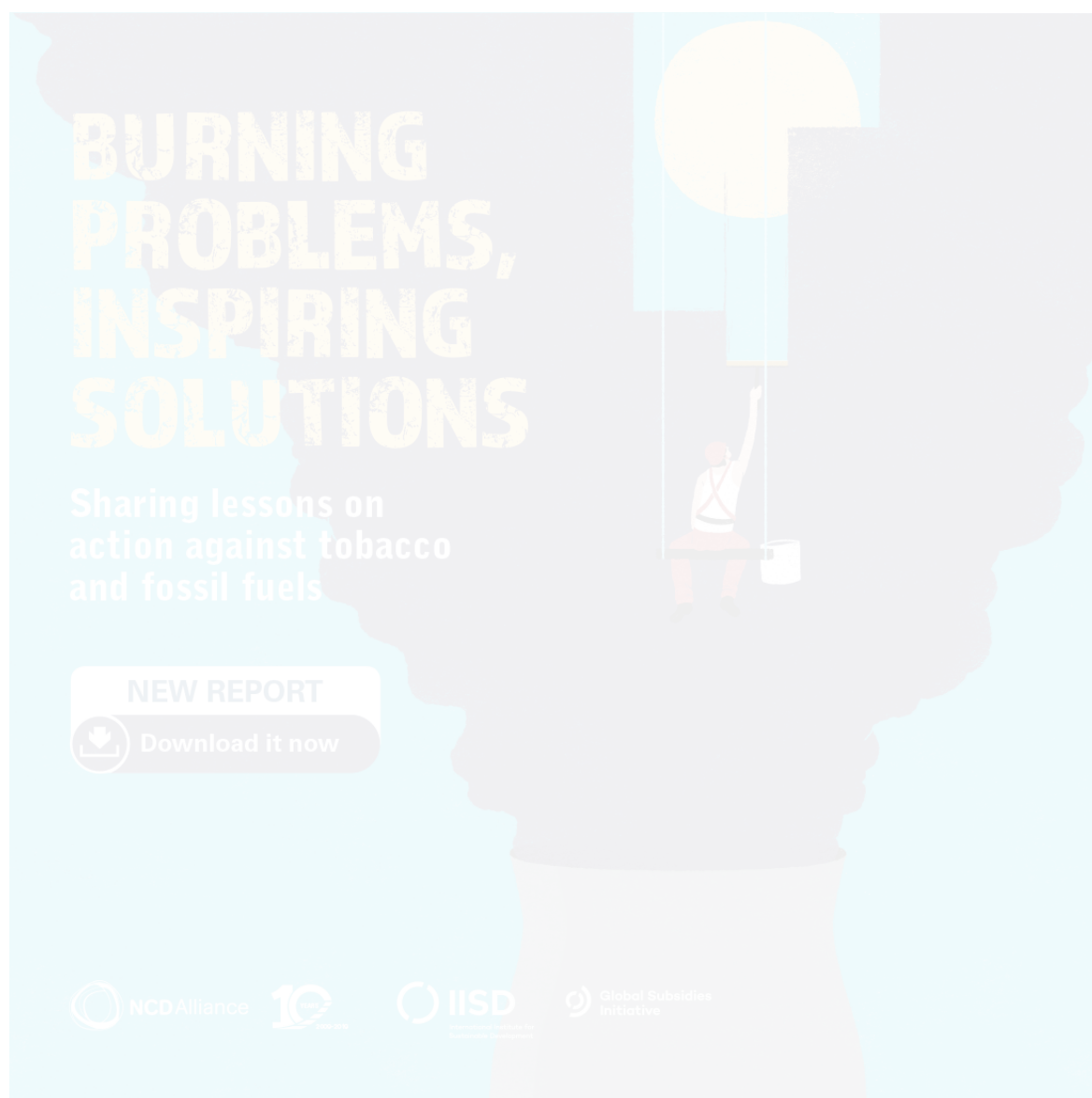
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