

# Comparing the Tobacco Industry's Corporate Social Responsibility Activities in Brazil and some other countries

## Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are measures and values adopted by companies to promote their image.<sup>1</sup> According to numerous studies, the CSR actions developed by the tobacco industry (TI) end up being characterized more by its interference with public health than its commitment to society<sup>2-5</sup>

The reason is simple: the tobacco industry aims at a profit, its marketing aims at the most vulnerable populations, such as women and young people, and the tobacco production cycle takes advantage of child labor and harms the environment. Tobacco products lead to illness and death.<sup>6</sup> These facts create a fundamental and irreconcilable conflict between the impacts of tobacco on the planet and social or environmental protection actions developed by the industry that produces them.<sup>7</sup>

To better contextualize this problem globally, CETAB compared TI's CSR strategies in Brazil and some other countries on significant themes. These themes are sustainability and the 2030 Agenda, including TI's strategies to promote electronic smoking devices (ENDS), and child labor. We analyzed illicit trade separately, as it compromises the achievement of all sustainable development goals (SDGs).



## 1. Sustainability and the 2030 Agenda: TI's CSR strategies in the 17 SDGs, including the promotion of electronic smoking devices and child labor

The United Nations (UN) SDGs listed in the 2030 Agenda are "a blueprint for dignity, peace, and prosperity for people and the planet" and seek to guarantee human rights for all, achieve gender equality, and empower women and girls.<sup>8</sup>

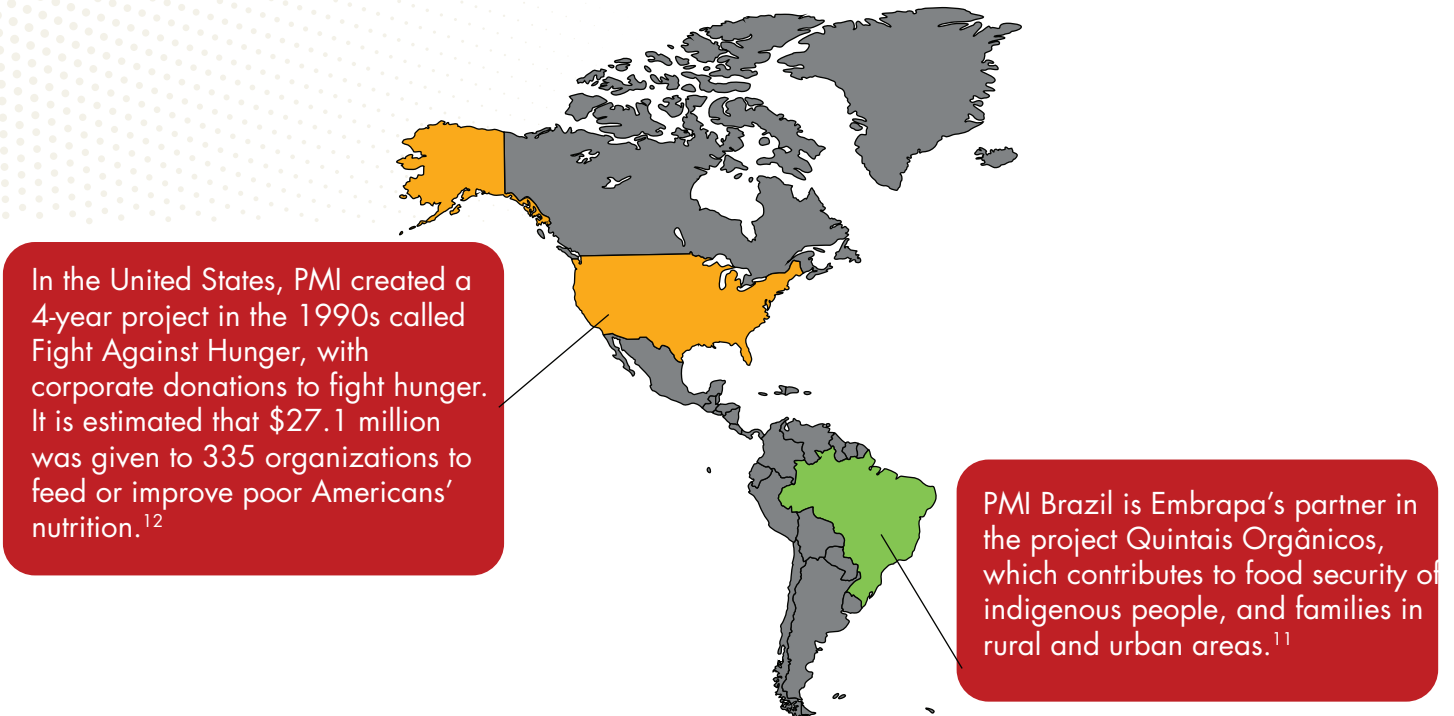
TI has tried to partner with the 2030 Agenda by carrying out its projects, funding groups that defend their interests, or collaborating with organizations that have credibility in implementing the 2030 Agenda.<sup>5</sup> It has been using the acronym ESG (environmental, social, and governance) as an indicator of its actions. British American Tobacco (BAT), for example, reached the "gold standard" in an ESG index and received the Financial Times award for being a "climate leader."<sup>9</sup>

In response, the United Nations has developed a model policy to protect tobacco control from TI's interests throughout the UN System.<sup>10</sup>



## SDGs 1 & 2

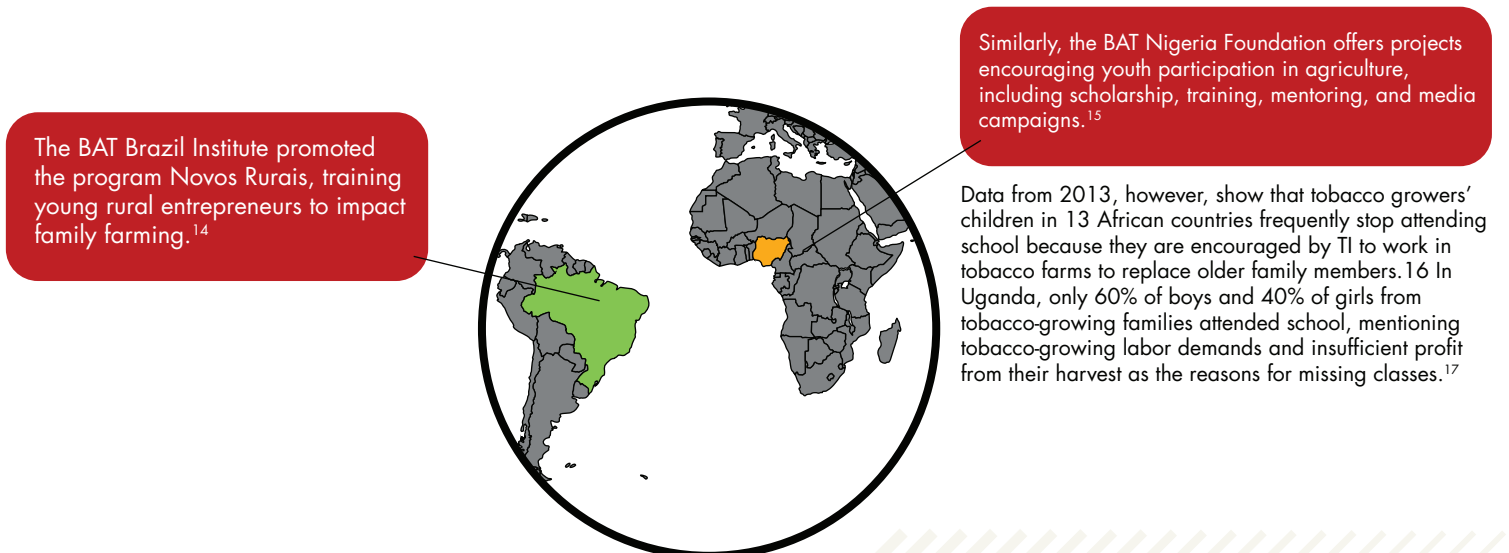
The industry wants to sell the idea that it is committed to fighting against hunger and poverty.



Both projects aim to associate the TI with organizations with a leading role in fighting against hunger and poverty. Nonetheless, evidence suggests that these same companies are responsible for tobacco growers' continued indebtedness and dependence in developing countries, which impoverishes and brings food insecurity to their families.<sup>13</sup>

## SDG 4

TI tries to show concern for the future through programs aimed at youth learning.



## SDGs 5,10&16

TI also develops strategies involving gender equality, inequality reduction, peace, justice, and strong institutions.

In Brazil, the Interstate Tobacco Industry Union (SindiTabaco), through Instituto Crescer Legal, has developed the program Nós Por Elas – The female voice of the field,<sup>18</sup> now in its 5th edition. It addresses topics such as psychological violence and women in decision-making spaces.



The Empowering Women Initiative is a similar strategy funded by BAT Vietnam, in partnership with the Vietnam Women's Union, to give underprivileged women in rural areas the opportunity to find good jobs and improve their quality of life.<sup>19</sup>

Despite placing itself as an evolving sector, TI's internal documents show the contradiction in this approach, as it has targeted women in its campaigns in emerging economies, creating "light" versions of cigarettes as a strategy to attract and increase consumption among women.<sup>20</sup>

## SDGs 6&7

TI has programs to preserve water resources and use clean energy.<sup>21</sup>

Philip Morris Brazil sponsored the project Protetor das Águas in partnership with the Vera Cruz City Hall (RS) and the National Water Agency of Brazil. Its objective is to preserve the river basin's water resources in the Vera Cruz (RS) municipality by raising rural producers' awareness.<sup>22,23</sup>




Similarly, in Pakistan, BAT develops corporate social responsibility projects focused on irrigation and clean energy in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, tobacco growing and cigarette production generate tons of solid waste, pollute water systems,<sup>25</sup> use pesticides that contaminate water sources and the soil and cause damage to farmers' health.<sup>26</sup> Recent studies show that 3.7l of water is needed to manufacture a cigarette.<sup>27</sup>

## SDG 8

TI portrays itself as a sector that promotes economic growth with decent jobs. An example is TI's CSR strategy to eliminate child labor.

It is estimated that 1.3 million children work in tobacco growing worldwide.<sup>28</sup> The industry's efforts to address child labor and follow ILO\*'s decisions are part of global initiatives focusing on some tobacco growers.<sup>29</sup> One of its CSR strategies is to promote information and educational programs on child labor elimination. The Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing Foundation<sup>30</sup> is an international advocacy group related to the tobacco industry that claims to promote the elimination of child labor in tobacco growing.<sup>31</sup>



In Brazil, the Instituto Crescer Legal, linked to Sinditabaco, includes seminars on child labor in its Rural Professional Learning Program.<sup>32</sup>

In Uganda, as in other developing countries, BAT has partnered with the ILO, governments, and civil society to eliminate child labor in the countryside.<sup>33,34</sup>  
In Malawi, for example, about 78,000 children are working on tobacco farms, and child labor is widespread in Brazil, Indonesia, the U.S., and other African countries.<sup>35,36</sup>

However, the financial model between tobacco companies and growers creates a cyclical credit bonding and poverty that leads to child labor. 16 Tobacco companies grant loans to growers at rates they cannot afford, perpetuating a cycle in which producers constantly remain indebted to them.<sup>37</sup>

# Child Labor



**International Tobacco Growers Association (AFUBRA in Brazil)**

**Tobacco leaf processing companies (e.g.: Alliance One, Universal Leaf, Continental Tobacco, UTC)**

**Tobacco industry (e.g.: PMI, BAT, JTI, China National Tobacco Corporation, Imperial Tobacco)**

**Tobacco industry's front groups (e.g.: ECLT, Instituto Crescer Legal, BAT Institute)**



- Weak national and international policies to protect growers
- Weak regulation and inspection on CSR strategies that mask and underestimate child labor in tobacco growing
- Unfair labor practices, including slavery for debt or sharecropping
- Poor earning potential for workers
- Low tobacco leaf prices



## Groups and factors that influence child labor in tobacco growing

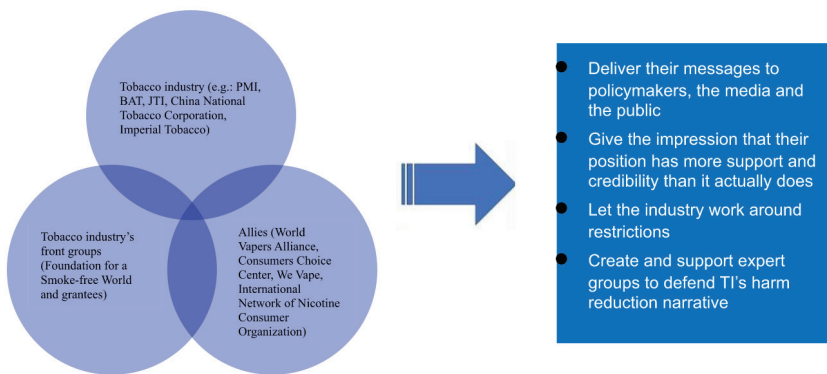
(adapted from Ramos, A.K.38)

So, if TI were committed to eliminating child labor, it would pay growers better, allowing their families to live off their work without involving their children in dangerous activities. CSR measures serve only as whitewashing.<sup>35</sup>

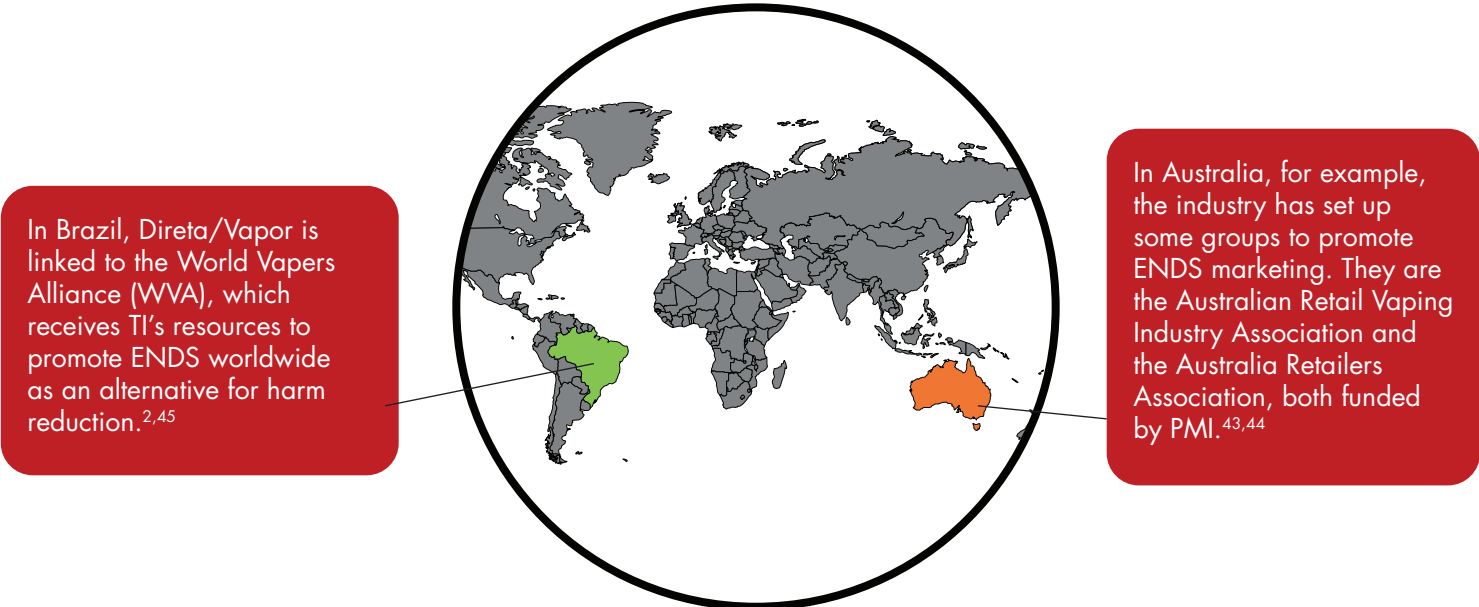
# SDGs 3&9

TI promotes inclusive and sustainable industrialization and fosters innovation, but its goal is only profit. With the advance of the regulatory framework for tobacco products and the sharp drop in the worldwide prevalence of smokers, TI has acted to keep its market alive through high investments in research and development.<sup>39</sup> Investment in ENDS is a way of offering nicotine to current smokers and, at the same time, promoting smoking initiation.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the industry presents these products as an innovation that benefits public health by offering smokers an alternative to cigarettes. However, there is no scientific evidence that this is the case.<sup>2,41,42</sup>

## ENDS



TI's, allies', and front groups' pro-vaping messages  
Adapted from Expose Tobacco [https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/Many\\_Faces\\_Modern\\_Addiction.pdf](https://exposetobacco.org/wp-content/uploads/Many_Faces_Modern_Addiction.pdf)



Another CSR strategy TI uses to promote ENDS is the financing of pro-tobacco research. In India, TI acted to prevent the ban on ENDS, using studies funded by it as evidence that ENDS cause less harm than cigarettes.<sup>46</sup>

The industry also uses ENDS to greenwash its public image. PMI has recently tried to persuade governments and the hospitality industry in places with high ecological appeal in Spain to receive the "Smoke-free Culture" Certification from TÜV Austria.<sup>47</sup>

## SDGs 11,12&17

TI creates projects for underprivileged populations and green initiatives to convey that it is committed to the sustainability of cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, and partnerships in favor of sustainable development goals.

JTI Brasil's Pensar no Futuro é Agir Agora project exemplifies TI's measures to pass on the image that it is engaged in sustainable development.<sup>48</sup>



In the Philippines, the Phillip Morris Fortune Tobacco Company (PMFTC) develops the Embrace program for local communities focused on access to education, women's empowerment, economic opportunities, and especially disaster preparedness and response.<sup>49</sup>

However, no social or environmental project can counter the consequences caused by smoking and the tobacco production chain. The industry simply "robs Peter to pay Paul" without bringing any real impact.

## SDGs 13,14&15

TI supports several projects to fight against climate change and protect life below water and on land to make the tobacco impact on the environment less harmful to species, clearly showing the contradiction of TI's performance in the 2030 Agenda.

In Brazil, the JTI Bio project integrates participatory monitoring of biodiversity and the encouragement of good conservation practices to contribute to the maintenance and increase of ecosystem services in rural properties.<sup>50</sup>



In the Dominican Republic, the Tobacco Institute (Intabaco) has signed an interinstitutional cooperation agreement to carry out activities to care for natural resources in the country. It develops scientific and technological research in areas of interest, including forest nurseries, laboratory services, and the by-product of the wastewater treatment process.<sup>51</sup>

Tobacco product manufacturing and distribution harms the environment and impacts the climate due to the extensive use of energy, water, and other resources. It is responsible for a substantial amount of carbon emissions (similar to 3 million transatlantic flights),<sup>27</sup> which TI's CSR measures cannot prevent.

## 2. Endangering SDGs: CSR strategies on tobacco product illicit trade

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), illicit trade puts all aspects of development and all 17 sustainable development goals at risk and slows advances in the global development agenda.<sup>52</sup>

Tobacco product illicit trade is a major global concern for health, the economy, and public safety. It undermines tobacco control policy efforts, particularly concerning tax policies.<sup>4</sup>

Among TI's CSR strategies on the topic is the financing of biased studies to overstate the smuggling scale.

In Brazil, PMI Impact funded a census developed by JHM Research in São Paulo, Paraná, and Mato Grosso do Sul. It provided the industry information on public policy formulation and evaluation so that the private sector could develop its strategies to deal with the problem.<sup>54</sup>



A study reporting cigarette smuggling rates in South Africa<sup>53</sup> misrepresents the size of illicit trade and comes up with low-reliability evidence, helping TI fight policies that raise specific taxes on tobacco.

Another TI strategy is to lobby against tobacco control policies, particularly against tax increases. In France, tobacco industry representatives claim they are illicit trade victims when it is known that smuggled products are, in fact, manufactured by TI, which obtains indirect benefits from illicit trade.<sup>55</sup>

In Brazil, the industry has found a way to speak out through government structures, facilitating its lobbying on relevant government sectors, such as the Ministry of Economy, responsible for tobacco product pricing policies.<sup>4</sup> TI and its front groups benefit from the legitimacy of the Brazilian Ministry of Agriculture's thematic chambers in the country's national and international positions, aligning them with its agenda and economic interests. This happens with support from parliamentarians, journalists, statisticians, and TI's front groups.<sup>4</sup>





Moreover, it is not uncommon for the tobacco industry to argue that high taxes are the cause of illicit trade and advocate for lower taxes through CSR measures, despite being involved in smuggling, as in the case of China National Tobacco Corporation, which sends smuggled cigarettes to Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil.<sup>56</sup> The industry also promotes a tax reduction campaign based on inflated smuggling data in Brazil.<sup>66</sup> On the grounds of reducing cigarette smuggling, the federal government set up a working group to discuss tax cuts using TI's arguments and lobbying in 2019 but failed.<sup>57</sup>

A IT também atua com ações de RSC financiando pesquisas, conferências e treinamento à polícia internacional e organizações anticorrupção visando associar seu nome a ações que pretendem acabar com o comércio ilícito de tabaco.<sup>4</sup> Um exemplo é a parceria entre a Crime Stoppers Internacional e a IT estabeleceram uma parceria para treinamento de policiais de fronteira em El Salvador.<sup>58</sup>



Similarly, in Brazil, TI supported training for the police in the Triple Frontier (Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina), a region known for the intense presence of organized crime. The project is funded by PMI Impact and has the partnership of USP Institute of International Relations and the Law School of Mackenzie University in São Paulo.<sup>59</sup>

TI has disclosed the damage governments have been taking with illicit trade in tobacco products and promoted their programs to address the problem. It blames governments saying their tobacco control policies spur smuggling and asks them to do more to address the problem (especially lower taxes). The industry also blames Brazilian clandestine companies (which produce without paying taxes), criminal groups (responsible for marketing cheaper products, and so more attractive), and consumers (who buy products of unknown origin). Its programs, however, are used to aggressively promote tax reduction on tobacco products, to counter public policies to control smoking, especially the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (with which Brazil has legal obligations), and to promote itself as a socially responsible company through organizations created to spread TI's ideas in illicit trade area.

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A GLOBAL TOBACCO INDUSTRY WATCHDOG



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