

# Policy on alcohol as a hindrance to development

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Decided by: The ForumCiv Board  
Date of decision: 18 March 2013  
Last update: 31 August 2017  
Period of validity: Until further notice  
Authorised by: Secretary General

## Application of the policy by ForumCiv

ForumCiv's policy platform for 2012–2022 describes the organisation's vision as "a just and sustainable world in which all people have the power to effect change". One of the factors that can obstruct ForumCiv's work for rights and poverty reduction is harmful alcohol consumption.

Many of the countries in which ForumCiv operates are new markets for alcohol companies, and major financial interests combined with inadequate alcohol legislation are rapidly pushing up consumption amongst new groups in society. Such trends can adversely affect power hierarchies, public health and the power of initiative, exacerbate violent behaviour and pose a serious threat to development.

This policy aims to clarify what ForumCiv believes civil society should do to help minimise the damaging effects of alcohol. ForumCiv's official positions, guidelines, instructions and plan for operations must be consistent with this policy, and it is the board's responsibility to ensure compliance in this respect.

## The role of civil society

To address the destructive effects of alcohol, CSOs should:

- take account of the importance of alcohol in the context in which they operate
- include alcohol-related questions in their contextual analyses and planning and let the responses influence activities as necessary.

CSOs can make a significant contribution by:

- informing the general public about the destructive effects of alcohol
- advocating governments to run proactive and effective public health policies
- advocating governments to take effective measures to minimise the damaging effects of alcohol, e.g. by regulating the alcohol market, imposing restrictions on promotion and making sure that existing laws are implemented.

## The effect on human rights and poverty

ForumCiv is to work with the following impact areas of alcohol in mind:

## **Democratic participation**

- Abuse and dependency risk passivising people, impeding their participation in democratic processes and enjoyment of their political and civil rights.

## **Equality**

While alcohol is not a root cause of inequality, it can reinforce the power hierarchies that already exist in a masculine system of norms:

- The alcohol industry and culture reinforces unequal power relationships by consolidating violent and dominant male roles. Drunkenness and aggression are often part of the masculine identity – an identity that is spread and reinforced by alcohol advertisements.
- Drunkenness is closely related to intimate partner violence and sexual violence during war.

## **Poverty and vulnerability**

- People living in poverty who abuse alcohol are more likely to become trapped in debt and suffer social exclusion.
- Alcohol consumption increases the risk of contracting HIV and other diseases through exaggerated risk-taking and compromised immunity. It also leads to early death through accidents.
- Children are put at danger through alcohol-related birth defects, violence in the home and the prioritising of alcohol over schooling by their parents. Parental alcohol abuse is one of the main causes of child homelessness.
- Alcohol imposes an enormous financial burden on societies that already lack the resources to cater for the needs of their citizens.

## **ForumCiv's responsibility**

It is ForumCiv's responsibility to:

- Keep its staff well-informed about alcohol as an obstacle to development and about its links to all other development issues.
- Keep itself updated on global strategies and on political developments in the field of alcohol as an obstacle to development.

- Monitor the inclusion of alcohol in contextual analyses and discussions on activities in areas where destructive alcohol consumption is widespread.
- Refer organisations to specialist organisations able to provide advice and support.
- Facilitate experience exchanges between member organisations.

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<sup>i</sup> Note: ForumCiv's policy on alcohol as a hindrance to development covers alcohol as a drug, and as a legal drug it must be approached differently from other drugs, the use of which ForumCiv rejects in accordance with Swedish law.