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## Grow Food, Not Tobacco

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2023 is the year aimed to grow food, not tobacco, as a global campaign launched for awareness on WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY, a good initiative by WHO to think of better alternative crops and address the food crisis. It is appreciated and celebrated at countless scientific forums but awaits some practical implications of the thoughtful idea in low-income countries, which are the gross affectees of the tobacco epidemic. The International days there are recognized, but the objectives must catch up.

From Plant to product to puff, tobacco has taken millions of lives, more than car crashes, murders, suicides, AIDS, and Alcohol combined in Southeast Asia, including Pakistan. Thousands die, and millions are affected by tobacco-related products every year. In Pakistan, around 15 million of its adult population smoke cigarettes, while WHO anticipates the number to exceed one billion across the globe in 2025.

Talking of the devil in detail, while we were on the table to get rid of conventional tobacco and its health hazards, heat-not-burn terminology caught us bad, and now we have an explosion of another generation of tobacco-to-profit corporations. It is safer to say this tobacco epidemic is caused by the industry and not smokers. The heated tobacco products that deliver nicotine but limit emissions of tar or carbon monoxide is a half-century-old idea, successfully marketed and yielded fertility to corporations.<sup>1</sup>

Heated tobacco products represent a novel category of tobacco products in which a tobacco consumable is heated to a temperature that releases nicotine from the tobacco leaf but not to a temperature sufficient to cause combustion and hence can be smoke-less but not nicotine-free at all. Several different HTP designs are currently available on the market, including Electrically heated tobacco products (eHTP), Carbon-heated tobacco products (cHTP), and Aerosol-heated tobacco products (aHTP).<sup>2</sup>

The HTPs are developed by the tobacco industry and marketed as harmless alternatives to smoking and even, at times, as aids to smoking cessation. These claims have always stemmed from the roots of the concept of different emission composition: aerosol generation. There is a lack of data that could be commercially interest-free, but few independent studies have remarked that exposure to nicotine

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from HTPs is higher than tobacco abstinence, even if considered lesser than conventional tobacco.<sup>3</sup> Further, increased puffing or increased use to compensate for lower nicotine delivery and craving satisfaction is subsequently increased exposure to harmful substances and has been reported in e-cigarette users and, most prominently, in smokers of "light" cigarettes. Thus, nicotine delivery and craving satisfaction, either towards cigarettes or the products to which the consumers have switched, need to be studied independently.

Prevalence of tobacco use is seen in low- and middle-income countries, but these tobacco users have switched to alternatives falling under the framework of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) and HTPs. ENDS are non-

combustible tobacco products typically rechargeable

through USB ports; if anything, this generation is fond of technology.

The last two decades have caused the emergence of several HTPs and ENDS from marketing, but the regulation is variable worldwide and often needs to be revised

Over the years, the controls have tried to control, but we have to move ahead of putting a little more taxes on tobacco every June of the year, disclosure the contents on packs, and restricting advertisements ahead of all these cotton candy and gummy bear moves towards the practical implications. We have to save the youth from the exploding vaping.

Our goal, of course, should be centered on growing food and not tobacco, but not at the cost of vaping. Over the



last few decades, South Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have tried to work effectively to address tobacco control. However, with the looming threat of ENDS, HTPs, and Smokeless tobacco uptake, said countries ought to apply proven tobacco control tools that work for citizens' holistic health, addressing all levels among different age groups.<sup>4</sup> While the neighboring country is on the road to controlling SLT and ENDS, December last year had a news headline for us: 'After the world, Pakistan regulates alternative tobacco products. 'Legislation in Pakistan has been made, and a proper legal framework has been processed for the responsible information and sale of these products to ensure their so-called benefits to public health.<sup>5,6</sup>

We have to stop underestimating the value of FDA-approved smoking cessation aids. Instead, ensure they are as readily available as the VELO for a single dollar over the counter. We have to subsidize the costly smoking cessation-approved aids and promote them to save the future. The quitters can be winners with the FDA-approved smoking cessation aids and nothing short of these, be it the heated-not-combusted bubble. The art lies in prioritizing beans over tobacco and varenicline over velo. For the goal to be checked as completed, we need to replace at least some of Pakistan's 47332-hectare tobacco cultivation land, which would proudly enable us to say we grew more food than tobacco.

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