



Research Report

World Health Organisation

Strengthening the implementation of the World Health Organization
Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in all countries

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INTRODUCTION

The tobacco epidemic is one of the biggest health crises of last century, which still continues today. Each year, 8 million people die because of the exposure to tobacco, and tobacco will be the death cause for over half of its users who do not quit. The fact that 22.3% of the world's population used tobacco in 2020 is however contrasting to these alarming facts, which shows the magnitude of this crisis.

Due to the ongoing globalisation process, the tobacco industry has been able to expand internationally. Factors like the increase in trade liberalization and global marketing have for example made it considerably easier for the tobacco industry to spread itself across the world.

In 2003, the WHO confronted the alarming situation and set up the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which was the first convention ever negotiated under the auspices of the WHO. This convention is also the first international legal instrument to promote multilateral cooperation and national action to reduce the growth and spread of the global tobacco epidemic.

This convention has been immensely successful in the implementation of restrictive rules and regulations concerning the tobacco industry. The WHO published the fourth WHO global tobacco trends report in 2021, which stated that the number of tobacco users had dropped with 30 million in a time span of 6 years. (2015-2021)

However, there has been an increased release of alternative tobacco products such as, but not limited to snus and the e-cigarette (better known as a vape) that bypass laws and regulations. It should not be forgotten that tobacco companies operate in a free-market economy in which profit, and therefore many customers, is the most important factor.

Definitions of Key Terms

Intergovernmental organizations

Organizations with sovereign nations as members. Examples are the United Nations and the European Union.

Convention

An agreement between states covering particular matters. Examples of intergovernmental conventions are: the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Federal Convention on Tobacco Control.

World Health Organization (WHO)

A specialized agency within the United Nations that is focussed on achieving the highest level of health for everyone.

Trade liberalization

The removal or reduction of restrictions or barriers to ensure the free exchange of goods between nations.

Marketing

The activity or business of promoting and selling products or services

Tobacco

A preparation of the nicotine-rich leaves of an American plant, which are cured by a process of drying and fermentation for smoking or chewing.

Nicotine

A highly addictive stimulant found in tobacco and vaping devices.

Heated Tobacco Products (HTPs)

A form of smoking that produces aerosols containing nicotine and toxic chemicals upon heating of the tobacco, or activation of a device containing the tobacco. They contain the highly addictive substance nicotine, non-tobacco additives and are often flavoured.

Electric Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS)

A form of smoking in which a liquid containing nicotine is heated. ENDS products do not contain tobacco. Those that do also not contain nicotine are called electronic non-nicotine delivery systems (ENNDS)

Smokeless tobacco

A tobacco product that is used in another way than smoking. Examples are: chew, snuff, snus and dissolvable tobacco.

Illicit trade

Illicit trade is the production or distribution of a good or service that is considered illegal by a legislature

General overview

History

The usage of tobacco by human beings has derived from America. Research has shown that even the Maya population already smoked the leaves of the tobacco plant for religious ceremonies around the first century BC. Later on, the tobacco plant (also called the genus *Nicotiana*) spread across the entire continent of America where the tobacco was also used for medicine purposes.

Due to Columbus' discovery of the American continent, the tobacco plant was introduced in Europe as well. This took place in the late fifteenth century. A time period that is characterised by colonialism. It is because of this ongoing colonialism, that the tobacco plant was able to spread itself to every corner of the world.

When the tobacco plant was introduced to the rest of the world, there was not a lot of awareness about the health risks. In fact, tobacco was considered as a plant that could be useful in the production of medicines. However, already in the eighteenth century the first studies began to show the toxicity of tobacco. These studies became nevertheless neglected due to the strong promotion of the product and the invention of the first cigarette machine. This machine made it possible for cigarettes to become much cheaper with a rise in popularity as result.

It wasn't until the 1950s that the great health risks that come along with the use of tobacco were truly pointed out again. In the decades that followed, a lot of countries felt the urge to combat the use of tobacco which seemed to cause millions of premature deaths a year. It is for this reason that the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control came into force in 2005. The FCTC marks the first attempt to banish tobacco usage through the use of international law.

Today, the FCTC has become one of the most important and successful treaties in combating the tobacco epidemic. There are right now 181 parties to the WHO FCTC covering 90% of the world's population. It is safe to say that because of this extensive cooperation on a diplomatic level, the FCTC has great potential in battling this crisis.

Current situation

Right now, 1.3 billion people smoke regularly even though the severe health consequences are known. Every 4 seconds a person dies because of smoking and only in the USA, smoking already costs more than \$600 billion a year. It is important to note that the costs from tobacco usage are not only made by the healthcare system. This money is also lost because of a loss of productivity due to smoking-related illnesses and premature deaths.

A big difference between the FCTC and other drug control treaties is that the FCTC is also focussed on demand reduction and not just on scaling down the supply. In fact, it has three pointers: the reduce of demand, the reduce of supply and more liability.

However, once a country or an intergovernmental organization has signed the FCTC, it only means that it approves the points stated in the convention. Not that it actually implements rules and regulations to achieve the goals stated in the convention.

To ensure that signers are more likely to ratify this convention, the WHO FCTC has established MPOWER. In the words of the WHO itself the measures of MPOWER: "***are intended to assist in the country-level implementation of effective interventions to reduce the demand for tobacco, contained in the WHO FCTC.***"

Each letter of MPOWER is a pointer that countries can use in their fight against the tobacco epidemic:

M = monitoring tobacco use

P = protecting people from tobacco smoke

O = Quitting tobacco

W = Warning about the dangers of tobacco

E = Enforcing tobacco advertising, promotion & sponsorship bans

R = Raising taxes on tobacco.

Even though the FCTC is praised by almost all nations and has invented the MPOWER system, implementation of good regulations by countries seems a hard task. This task is especially hard because of the tobacco industry that tries everything to keep their profit. Therefore, it comes up with new inventions and products that are not yet known by both scientists and politicians, which makes it extremely difficult think of fitting laws.

Major parties involved

Phillip Morris International

One of the leading tobacco companies in the world. The company has over 80.000 employees and in 2022, it had a gross profit of \$20.360 million. The company's vision is to, apart from the standard tobacco products they already sell, provide a multcategory of science-based better alternatives to smoking. Apart from Phillip Morris International there are a number of other large tobacco companies such as, but not limited to: British American Tobacco Imperial Brands and China National Tobacco Industry.

World Health Organisation

A specialized agency within the United Nations that is focussed on achieving the highest level of health for everyone. It is involved in many diverse projects that all connect to Sustainable Development Goal 3: ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

China

China is the world's leading producer of tobacco. Many provincial governments in China are dependent on the tobacco companies, due to the high amounts of taxes they pay. The Chinese tobacco industry has also doubled in the last decade.

European Union

All member states of the EU have ratified, accepted or approved the FCTC, and the EU itself has also signed the FCTC. It has declared that it shall adapt measures that complement the national policies of its member states concerning the regulations of tobacco control. It must however not be forgotten that some of the member states of the EU have one of the highest consumption of tobacco products worldwide.

Timeline of Key Events

50BCE: The indigenous Americans began smoking and using tobacco enemas.

1492: Christoffer Columbus returned from the Americas with the first tobacco leaves and seeds Europe has ever seen.

1761: First study of the effects of tobacco by Dr. John Hill; snuff users were warned that they risked nasal cancers.

1881: USA First practical cigarette making machine was patented by James Bonsack. It could produce 120,000 cigarettes a day, each machine doing the work of 48 people. Production costs plummeted, and, with the invention of the safety match a few decades later, cigarette-smoking began its explosive growth.

1939: Drs. Alton Ochsner and Michael DeBakey first reported the association of smoking and lung cancer.

1953: Tobacco executives met in New York City to find a way to deal with recent scientific data pointing to the health hazards of cigarettes.

1995: Federal Drug Administration declared cigarettes to be “drug delivery devices.” Restrictions were proposed on marketing and sales to reduce smoking by young people.

1997: European Network for Smoking Prevention (ENSP) created.

1998: WHO’s Tobacco-free Initiative (TFI) was established.

2003: Introduction of the e-cigarette

2005: WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) came into force, using international law to reduce tobacco use.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

After the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was established, the FCA (Framework Convention Alliance) came into existence. The FCA is an alliance between hundreds of organizations from all over the world that work together to assist with the implementation and ratification of the FCTC. In 2022 FCA renamed itself the Global Alliance For Tobacco Control. (GATC).

In 2012, the WHO FCTC established a new treaty called the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products. This treaty is more specifically focused than the FCTC and can therefore be seen as an important step in achieving the goals of the FCTC.

The earlier mentioned MPOWER goals can be seen as another previous attempt that tries to strengthen the implementation of the FCTC.

Possible solutions

With this topic, the focus is to strengthen the implementation of the FCTC in all countries. It is important to note that almost all nations have already signed the FCTC, which means that they support the ideas stated in the convention.

However, it is up to these countries themselves to what extent they implement these ideas on a national level. To ensure that nations will comply to the FCTC to the fullest extent possible, strong international cooperation is needed.

When thinking about solutions, also take into consideration the illicit trade in tobacco products. This is a worldwide problem that does not stop at a border.

Negotiations with the tobacco industry can also only be done on an international level. Examine in which countries the headquarters of the big tobacco companies are situated, and in which nations they have placed their factories. It is essential to also involve these concerning nations into the debate.

Lastly, the importance of education should not be forgotten. It plays a huge role in the prevention of smoking. Educating people about the FCTC and explaining the importance of this convention can be of great value in strengthening the FCTC.

Further Readings

To get an overview of the nation that you represent:

<https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/references/country-summaries/>

To learn everything about the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control:

<https://fctc.who.int/>

<https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/42811/9241591013.pdf?sequence=1>

To discover which tobacco laws apply in the nation that you represent:

<https://www.tobaccocontrolaws.org/legislation/find-by-policy?policy=smoke-free&matrix=statusSummary&handle=smoke-free&criteria=all-indoor-workplaces,all-indoor-public-places,all-public-transport&status=S>

To learn more about the tobacco epidemic:

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/tobacco>

To get a better understanding of the motifs of a tobacco company:

<https://www.pmi.com/>

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