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Economic, Ecological and Environmental Effects of Tobacco Use

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The argument that is most frequently offered by the tobacco industry and its apologists to oppose tobacco control is that the tobacco trade offers bountiful revenue to the government and provides several other economic ‘benefits’ to the society. The countervailing costs of health care for tobacco-related disorders and the loss in productivity due to early deaths caused by tobacco are not considered in such partisan projections. Even in the wider arena of public debate, these costs are most often not quantified adequately to be properly contrasted with the revenue generated by tobacco. The environmental effects of tobacco seldom gain mention when the harm done by tobacco is discussed in policy documents. Even in the public mind, it is only second-hand smoke that has come to be recognized as an environmental hazard in recent years. The environmental impact of tobacco agriculture and manufacture is less well known, despite the large extent of deforestation that results from the use of wood fuel for curing and clearance of forest land for tobacco cultivation. Likewise, the large-scale use of hazardous pesticides goes mostly unnoticed.

This chapter provides an overview of the social costs of tobacco arising from the health effects of tobacco and also profiles the adverse environmental effects of tobacco, especially as relevant to

the Indian context. The methodologies used for evaluating the economic costs of tobacco use are critically appraised and estimates are provided of the costs arising from the major tobacco-related diseases—cancer, coronary artery disease (coronary heart disease) and chronic obstructive lung disease (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease).

The chapter also describes the major environmental effects of tobacco, which include deforestation, soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, pollution by pesticides and excess use of fertilizers. The social costs of tobacco cultivation are also noted, especially with respect to the effects on children and women.