



FORUT Approach to Alcohol and Drug Prevention



Drinking place in rural Burma (Photo: Rune Eraker)



FORUT - CAMPAIGN FOR DEVELOPMENT AND SOLIDARITY
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1. FORUT's vision

FORUT – The Norwegian Campaign for Development and Solidarity - will contribute to social mobilisation of the poor and oppressed in their struggle for human rights, being instrumental in reforming society to be responsive to these rights and needs. Solidarity means putting respect above pity, struggling together with underprivileged groups. FORUT draws a clear line against gifts or alms, but wishes to participate in the mobilisation and activation of human resources. An important task is organising against unjust, repressive and exploitative structures. We are working for a higher economic standard for the poor, but also for securing their daily lives, increasing their freedom and integrity, strengthening their social rights and contributing to human development.

2. Alcohol and drugs – a development issue

As a specialized agency for international solidarity and development cooperation, FORUT has specialized in alcohol and drugs as a development issue, for several reasons:

- Public health promotion must be a key element in any development strategy, by governments and by NGOs. Substance abuse, and alcohol use in particular, has been shown by the WHO to be one of the most prominent health risk factors globally.
- Intoxication from alcohol and drugs creates a wide range of social problems and is, by that, closely linked to many of the important development issues; poverty, crime, accidents, domestic violence, neglect of children, hiv/aids, trafficking, street children etc.
- Alcohol and drug related problems are closely linked to both poverty and economic development. Experience shows that alcohol consumption tends to rise with economic development, increasing purchasing power and the growth of a middle class. Consequently, developing societies that succeed in eradicating poverty and creating economic growth, will face new social problems linked to alcohol use, - if prevention of such problems is not integrated into their development strategies.
- The alcohol industry has pointed at developing societies as their new and promising markets. These countries have low consumption levels in the outset, large youth populations and economic growth.

- The increasing economic and cultural globalization favours multinational companies with Western-style consumer products and international brands. International trade agreements and massive marketing efforts are used to open up markets in the South for Western drinking habits.

3. The FORUT approach to alcohol and drug prevention

3.1 Knowledge based

The choice of strategies and interventions shall be knowledge based, ie. based on the best available scientific findings, as well as knowledge and experience from the international community of research institutions, NGOs and intergovernmental agencies. We use three main sources of information, where the international knowledge base is summarized:

World Health Report 2002 – Reducing Risks to Health, Promoting Healthy Life (WHO)

Alcohol in Developing Societies: A Public Health Approach (Robin Room et al)

Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity (Thomas Babor et al)

3.2 Comprehensive approach

On a strategic level, one has to take a comprehensive approach to the problems of substance abuse:

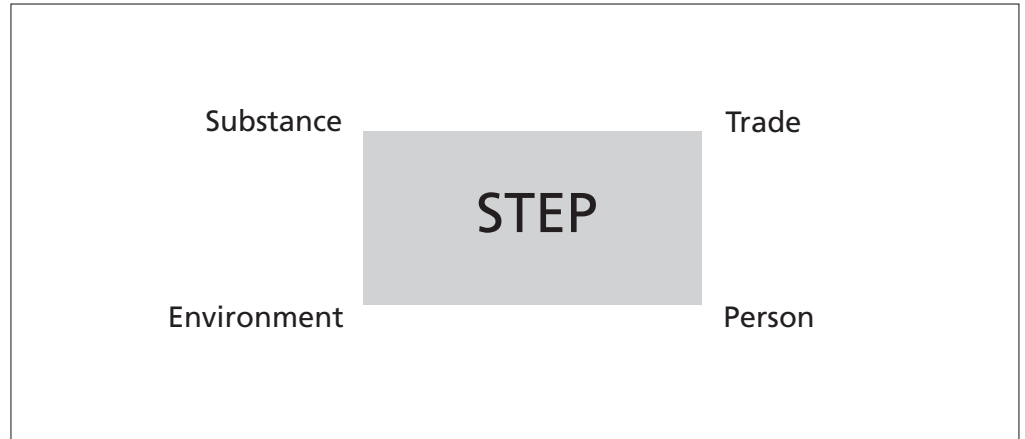
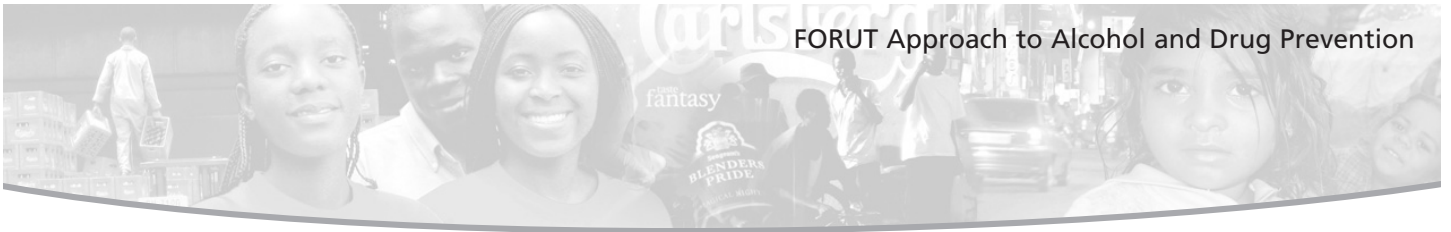
- Prevention activities including control policies, treatment programs and rehabilitation/integration after treatment.
- Alcohol, medicines, illegal drugs and solvents – and combination use of these substances.

FORUT has given priority to prevention programs, and our main focus will normally be on alcohol, being the most common intoxicant in most societies and, by far, the main legal substance of abuse.

3.3 Define the determinants

In order to design the most effective interventions against alcohol and drug problems, it is essential to define the determinants behind the problem; i.e. factors that control or influence consumption habits. In other words; to understand the reasons and mechanisms that draw or push persons towards drinking or taking drugs and, in turn, lead to increased consumption.

Some of the determinants will be found in the social and cultural environment, while others rest within the users as biological and psychological mechanisms. The determinants behind use of intoxicating substances can be categorized as in the “STEP model” below: Substance, Trade, Environment, Person.



Substance

Characteristics of the substances that are being used (intoxication, dependence etc)

Trade

The economical aspects of substance use (vested interests in production and distribution of alcohol and drugs, price of the substances, purchasing power etc)

Environment

The social context where the alcohol or drug use is taking place (values, traditions, norms, peer pressure etc)

Person

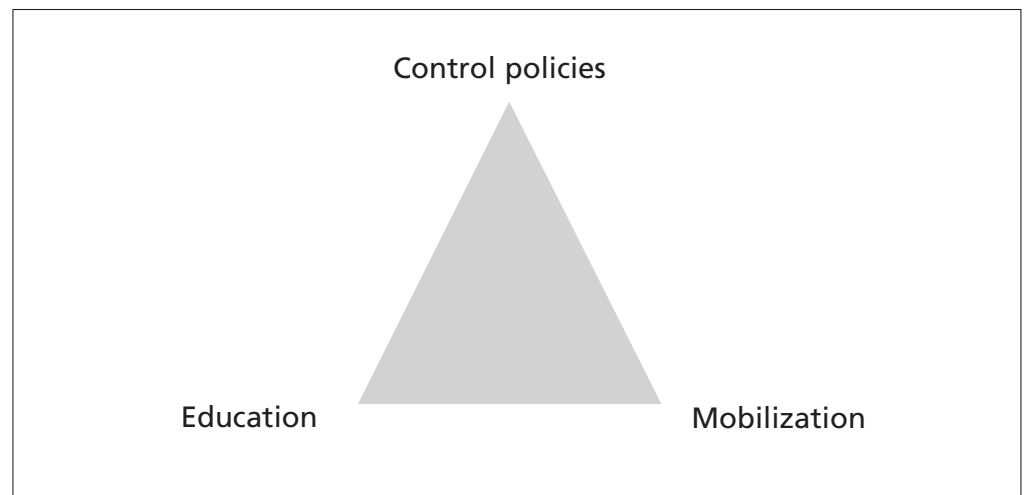
The personal characteristics of the user

A part of this exercise must be to make an assessment of which determinants are the most important and which are less influential, as well as an evaluation of which determinants that - after all - can be influenced by our interventions

3.4 The prevention triangle

Having defined the determinants behind substance abuse- and selected the most important among them - the next step is to select strategies and activities for prevention of alcohol and drug problems: How can we influence the most important determinants in a resource-effective way?

A comprehensive strategy seems to give the best results; a combination of several interventions and activities. The “prevention triangle” may be a good guide to such a comprehensive strategy:



Control policies:

Interventions by governments to reduce the availability of a substance and to guarantee - from a health and social point of view - a safest possible production and distribution system.

Education:

Training of professionals, education of consumers, parents, youth etc and campaigns to raise awareness, challenge and motivate the public and to create an understanding of the need for control policies.

Mobilization:

Make alcohol and drug prevention a part of the agenda for social and political movements, link the issue to other key policy issues and involve leadership and members of NGOs in practical activities.

3.5 Control policies; a top-down approach

International research has established that reduction of the availability of alcohol is the most effective strategy to reduce alcohol-related problems. In the summary of “Alcohol – No Ordinary Commodity” an international group of researchers conclude that the following measures stand out as best practices: Minimum legal purchasing age, government monopoly of retail sales, restrictions on hours or days of sale, outlet density restrictions, alcohol taxes, sobriety check-points and lowered blood alcohol limits for drivers, among others.

3.6 Education; a peer-based approach

It has been difficult to prove that public information and education is effective in changing the drinking pattern or consumption level in any population group. This means that such campaigns can never replace control policy measures. On the other hand, if well designed, education and information activities are needed to generate popular support for implementation of effective policies. Another important task is to educate a variety of professional groups in how they can contribute to alcohol and drugs prevention in their ordinary work; medical doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, politicians, police etc.

3.7 Mobilization; a bottom-up approach

There are many examples of social and political movements that have mobilized their members and the public opinion towards better alcohol policies, but also contributed to changes in cultural patterns and in individual behaviour of many people. Such examples include organizations working specifically with alcohol and drug issues, but just as much other movements which have integrated alcohol and drug issues as part of their other agendas; women’s movements, political parties, religious organizations, health promotion organizations, consumer association, trade unions etc.

3.8 Local, national and international efforts

As economic and cultural globalization expands, it becomes increasingly important to design and implement coordinated prevention efforts on both the local, national and international level. Some actions are most effective when implemented within the local community and by the community itself, while other interventions can only be effective when they have a national or global scope.

3.9 Targeting larger population groups

Changes in drinking patterns and drug-taking habits are above all a social and cultural phenomenon. As individuals we are, in many respects, simply swimming with the tide. We adopt other people's habits, and vice versa. Cultural changes are long and complicated chain reactions. Therefore it is vital to understand the cultural and social context of drinking and drug taking, as a part of designing prevention strategies.

The most effective way to influence alcohol and drug consumption is, consequently, to change the user environment through targeting larger population groups, rather than targeting the individual users. This includes interventions towards also the larger groups of moderate alcohol users and experimental drug users.

3.10 Country and culture specific

The international knowledge base on alcohol and drug prevention must be combined with a thorough understanding of the specific cultural, political and social situation where the substance abuse occurs. FORUT will therefore contribute to the development of country and culture specific documentation on the alcohol and drug situation in areas we operate, both through scientific research and systematic collection of experiences from the field.

3.11 Independence from vested interests

When prevention efforts are being designed there is always a need for resources. These can be obtained from various sources, but we recommend that all interventions to prevent or treat alcohol and drug problems should be designed and implemented independent from vested interests. Sometimes the alcohol drinks industry or various bodies set up by them will be eager to fund and design activities. Parts of the industry are also eager to influence the formulation of national health policies relating to alcohol. We see several problems in that:

- There is often a fundamental conflict of interests between alcohol producers and the evidence based prevention efforts which focus on a general reduction in alcohol consumption as a main priority
- These companies tend to discredit independent science and research which support the public health perspectives
- The alcohol producers establish organizations and institutions that pretend to be independent and science based, while they often simply serve as propaganda agencies paid by the industry
- The industry interests will usually oppose control policies by governments and promote self regulation by the industry themselves

Suggestions for improvements?

FORUT has the intention to develop this document, both its structure and content, based on practical use of it in a variety of settings and organizations. If you have suggestions for improvements, please contact us.

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Alcohol, Drugs and Development

“Alcohol, Drugs and Development” (ADD) is a global program in FORUT, in the sense that it involves all countries with FORUT activities and also FORUT action on the international level. As one of its main priorities, FORUT aims at integration of alcohol and drugs perspectives in its development programs, as well as in the field of development cooperation in general.